



Tydskrif

VIR LETTERKUNDE

'n Tydskrif vir Afrika-letterkunde • A Journal for African Literature

55 (1) 2018 • Vierde reeks • Fourth series • Herfs • Autumn

Tydskrif VIR LETTERKUNDE

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Ontwerp en uitleg / Design and layout

Hond BK/CC

Drukker / Printer

STN Drukkers, Soutpansbergweg / Rd, Pretoria

Nota / Note

Tydskrif vir Letterkunde is vanaf uitgawe 54.1 (2017) slegs as e-joernaal beskikbaar by <http://journals.assaf.org.za/index.php/tvl>. Vir nadere besonderhede skakel tvl@postino.up.ac.za.

From issue 54.1 (2017) Tydskrif vir Letterkunde is only available as an e-journal at <http://journals.assaf.org.za/index.php/tvl>. For further information email tvl@postino.up.ac.za.



ISSN: 0041-476X

E-ISSN: 2309-9070

GW / HSB 15-16, U Pretoria, Pretoria 0002

Tel: +27-12-420 4320 Faks/Fax: +27-12-420 3949

E-pos/Email: tvl@postino.up.ac.za

Webblad / Website: <http://journals.assaf.org.za/index.php/tvl>

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Breyten Breytenbach

Breyten Breytenbach is an award-winning South African writer, painter and cultural activist, based in Paris, France.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Modernities & our inner Africas

“You say the act of writing produces its own illegibility? That it goes nowhere, but cannot help going?”

“Well then: run, baby, run!”

— Blackface, *A Veil of Footsteps*

“... essentially, there is no one at home, but the stories we tell ourselves.”

— Guy de Lancey, *Light as Thought and the Binding Problem*

1

Let us agree that you do not know me. Allow me then to introduce myself and indicate what I try to do and what I know I cannot do.

To be brief: I'm an Afrikaans-speaking South African African who, by luck and of necessity, was also exposed to living and working elsewhere in the world. Add to this the observable fact that I am whitish—a historical, generic marker that has again become acutely polarising, even though it comes in all shades of pale. My home language, to an extent also my working tool, is French; my mother tongue is Afrikaans.

I'm neither literary scholar nor an academic although I have been employed on and off by tertiary education institutions both in this country and abroad. Do not, therefore, expect me to contribute to the very valuable analyses and insights into African literatures, if I may judge from the themes announced in the programme, that you will be sharing over the next days.

A trope of the past used to be: *it is impossible to see South Africa whole*. This is true of the entire continent. The absence of a smooth, all-encompassing, unitary vision of what it means to be African—despite attempts to root such a make-believe entity in the awareness that the concept 'African' signifies to be oppressed and exploited, and hence the repeated attempts to overcome these by positing a rebirth, to deal with history once and for all—that this 'absence' of vision is experienced as an obfuscation or a lack of purpose that can be ascribed, it is now argued, to the contamination by non-Africans. But could it not also imply that to be African is to be multiple and diverse? Why should we submit to being defined negatively? Why be outlined and inked in at all? By whom? Can it not be that the texture of our specificities and the

flow of our interactions, often rough, constitute our collective being? More: that we are doomed and privileged to keep on having to situate and describe ourselves? Absence brings about the movement of searching.

Or am I now extrapolating from a personal condition, chosen or imposed?

To attempt presenting a *whole* will be like lobbing off the limbs of observation and experience so as to fit into the bed of structured theory. What I intend to do here is to show rather than tell, to share with you some fragmented writing numbered in sections. The fragments are not ordered in a logical procession of thoughts. Rather, as in concrete poetry, I hope the arbitrary positioning may produce unexpected *correspondances*. Some entries may be amplifications, or afterthoughts, or footnotes. Because of the many quotes you may also take (or mistake) my contribution for a collage.

The title of my contribution is “Modernities & our inner Africas”.

The one tenet of the equation refers to the fact that we are influenced, perhaps even conditioned, by modernism; that this modernism in assumptions and expressions is not as universal as we take it to be but, partly at least, to be understood in the light of the history of thinking in various cultures, not to mention other historical processes, and what we are slowly evolving may well be an *African modernism* in significant ways different from other manifestations elsewhere of the same tendency although we share basic traits. I can only allude to the subject because it is vast and slippery (even if being confined to half-an-hour is a great incentive for condensing one’s meandering—and a good excuse for not succeeding!), and because it is evolving as we speak.

The other part of the title points at a project of the Gorée Institute that I’d like to share with you. This coming year—2017—we’ll be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the historic meeting in Dakar and on Gorée Island (we also travelled to Ouagadougou and Accra) between the ANC, then still illegal and in exile, and a number of influential South African whites, most of them Afrikaners, from ‘inside’. It is generally accepted that this Meeting, also called the Dakar Expedition, was instrumental in legitimizing the processes of negotiating a transition to a democratic South Africa and initiated the national Reconciliation—which, with hindsight, was flawed and left unfinished. Gorée Institute was born from the desire to find shared ground and to resolve the conflict among adversaries of the time.

2

To illustrate aspects of modernism I want to insert here some pointers. The first is from Catherine du Toit who obtained her Doctorate in Philosophy, entitled “Henri-Pierre Roché: A la recherche de l’unité perdu”, from the French Department of the University of Pretoria. Her thesis was built on the life and work of Henri-Pierre Roché. She quotes him: “La vie est faite de morceaux qui ne se joignent pas...” (Life consists of pieces that don’t fit). This highlights a salient attribute: that modernism in Europe, emerging from the falling apart of dominant dogmas and orthodoxies, religious or

otherwise, and the break-up of state hegemonies, made public life *secular* to a large extent and gave primacy to the individual consciousness—at least as expressed in literature and through the visual arts. It brought about an increased awareness of the matter and the import of the material of your craft, with which you are in a dialectical relationship: words, images, sounds... As Arnold Schönberg, the modernist composer, wrote to his friend Wassily Kandinsky, the Russian painter, cited by Catherine du Toit: “Art belongs to the subconscious. You have to express yourself—not your tastes or education or intelligence, that which you have been taught to know. None of these acquired possibilities—but the inborn, instinctive qualities.” Or, as expressed by Edward Said in writing about Theodor Adorno whose entire career, Said says, “skirted and fought the dangers of fascism, communism, and Western mass-consumerism. [...] For him life was at its most false in the aggregate—the whole is always the untrue, he once said—and this, he continued, placed an even greater premium on subjectivity, on the individual’s consciousness, on what could not be regimented in the totally administered society.”

But the need for structural and organic interaction with the environment, your readers, maybe even with the people or the instances that govern our lives, or with your memory or moral imagination or better instincts—this need remains. Hannah Arendt notes in her, *The Life of the Mind*:

Nothing could appear, the word ‘appearance’ would make no sense, if recipients of appearances did not exist—living creatures able to acknowledge, recognize and react to—in flight or desire, approval or disapproval, blame or praise—what is not merely there but appears to them and is meant for their perception. In this world which we enter, appearing from a nowhere, and from which we disappear into nowhere, *Being and Appearing* coincide... Nothing and nobody exist in this world whose very being does not presuppose a spectator. In other words, nothing that is, insofar as it appears, exists in the singular; everything that is is meant to be perceived by somebody... *Plurality is the law of the earth.* (My emphasis)

One should read this together with the opening remarks of Susan Sontag in her lecture on Nadine Gordimer, titled, “At the same time: the novelist and moral reasoning”, later included in the posthumous collection, *At the Same Time: Essays and Speeches*: “I’m often asked (she says) if there is something I think writers ‘ought’ to do, and recently in an interview I heard myself say: ‘Several things. Love words, agonize over sentences. And pay attention to the world.’”

3

Have we abandoned the position that writing reflects reality? Do we still believe the narrative of novel-making may help constitute the shaping of norms and values or even just the understanding of our lives and the world? Are other discourses not

more illustrative of our condition, do they not more urgently influence the ways we approach our surroundings, fashion it, leave it? I'm referring to the exercise of power, the importance of economic systems, the ritualisation of fear and ignorance and intolerance and greed, to the herd instinct of migration?

Do we really gain much from exploring life as we observe and experience it? Do the scaffolding and surfacing through writing achieve anything more than satisfying a dumb but, it would seem, collectively experienced need to allay our apprehensions by imagining life as the making of virtual worlds? Is the money lender not more influential than the writer?

One could hold that all of the above are articulated. But the forces and surges defining our lives now mostly live *outside writing*. Writing no longer mediates the world. It used to be that we could pretend to engage with a social consciousness spanning the illusion of generations, embodying the strive for freedom and dignity—even if splintered into a multiplicity of individuated voices.

Now, even when polyphonous—are we not indulging in a monologue, intensely aware of the materiality of our means—language—and as intensely immersed in the existential consciousness of the individual? What we do at best is to project fractured options of telling what it is like for *this* individual to be alive in *this* matter, *this* tongue, and during these tumultuous times. Often, it would seem the writer excruciatingly reaches for a lost certainty (some would say 'safety') through the manifestations and interruptions of uncertainty.

In the North writing appears to have lost that imagination which was fed by and sometimes constituted the skin of the world we inhabit. Writers have forfeited the folly of daring, the hubris to attempt reflecting or recasting the outside in one wide sweep. We no longer see the ambition of a John Steinbeck at work. Or that of a Joseph Conrad or a Balzac, a Malcolm Lowry or a Marquez.

This holds for Africa as well. Where are the attempts at a total vision of an epoch or a topography? Where are the contemporary successors to Naguib Mahfouz, Chinua Achebe, Nadine Gordimer? It is as if we shy away from Utopia as much perhaps as we avert our eyes from Hell in all its gaudy facets, as in the horrors painted by someone like the medieval Dutch painter, Hieronymus Bosch.

4

One writes, and in the process of doing so, as the matter densifies, one discovers *what* it is that you're writing about or *for*. Inevitably, it would have been a trip recognizing and exploring the environment, but also a process of *making* it. Seeing is making. Even when you're shortsighted. The words are eyes, the sentences the interpretations of what comes into being in the process of seeing.

Is any of this new? Or are you but enacting the gestures of "I cannot go on, I must go on"?

Is it that one can no longer bear to continue imagining because to do so would be to re-enter the world (or the night) of contradictions, which was always there: a dichotomy between the voyage of uncovering consciousness and the inadequacies of the means used (words, images) that will solidify to become opaque like skins (cataracts) darkening sight? To uncover the existent is to be faced by the unacceptable and by your limitations in bearing witness.

You write landscapes, escapes, I-scapes—and all of these finally inkscapes.

5

A little more than a week ago I had the dubious pleasure of listening to V. S. Naipaul being interviewed in public, painstakingly so, by a young aspiring writer in Obidos, Portugal during the *Folio* cultural festival. It was distressing to watch the old Minotaur having to defend himself, clinging to the thread of writing as justification for *the suffering of having seen* (these were his words), confined to a wheelchair that might as well have been his sanctuary in the labyrinth; watched over (or trapped) by his entourage. But still lowering his hump to thrust horns at the shadows, real or imagined, of the cape that we may see as the illusion of life (or is it death?) always just out of reach. At one point the young interviewer asked him whether he had the impression of leaving the world a better place than he'd found it. He tossed the question aside; he'd already deflected a question on Utopia or the need for utopias as being of no concern and now reduced the reason for his existence to the deontology of, "I write and I write and I write, and so on." In my mind I completed the echo: *I write writing*. He also claimed he never rewrites, but I didn't believe him. We all do because we dream with eyes wide open.

"It is what I do," Naipaul said. "It is a job. My job is to finish books, you know."

His wife, present as one of the Guardians of the Wheelchair or Keepers of the Cave (to prevent him from escaping?), then took over to recount how, on a recent visit to Cameroon, people who'd detested his African books, particularly *A Bend in the River*, came up to shake his hand as a prophet. "You foresaw it all happening, you saw the corpses floating down the river." (The reference was of course to the Rwanda genocide.) She told of how her husband always had *to see for himself*: to fly in a helicopter over the jungle could not replace the suffering of going down to *see*. And how one should not listen to one's own ideas. This workman-like attitude, she says her husband told her, constitutes the difference between a great writer and a hack. Her husband was a great writer to thus foretell the existing.

She might have added that writing brings to the surface—or *is* the surface, one can say the river—of what has always been there, that this carries with it a responsibility. How accountable are we for the pictures, inevitably coloured by personal experiences and limitations and prejudices, that we hold up to the reader? 'Great writing', however defined, has the capacity of interacting with what's to come by engaging

with the material of consciousness. Scenarios are built in the original sense: stories, sequences, motivations put together (imagined), which somehow go to the heart of the enduring human madness just under the surface of our collective existence. Imagination is an intense awareness of who and what we are. And consciousness (one could say conscience) is the *matter* of imagination.

Perhaps all things have been since all time. One is using the known to forge a way to making the unknown known, or to create the pretence at predictability. And thereby, of agency.

And yet here I am; I can do no less. Silence may be a resolution, a way of becoming dissolved in the flow of awareness, ultimately a corpse in the water. Even if there can be no absolute silence, and thus no absolutism in silence. For it continues anyway as the vibration of after-sound.

To breathe is to be. Maybe past and future are the breath of the present dreaming. And to be is to dream. You objectify the means to your awareness: the I as *eye*. You are terrified of closing the eye.

Imre Kertész in his flow of consciousness text, a raging argument with himself about the purpose of being—it is called *Kaddish for an unborn child*—says one must by all means continue *to do*. If one were to cease doing one would have *to be* and he does not know what that state would be like (when *that* becomes *this*), but the eventuality scares him.

The *word* is a coming into being of the *world*, a bifurcation and thereby a tension. Hope springs eternal. What is modernity if not an expanding experience of the rhythms of existence, the awareness of and therefore the responsibility for the world in all its manifestations ?

6

One shudders at the enforcement of mob thinking that seems to be the order of the day in this country. Of course, it is not 'thinking' and it is most certainly not about decolonizing the mind. It is painful to witness the contradictions evident in the posturing of spokespersons and in the campaigns they try to launch. First contradiction: to destroy the places of learning, the depositories of knowledge and the expressions of awareness or of processes of creativity that would help us free ourselves—ostensibly because they are not 'African' enough.

We proceed from a condition of being hybrid cultural products—the result of past acculturation and the refraction of an ongoing process where we not only share the same consumerist desires and bourgeois values, but probably also similar dreams of a future where our vitality and potential and discrete contributions may come to fruition for the well-being and the development of the people. Yet, there is a pretence that it is possible to do away with the complications of the parts striving for a whole. Of what good will it be to get rid of the whites if the dominant modes

we are left with, including the white language of imperialism, remain unchanged? As if the pristine Utopia supposed to have existed in the past, that we wish to see reborn and pure, will be anything else but a clone of the present dispensation come to mock our dreams!

We'd be well advised to remember that the 'harmony' we wish to establish or impose—posited on the exclusion of those we consider to be 'foreigners'—actually translates as perpetual *dynamic change*. (Another wisdom postulates that *one ought to be one with what already exists*: only active identification will close the gap between the desire for change and a consciousness of the open-ended process of which we are both the outcome and the protagonists.)

7

The reasons for the dead-end street littered with soiled dreams and spent teargas canisters that we find ourselves in, are the moral bankruptcy and the unbridled gluttony and greed for patronage and power of the erstwhile liberation movement kidnapping the state to share the loot with a system of exploitation they—we!—were mandated to replace.

Free education ought to be a given in a development state. But it implies that the viability of the concept of 'university'—a Western construct that also embodies the universal need of being prepared and equipped for full citizenship—must be revisited. *Entitlement is not a revolutionary stance*.

The students are barking up the wrong tree. Barking in unison may make the news—sicked on by lecturers wallowing in the luxury of guilt hoping to vicariously assuage their romantic wet dream of escaping the human condition and their responsibilities by sucking up a 'revolution' where 'others' will man the barricades, and appeased by spineless and thoughtless administrative authorities. But neither the whipping up of mass hysteria nor the nostalgia of closet activists or the acquiescence of those who suddenly forgot their history will confer legitimacy on the protest.

It will be disastrous if we should, when struggling for a transformation toward greater social and economic justice, take refuge in nationalism—often nothing more than thinly disguised tribalism—as the first dance of the scoundrel and the alienated. There are only too many examples of this "forward flight" in Africa. Idi Amin tried to 'de-Asianize' Uganda; Mobutu Sese Soku wanted to make of 'Zaire' an 'authentic' African state...

We must not ignore the little historical memory we still have despite the narcissism of instant gratification in constant communication that obliterates whatever sense we may have had of the linkages between cause and effect. For the sake of all of us, we dare not forget the horrors wreaked by Hitler's Storm Troopers when they, similarly, torched the 'parasite culture'—and once you burn books and paintings, why not people? Or the regime of terror brought about by the so-called revolution-

ary fundamentalism and nihilism of the Red Guards in China, or the barbarism of Pol Pot's populism that led inevitably to the physical elimination of all independent and reason-based contestation (in fact, all those who wore glasses, since they were considered to be of the stinking ninth category of intellectuals—one could say, the “clever blacks” of their time). Or, closer to home, the terror imposed by Boko Haram in Nigeria, who probably hold that all book knowledge is ‘impure’ because it can be construed as the power food of colonizers.

The phenomenon is not new. Elias Canetti during the ‘thirties of the previous century already warned against the fascism inherent to mass-thinking in the Europe of his time. “Eat shit: a thousand flies can’t be wrong!” We know about the totalitarianisms that followed. Blind obedience to the One-Thought idol leads us to the social pathology of fanatically religious extremists blowing themselves up for Paradise—and to child soldiers with Kalashnikovs, pathetically garbed in dirty wedding gowns on the streets of Freetown during the civil war there, drugged to believe they cannot die.

Is this not the self-annihilation of those who feel they have been betrayed?

8

Our acceptance and exploration of the many faces of Africanism need not be a cause for fatalism. Africa bears the seed of vigorous resistance and of alternative creative thinking. In South Africa, for example, the Big Indaba about the nature and the purpose of tertiary education institutions, about the function of intellectual development and research and analysis conditioned by *this* topography and by *these* histories, can still take place.

In doing so, and in the light of the call for the Africanisation of universities in contents and appearance, we should lift our noses above the horizon of victimhood and ask where the once prestigious universities in Africa are now and what their prospects are. We should then listen to the considerations and aspirations of people who study or teach there, or who studied and once taught there.

The acrimony and confusion people here seem to experience at the present moment can perhaps be partly explained by a true need and desire to be actively involved with the magnificent challenges and exciting possibilities facing the continent, the creative thinking and potential for ethical imagination that can be valorized and developed - not only because these are essential contributions to bring about a more just and more decent future so that young people particularly may want to stay and invest their energies, but as well so as not to forfeit the freedoms already gained for which so much was sacrificed.

We need—and we have it in us—to unlock the richness of *pluralism, critical thinking, true accountability*, an exploration of the veritable epistemology encapsulated in each one of our mother tongues, the flesh of living and dreaming that make us part of the past and the future and without which we’ll be formatted stutterers with mouths and minds shaped by the clichés of parrot wisdom.

It may be difficult to entertain the idea that Pan-Africanism is *not* synonymous with blackness, that we therefore cannot simplify our stories to some homogenisation that would provide, theoretically, a national cohesion. It is, similarly, complex to keep in mind that Africa is a vast mosaic of cultures and languages drawing its strength exactly from diversity (the works of Assia Djebar and Yvonne Vera and Chimamande Adiche attest to this)—and, at the same time, that the communal, the common sense of a shared future, of being preyed upon by the outside world (the North still, and now also China)—that this history shaped us collectively and will continue to do so.

Let me contrast two approaches, which I trust we can keep in harmony. (But keep in mind also that ‘harmony’ is ‘movement’!)

The first position is that of Edward Said from an essay he wrote about Yeats and Decolonization:

Let us look again at [...] the literature of anti-imperialist resistance. If there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism, it is the primacy of the geographical element. Imperialism [I’m tempted to add: *as the avatar of colonialism*] after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of the locality to the outsider; its geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. Because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination.

A shading of Said’s position will come, at least implicitly, from Manthia Diawara, an essayist from Mali and a fervent advocate for African modernism, and Edouard Glissant, poet and nomadic thinker from Martinique. Diawara published an extensive interview with Glissant, known as “Conversation with Edouard Glissant aboard the Queen Mary II”, when the latter had to cross the Atlantic by ship because of ill health. Glissant:

Departure is the moment when one consents not to be a single being and attempts to be many beings at the same time. In other words [...] every diaspora is the passage from unity to multiplicity [...] One of Africa’s vocations is to be a kind of foundational Unity which develops and transforms itself into a Diversity.

And when Diawara asks whether we’re arriving somewhere, Glissant says:

For me, the arrival is the moment where all the components of humanity—not just the African ones—consent to the idea that it is possible to be one and multiple at the same time ; that you can be yourself and the Other; that you can be the Same and the Different. When that battle [...] is won, a great many accidents in human history [...] will be abolished.

Could it be that the characteristics and prerequisites of the modernity we speak of are quite universal, underpinning our aptitude for survival and competing in the contemporary environment? And among these: an adequate education, a functioning democracy, a paid job, dependence on Chinese fabricated consumer goods and appliances?

What are the present day struggles about?

I'd suggest they are as much about the past as they are about the present and the future.

The *past*: The uses and abuses of memory, the importance accorded a critical assessment and valorisation of history within the ambit of historical consciousness, if possible. That is where our values and the forms and possibilities (or restrictions) of our means of expression are sedimented.

The *present*: Where contest and the extent of differentiation lie within the scope of the responsibility we're willing to take for one another—be it due to cultural codes, custom, or moral and religious convictions. This where our values come into operation.

The *future*: The extent to which we are willing and prepared to re-invent our relationship to the world and to the notion of differences, to imagine an Africa of self-sustainability given its richness of human potential, to risk a *dépassement de soi* (a going beyond self)—recklessly, if needs be.

Are we willing to reach for true transformation, which will change all of us in a profound repositioning not only premised on entitlement, the settling of scores, demographic repartition, pragmatism, or national cohesion?

The 'good', it is said—competence, conformism, approval of the peers—is the enemy of the 'great'. Under 'great' I'd understand in this instance the inevitability of total rupture, of discomfort, dissidence and even abnormality.

The present-future is where the viability of our values are tested against the capacity we have for breaking through to the acceptance of our humanness (or of life in all its forms) posited on ongoing change, perhaps ultimately to challenge the void. Are we capable of thinking—imagining, creating, making being—beyond the glib validation of political correctness? Can we break free of self-centredness and the survivalist obduracy of our mediocrity as consumers of shallow thinking: the tyranny of the profit motive where faceless administrators try to turn our universities into business enterprises instead of protecting the groves where new generations can be prepared for participative and responsible citizenship and the critical assessment of power?

Grabbing hold of life as the one fire against the eternity of not knowing is a question of allowing ourselves to *imagine*. When we wake up to the disappointment that we no longer experience literature as essential, as a surprise or a revelation, it is not because of jaded senses, but because we have lost the ambition to bring down the

moon, to effect justice in our time, to beard the woman in us, to *be* the Other, to be the dogheaded human who promotes the chaos and the radical changes of harmony from which all creation originate. We lost our outsize, maybe mad dreams. We no longer want to be free—only independent and preferably linked to facebook.

What happened to the spaces opened up for us by—again to name eclectically—James Joyce, Robert Musil, Aimé Césaire, or N.P. van Wyk Louw?

It may well be true that a secular society only has itself and its complicated history of coming into being as reference. But even so, I believe that we should dare to imagine. That we can put our writing out there as pebbles for the birds who will show us the way back to the pleasure houses of the gods or the sacred sanctuaries of the ancestors. (It may well be the same place.)

11

Let me conclude these rambling thoughts that go nowhere. (Writing, as you would have noticed, only too often, takes one there.)

We need to be aware of the theories and the practices of other modernities. Among the attributes I tried to allude to here, are—not exhaustively and in no hierarchical order (it is too late to try and put my house in order):

- A shattering of the pretence at seeing the world/fate/sense *whole*;
- The fragmentation of discourses;
- An intensification of awareness of the means and material at one's disposal, and also that these are defined by limits, scars, approximations;
- A deepening of the dichotomy inside/outside, the dance with shadows, oscillation, movement and hence nomadism ("one doesn't dance with one's feet, but with the head and the heart", the flamenco dancer, Antonia Mercé says);
- The gods of old now being distant family speaking foreign tongues—the drunken uncles, the fat aunts;
- A hollowing out of our humanity.

From Africa, as well, we must look at these forms of creativity manifest in modernism if we wish to break the sterile cycles of fatalism, impunity, dependence, and the corruption of victimhood. But our modernity will be grounded in what we share and play with: the magic of memory; eating from the *shared* bowl of oral tales told to explain the coming about of mankind, to placate the spirits, to deride the gods, to track the trickster god who stole our stories.

These distinct qualities ought to be valorised and promoted. We need substance and not just motions of lofty intentions. We should not have to play up to the foreign paymaster. But *with responsibility comes depth and texture*. I believe we can learn and integrate and adapt the lessons whilst counteracting the alienation of following (and then resenting) norms embodying attitudes established elsewhere.

That is how and why—if you'll tolerate me a little longer—we dream from the ancient slave island of Gorée, within the ambit of our project of creativity and taking ownership of our dreams, called *Imagine Africa*.

More specifically, we'd like to mediate a concerted exploration of *Our inner Africas*: to weave the threads of literary research and creativity into a cloak that we can proudly wear in the salons and auditoriums and bookstores, on the stages and the screens of the world. It will have sewn to the inner lining the reminder of the trickster god: that *we do what we do to make mankind live up to the best we have in us, and not just to submit to the world*.

Admittedly, all of this was done long before our time, and impressively so, by Arab travellers and merchants of ancient lore to European explorers all the way to novelists such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sony Lab'ou Tansi and Bessy Head and many more. But we're convinced that we have to try and foster the conditions that would allow for African writers *to continue writing Africa*, to again uncover the topography of our concerns and our aspirations. This they will do as observers and protagonists, historians or sociologists or simply as storytellers... of the splendor and the vigour, the wickedness and clamour and knack for survival in our megacities to the depths of our rural areas, from our wars and our cruelty and our poverty and our superstitions to our wedding feasts and our sharing and our diasporas.

Our inner Africas. The project, coordinated by the Gorée Institute and more specifically by the Pirogue Collective—the grouping which initiates festivals and literary caravans and publications and translations—will consist of conceiving of the possibilities and conditions for fifteen writers (to start with) to each have the time and support and leisure to do the book she or he has always dreamt of writing. Be it novel or travel journal or memoir. This should happen over a two-year period. The authors may wish to do so while travelling, or working from another country, or from the facilities offered by writers' residencies. Or just to stay home and explore the known.

Ideally, the process ought to be facilitated and punctuated by creative writing workshops—for the participants to meet, to reflect, to exchange experiences, and to impart some of all of the above to younger writers.

The intention will be to have the works published and made available and distributed not just in one or two international languages, but as well in the major languages of Africa. The books will be made known and grouped over a short period in order to achieve maximum impact. And all of it in collaboration with established publishers who may well wish to integrate the works as a Collection. But it should also be with the aim to promote the distribution of works in African languages, and thus to strengthen African publishing ventures.

I end with a quote from Senga Nengudi, an African-American artist who talks about her many forms of expression—among them writing, dancing and sculpting, and each time, like a chameleon, taking on a new ‘identity’:

The powers that be don’t get it—even today—that when you expose full histories of things, everybody is richer for it. I guess it’s a power thing. I don’t know why that hasn’t gotten through. When they talk about Black studies, Asian studies, people think it’s only a course for that ethnicity. But we’re all part of the same tapestry. It’s important that we know as much as we can know, and be exposed to as much as possible, and be motivated, inspired, and show interest in something that’s beyond our own personal history.

Note

This paper was presented as the keynote address at a conference entitled “African and Diasporan African Literature: Imaginings, Modernities and Visions”, held under the auspices of the Southern Modernities Project and *Tydskrif vir letterkunde* at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa on 5–6 October 2016.

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Elisabeth Snyman

Elisabeth Snyman is a retired Professor in French who works as a researcher at the School of Languages of the North-West University, Potchefstroom.
Email: Elisabeth.Snyman@nwu.ac.za

Véronique Tadjó: Is there hope beyond the divisions in contemporary Africa?

Is there hope beyond the divisions in contemporary Africa?

This article discusses the Ivorian author Véronique Tadjó's representation of separation and division in a post-colonial African context through a close reading of three of her texts, namely *The Blind Kingdom* (1990), *Queen Pokou. Concerto for a sacrifice* (2004) and *Far from my Father* (2010). In Tadjó's novelistic universe, such divisions often require the intervention of a female protagonist, whose own existence is deeply influenced by tensions and frictions between two opposing camps. I shall argue that the agency of these protagonists is never futile and may even point to a way to go beyond the original divisions. Tadjó's representation of division also transgresses generic boundaries to address socio-political problems in unique ways. I shall demonstrate how the author draws on various genres such as poetry, the African folktale, the novel, as well as autofiction in order to engage the reader in a profound reflexion on the current state and future of the African continent. **Keywords:** Franchophone women's writing, Véronique Tadjó, social divisions within a nation.

Right from the start of her career as a writer, the Ivorian author Véronique Tadjó questions contemporary Africa in an oeuvre focussed on socio-political divisions on the continent. The present article proposes a reading of three texts, namely *The Blind Kingdom* (1990), *Queen Pokou. Concerto for a sacrifice* (2004) and *Far from my father* (2010), in order to examine the author's representation of, and reflexion on, separation and division, be it within a nation, amongst groups, or in the heart of a family.¹ The reasons for this choice are firstly, that these texts have received less attention from scholars than for instance *The Shadow of Imana* (2000), and secondly, because reading them together highlights the interconnectedness of Tadjó's oeuvre.

Although it is clear that the socio-political problems of her country lie at the heart of her own involvement in the African continent and her search for hope and solutions through her writing, the scope of the author's endeavour is not limited to the problems of one country. The vagueness of spatio-temporal settings that characterises works like *The Blind Kingdom*, *Champs de bataille et d'amour* (1999; not yet translated into English) and *Queen Pokou*, gives a universal quality to the author's depiction of Ivorian socio-political divisions. On the other hand, texts situated clearly within a specific space and time, like *The Shadow of Imana*, and *Far from my father*, also carry messages that reach beyond their historical anchorage.

The proposed analysis will refer to interviews with, and articles written by Tadjó as well as lectures she delivered, to support some of its findings, however, without losing sight of the fact that what an author creates in a literary text cannot simply be considered on the same level as her own interpretation of her work in other contexts. The text as a work of art, should speak for itself. Does not Gérard Genette (410) warn us that “the paratext is only an assistant, only an accessory to the text”? Therefore, such references will be made cautiously, considering the authorial epítex as yet another interpretation of a specific text that might shed some light on the author’s intention on writing of a specific text, but not as a meaning necessarily created by the work itself.

The portrayal of divisions

In the three texts, the concept of division manifests itself in multiple ways. *The Blind Kingdom*, a political allegory, starts with an apocalyptic scene of a terrible earthquake, unbearable heat, anguish, suffering and death (10) sweeping away all former political hierarchies and injustices (11). In a political sense, the space becomes a *tabula rasa*, peopled with men and women who are all equal just like in the beginning of time. Subsequently this fictional world is invaded by the Blind with their invincible army, dominating the rest of the population. Blindness and Vision thus form two opposing symbolic fields underlying the unfolding of the intrigue. Blindness is associated with dictatorial oppression; the exclusion of the Other, inequality, the refusal to share power (especially with a woman) and corruption. Tadjó draws on imagery from nature to render the idea of a dictatorship that stifles the country. In “A Conversation with Janis Mayes”, an interview on *The Blind Kingdom*, she explains that this catastrophe refers to the end of colonisation and the beginning of a new era, here depicted as the reign of the Blind. To render the oppression of this post-colonial dispensation, the author chooses the image of a bat: the palace of King Ato IV who reigns over the blind kingdom, has the form of this animal associated in the text with “the force of darkness” (*Blind Kingdom* 14), which extends its wings far over the city (13).² The decorations of the royal abode are all too reminiscent of the palace of Versailles, associated with the colonisers of the Ivory Coast. Real bats also invade the kingdom soiling everything with their excrement which is hard to remove. Images of draught, pollution, heaps of refuse and stench prevail in this setting.

King Ato IV’s reign divides the city into two realms: firstly, the realm of the Blind and the realm of the Others, the Sighted, who are living in misery, and secondly into the Great North where people can see, and by implication, the South, where blindness reigns. It follows logically that the characters in these texts would also belong to these opposing camps: thus the blind Akissi, the daughter of Ato IV falls in love with Karim from the North. Vision is associated with the excluded Other whose visage cannot even be seen by the Blind. Vision represents true insight, community, sharing, life, energy and change.

In the aforementioned interview on *The Blind Kingdom*, Tadjó points out that she had post-independence African states in mind when creating the character of King Ato IV. She adds that, although already published in 1990, the story parallels current divisions, that is “the North/South” divide within Côte d’Ivoire caused by “the rebellion which took place in September 2002” and which “marked the beginning of a deep political and military crisis” (Conversation). From other interviews one can also gather that the author is deeply concerned about political and social conflict in Cote d’Ivoire, a problem which she grapples with in most of her works.

In *Queen Pokou*, the second text, the divisions are clearly political in nature and unequivocally linked to the history of Côte d’Ivoire. Right from the start, the reader is confronted with the complexities of conflict and divisions in Africa caused by a struggle for power. A war of succession within the same family—yet again a family is at the source of the conflict—forces Queen Pokou and her followers to leave the Ashanti kingdom (Ghana today), as Pokou’s only male child is considered a threat to the throne. The group of refugees arrive at the Comoé River that is in flood and they cannot go any further. After consultation with the spirits of the water, it becomes clear that a human sacrifice in the form of a noble child is required to cross the water. Pokou decides to throw her only and long awaited child in the water in order to save her people, who can then cross the river and establish a new territory, the kingdom of the Baoulé meaning “the child is dead”.

Apart from the obvious division between Ashanti and Baoulé, and the separation necessary to found a new nation, Tadjó explains in a 2011 lecture on the political upheaval in her country yet another form of division attributed to the Pokou legend. She points out that under Félix Houphouët-Boigné the tale “became part of the collective imagination and acquired the status of a national myth that portrayed the Baoulé people as the true custodians of Ivorian identity” (“Of saviours, gods and domination”). In other words, the foundational legend became a motif to exclude non-baouléen Ivoriens from the nation, to consider them as the unwelcome Other. However, Tadjó’s deconstruction of the myth about the origins of the Baoulé people changes it into a polysemic metaphor of not only the hardships of African people caused by historical events which opposed them to Westerns nations, for instance the slave trade, but also of Good versus Evil as a given of human existence. As Dina Ligaga (487) so aptly observes, “Multiple narratives contest totalizing structures and offer possibilities for alternative voices, as is the project that Tadjó undertakes”.

The North/South divide in Côte d’Ivoire again serves as the backdrop for *Far from my father*, published in 2010 before the upheavals of 2011, but this time the story is firmly anchored in reality, and situated in Abidjan after the rebellion of 2002. On top of this initial division, the separation between the Self and the Other is internalised within the protagonist’s own mind. After the death of her father, Nina, born from a French mother and an Ivorian father, finds herself torn between modernity and

tradition, between her Western and African heritages. Nina feels “far” from this father; different from her family; unwelcome in her own country. The character of Nina is placed in an in-between situation, reminiscent of Homi Bhabha’s interstice (30), highlighted by the configuration of secondary characters amongst whom she evolves. It should be noted that the family, with its internal divisions and conflicts, becomes a trope for the nation in this text, and indeed in all three the texts, as in other African novels written by women (Toivanen 99–126). Frequent references to the political problems of Côte d’Ivoire broaden the scope of the intrigue to a questioning of the post-colonial Ivorian state.

Ideals of healing and perspectives of hope

Tadjo herself makes no secret of the fact that she is committed to overcome division and to open up possibilities for hope: “You look beyond destruction to let life in again,” (Conversation) observes the author in the interview on *The Blind Kingdom*. The question arises as to how Tadjo achieves this in her texts, without resorting to what Dominick LaCapra (154) would call a redemptive narrative.

In all three texts, Tadjo presents the reader with two main sources of renewal: on the one hand the importance of rethinking traditions, and, on the other hand, drawing on cultural heritage. They are profoundly interconnected, as the following examples will show.

In *The Blind Kingdom* a sorcerer orders Akissi to let herself be impregnated by “a man [...] who will come to see many things at once” (note vision versus blindness) but most importantly a man who “will rethink our traditions without negating them” (94–5), like the author herself. It turns out that this man is Karim, Akissi’s lover, who comes from the realm of the Sighted. Akissi falls pregnant, an image of full commitment to truth (Conversation) according to Tadjo, thus fulfilling the old sorcerer’s prediction that she will become the carrier “of great hope: a new generation who will set energy free, open closed doors and create new paths” (*Blind Kingdom* 95). Moreover, in *The Blind Kingdom* the importance of cultural heritage as a source to be drawn upon becomes apparent in the role of prophets, sorcerers, chants and rites that go together with the belief in an invisible world beyond reality, characteristic of African animism. In the Great North the old man who performs rites of initiation on Akissi to cure her from her blindness, calls on “all the invisible beings living in the holy forest. He calls on the founders of the village, on the Ancestors, the guardians of secrets” (*Blind Kingdom* 92). Tadjo herself quotes this passage to make a plea for not merely doing away with these forms—dare I say—of indigenous knowledge because that “would erase a whole new range of possibilities” (*Invisibility* 3). After Akissi’s initiation and her new insight into the problems of her father’s reign, she returns, joins Karim and falls pregnant. Tadjo doesn’t present the reader with an unequivocal victory of Vision over Blindness. In fact the text underscores the complexity of choices

and the hardships to be endured in the process of opposing oppression. The text finally juxtaposes Karim's death—he is hanged—to the start of Akissi's contractions. The story ends with the disappearance of the bats and a potential sign of hope in the birth of twins, a boy and a girl (signaling gender equality), who embody a new generation capable of representing the vision to go beyond the original divisions.

The second example: in *Queen Poko*, the author's deconstruction (rethinking) of the Pokou legend brings her to propose a new ending to the tale, entitled "The time of the bird-child". Tadjó endows the deceased child with wings: he soars over a world full of tears, suffering and fear. The child returns to "combat against the evils of all times" (*Queen Poko* 94). This embodiment of hope and salvation comes from the African soil itself: "Man, woman, bird. I am the old man, the child of the young man. I am the young man, the son of the child. Born from the bush and the forest and the crammed town" (*Queen Poko* 95). Having taken on another form, the child is no longer subject to death and becomes so powerful that he is able to kill the snake that brought destruction to the world: "and the bird-child laughs, he raises his arms to the heaven. He has conquered the beast" (*Queen Poko* 96). Tadjó thus opens up new modes of understanding for a politically abused legend: in her narrative it becomes a myth drawn from African cultural heritage, dealing with universal problems such as mankind's propensity to exclude or to violently eliminate the Other. In her own words: "I [...] remind readers that we are all migrants" (Lecture). Tadjó transforms the tale into a depiction of the eternal battle of Good against Evil, of sacrifice in order to restore peace, not only in a specific country, but amongst mankind. The new ending suggests a vision of hope that stays within the register of the legend or the myth, genres which serve to educate the reader or listener about moral behaviour.

My third instance is the novel *Far from my Father*. The text is anchored in contemporary African society and also linked to the author's own life. It offers yet another perspective on how the author envisages overcoming divisions; however, in this case, in a more practical and contemporary way. Once more, Tadjó questions what has become of African traditions, in particular the custom of the prolonged funeral and the institution of polygamy. There are two dimensions at work in the narrative: firstly, the plot is based on the drawn-out process of organising Nina's father's funeral, culminating in the last chapter with the scene of the burial itself. Secondly, most of the *péripties*—the twists and turns of the plot—are linked to the tradition of polygamy, when Nina gradually discovers the existence of four siblings, of whom she knew nothing, born from her father's unofficial relationships. In her interviews on this book, Tadjó reveals her intention to question the current corruption and perversion of these two customs. The text stages Nina's dismay when she discovers how corrupt employees extort money and gifts from the deceased's family all through the lengthy and often delayed stages of the preparations for her father's funeral. As far as polygamy is concerned, Tadjó highlights the plight of offspring born from

unofficial relationships. Previously, when polygamy was officially practiced, children from such marriages enjoyed social recognition and financial protection, whereas presently they are marginalised and ignored by families. Tadjou not only underscores from a modernist point of view her main character's disbelief and irritation with the many incidents of corruption surrounding her father's funeral, but also shows how Nina must decide, against her family's wishes, to take care of her siblings, thus correcting the social injustices of unofficial polygamy.

Nevertheless, other African traditions, especially art forms like the folktale, are yet again considered a rich source of wisdom holding solutions for current problems. As already indicated *Far from my father* does not only deal with Nina's personal challenges, but also with those of a country on the verge of civil war. When Nina's half-sister Cécile tells her the tale of two brothers who had to go through a process of conflict and rupture to eventually establish a prosperous kingdom, a tale which underscores the idea of compromise, solidarity and joint responsibility, Nina, like Karim, can see more than only what meets the eye. Finding compromises with her aunts, appreciating a sense of belonging surrounded by her new family, she finally, together with the others, finds a way forward in her new circumstances and assumes the immense responsibilities that go with it. Cécile's folktale subtly introduces a wider applicability to Nina's story and suggests that healing for the post-colonial state is possible if everybody contributes to rebuilding a nation.

In addition to the folktale as a source for renewal, other forms of art also play a positive role in these three texts: in one version of the *Pokou* legend, the carefully sculpted wooden statue of her child consoles Pokou and enables her to find peace after his death. The Mask in the *Blind Kingdom* holding the power to restore Akissi's vision, is made out of the red fabric of a beautifully woven garment. As Tadjou puts it herself: "It is important that as a people, we recognize that our cultural diversity is a source of richness" (Conversation). In all three novels and in the rest of her oeuvre, African culture, be it rites, chants, folktales or artefacts, is associated with the solutions proposed by the narratives, but in a nuanced, open-ended way.

The agency of women and female characters in the process of bringing about change

After I have dealt with Tadjou's ideals of healing and perspectives of hope, the stage is set for her views on the agency of women and female characters in the process of effecting salubrious social change. All the female protagonists in the corpus selected for this study have to go through a process of separation and initiation and two of them (Akissi and Nina) have to be reintroduced into their previous environments to be able to bring about renewal. Tadjou's female characters have to make choices that can have good or bad consequences and they are never allowed to resort to an attitude of Sartre-like bad faith. The intervention of a female character is needed in order to find solutions and a way forward.

Akissi is the only person in the reign of the Blind who cannot be controlled by her megalomaniac of a father. King Ato IV acknowledges that he is powerless against her—not being able to force her to marry someone of his choice (*Blind Kingdom* 15). The king regrets not having been able to father a son with whom he would have been able “to conquer the whole world” (16). The fact that the stubborn Akissi is his only heir, adds a feministic slant to Tadjó’s text: Akissi becomes the first to transgress the Law of the Father, and to leave her father’s kingdom for the Great North, where her mother originated from. In the realm of the Sighted she is welcomed, protected and instructed by yet another woman, namely Karim’s mother. This character is reminiscent of the figure of the old woman in the African folktale, a genre that “establish[es] the tradition of women as insightful and resourceful problem solvers” (Mbelle 61). Although the traditional African folktale is misogynist (Lee 20), “a woman gains a certain amount of power when she is old” (27). Karim’s mother is given a role often assigned to older women in folktales and legends, namely that of mentor and guide. Moreover, she has the “knowledge of secrets” and is able to speak “the language of the initiated” (*Blind Kingdom* 73). She also has the right to request the start of rituals for Akissi’s initiation to true vision. She assists and guides the young woman when an old man calls on the spirit of the powerful Mask, the “source of life” (79), linked to truth and vision, to heal Akissi from her blindness. It is from her that Akissi will learn “the myths and legends of her people” (78) and how to confront the problems of her father’s reign.

The figure of Queen Abraha Poko, descendant from a matrilineal dynasty, is a prime example of the complexity of female agency in Tadjó’s work. The original legend, as recounted by Tadjó, depicts Pokou as being chosen by the spirits of the clan for “a great destiny” (12). The story of her life foregrounds her courage, insight and leadership qualities and her ability to save her people through personal sacrifice. Nevertheless, through Tadjó’s deconstruction of the legend, the figure of Pokou loses her monolithic Amazon-like nature to be only a mother grieving about the loss of her beloved child and questioning the fact that women must always sacrifice their sons to save kingdoms (42). In this version of the legend, Pokou can only become the founder of a new nation after having received restoration for her loss in the form of the wooden statuette resembling her son. In yet another rewriting, Pokou embodies the abuse of power (female power) or becomes the epitome of the malicious, vengeful seductress.

Nina, the fictional “descendant” of both Akissi and Pokou, is not a princess but also enjoys a certain social status as the daughter of Kouadio Yao, who during his lifetime, played an important role in the Ivorian society. In spite of an epigraph to *Loin de mon père* (9) underscoring filiation passing from father to son, it is Nina, the second daughter, on whom the family relies to handle the problems her father left them with. After a process of re-introduction to her roots, Nina finally over-

comes her initial reluctance and takes charge of her newly found family after her father's death.

Tadjo aligns herself with other contemporary African female authors who question traditional patriarchy and subscribe to female agency (see Toivannen 102). Odile Cazenave, a proponent of African feminism, considers Tadjo as representative of a new generation of "rebellious" female writers who "search for new alternatives to the socio-political problems of a stagnant post-colonial Africa and create feminist/female voices contrasting sharply with canonical masculine authority" (14). Cazenave defines African feminism as follows: "Feminist African consciousness admits the inequalities and limitations imposed on women in pre-colonial Africa, it acknowledges its affinities with international feminism but in its objectives, envisages an African feminism" (Kingué & Cazenave 642). The roots of Tadjo's specific form of feminism may well lie in her own cultural roots. Her father was a descendant from the Akan, a "matrilineal people" according to Tarikhu Farrar (585), who adds that "[e]very office in the Akan political hierarchy (in all its variants) has its male and female counterparts" (588) contrary to some other African peoples. Furthermore, as far as the binary male/female in Tadjo's three texts is concerned, she does not subscribe to merely privileging female over male in a simplistic fashion. The role of male characters is significant: without Karim, Akissi cannot become an agent for change. Karim becomes a sort of Christ who has to die, who is sacrificed, in order to obtain salvation. Poko's male child also has to be sacrificed and his return in the form of a bird signals hope; Nina needs her ex-boyfriend Kangha's advice and her recently found half-brother Amon's help to find solutions to all the problems she inherited after her father's death. In Tadjo's oeuvre female agency is inscribed in a context where the solidarity of a whole community of women and men is needed in order to achieve change.

Nevertheless, in all three of the texts, finding solutions and taking responsibility are never depicted as being uncomplicated: Tadjo's poignant depictions of Karim and Akissi's self-doubt; Nina's hesitations and initial refusal to take responsibility; the questioning of the Pokou figure's bravery, all illustrate that these women are not heroines in the traditional sense of the word. As the author very significantly observes: "There is no saviour, Ivorians are fully aware of it. If Côte d'Ivoire is going to gain lasting stability and development, it will come from the country as a whole." (Lecture)

This remark by Tadjo brings me to the values of solidarity, community and unity that are so pronounced in her oeuvre: Princess Akissi has to go out to the people of the North where she is unconditionally accepted and advised by the whole community; on her own, the grieving Pokou can't find any solace and Nina must step out of her in-between situation and has to depend on the advice and support of others to find her way.

Going beyond generic boundaries

From a stylistic point of view it is significant that Tadjó's representation of division goes beyond generic boundaries to open up a rich variety of perspectives on the problems she deals with. In typical postmodern fashion *Reine Poko. Concerto pour un sacrifice* proposes alternative readings of the traditional legend in the form of four different scenarios with four different endings. Furthermore, the text is divided into three sections: the legend, the questioning of the legend and the last section entitled "The time of the bird-child", forming the *coda* of the concerto (see Vassilatou 141) in which Tadjó structurally overcomes division by going further than the content of the legend in order to envisage a time of hope when evil will be vanquished. The *Blind Kingdom* is a collection of short texts told from different points of view without any clear chronological sequences of events. Poetic passages containing prophecies or evoking rites and chants, alternate with monologues and inner dialogues in order to create a poetic modern legend or tale which allows for multiple allegorical interpretations. *Far from my father* defies the definition of autofiction by avoiding any onomastic identity between author, narrator and protagonist, in spite of biographical details being clearly reworked in the text. The focalisation shifts without transition from Nina to her father in order to create a better understanding of her father's actions. Information on mating habits of insects, the content of a booklet on sorcery, letters and e-mails are reproduced and presented without much accompanying commentary, so that it is up to the reader to collaborate in the construction of meaning and to link all these archives to the overarching concerns of the novel. All these literary devices give a unique stylistic quality to Tadjó's engagement with the African continent.

In conclusion it may be surmised that Tadjó's texts tackle the issues we live by: division and separation, be it the North-South divide in Côte d'Ivoire, Brexit versus the European Union, or fundamentalism (of whichever variety) versus the secular state. Véronique Tadjó consistently strives in her œuvre to counteract division and separation by promoting solidarity, compromise and caring for the Other. She makes it abundantly clear that these values are already embedded African culture, a source from which new creative modes of shaping the future of the continent can be drawn.

Notes

1. For the sake of clarity, the English titles of all the original French works written by Tadjó are used in this article. However, the dates of publication are those of the original French texts. .
2. All references to these texts refer to the original French editions. Except when otherwise indicated, all quotations from Tadjó's three texts are my own translations.

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Shelton Muvuti

Shelton Muvuti is associated
with the University of Zimbabwe
with special interest in
Francophone African literature.
Email: sheltonmuvuti@gmail.com

Revisiting trauma and homo religiosus in selected texts by Mongo Beti and Veronique Tadjó

Revisiting trauma and homo religiosus in selected texts by Mongo Beti and Veronique Tadjó

This paper locates religion within the literary narratives of traumatogenic experiences such as war and genocide as depicted in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* by Mongo Beti and Véronique Tadjó's *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*. In spite of evident reference to the role played by religion in traumatic and traumatising encounters, it features simply as a footnote to the ethnic tensions that underpin these encounters. Drawing on the theoretical work of J. Roger Kurtz and other scholars as well as casting a glance at anticolonial and postcolonial Francophone literatures, this paper argues that trauma in modern postcolonial Francophone literature is ubiquitous. It reveals itself in the post-independence contradictions and injustices as depicted by modern francophone authors and thinkers whose subject matter is largely dominated by such motifs as corruption, war, violence, insanity, rape, poverty, disillusionment, which all accommodate a direct challenge to religion. The absence of *religiosity* in trauma literature suggests a reversal of the socio-historical stereotype that frames Africans as highly religious, and whose opposition to religion is a result of enlightenment through education. **Keywords:** Homo religiosus, trauma, religiosity, genocide, Mongo Beti, Véronique Tadjó.

Introduction

To imagine Africa without instability, war, exploitation, famine, brutality and wholesale death is so utopian a view, it borders on the impossible. While these traumatic realities exist all over the world, the African continent has by far epitomised their prevalence. Africa is in a constant "state of emergency", a perpetual nervous condition, and reasons for this vary from religious, through anthropological to political, or a complex combination of all of these factors. This reality of trauma has provided the fodder for over a century of literature on the subject, practically relegating any non-traumatic theme about Africa to quasi-irrelevance (Gikandi 379). J. Roger Kurtz argues that "all aspects of contemporary African writing originate in the context of a massive, continent-wide experience of deep social trauma" (421). Literature on this trauma took the character of anticolonial writing (Brière) during the colonial period such as that of Frantz Fanon; Alexandre Awala-Biyidi (Mongo Beti) and Ferdinand Oyono, and has proliferated into a wide array of postcolonial work by such writers as Florent Couao-Zotti; Calixthe Beyala, Abdurahman Waberi and Ahmadou Kourouma to name a few who each represent the diverse ramifications trauma has

had and continues to exert on the African continent. No more evidently has this reality been revealed than in the trauma narratives on the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Rwanda according to Achille Mbembe has since come to symbolise the “stamping out of life” and the “existential negativity that Africa often emblemizes in the global imaginary” (Mbembe 1–5). Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* explains trauma as mental disturbance of survivors of devastating events which involve a risk to life, such as disasters, accidents, or war (Freud 6). This definition albeit specific to psychology and psychoanalysis allows us to see the link between traumatising events and the traumatic response. Véronique Tadjo’s depiction of the genocide in Rwanda in her fictional narrative with its multifarious manifestations such as violence, rape, assassination and war captures the fundamentally and inherently negative character of trauma.

Amid the numerous perspectives on the psychosocial phenomenon of trauma, is the religious paradigm, which this paper will consider more closely. The debate on religion is age-old, complex and controversial and I do not aim to postulate any new theoretical reading on the phenomenon. Rather, this paper acknowledges over half a century of research in the area of trauma and millennia of scholarship on religion. Religion is undoubtedly a very complex concept owing to the multiple and sometimes divergent perspectives from which it can be approached. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will use Kehinde Olabimtan’s definition of religion as a dominant belief in transcendental powers, irrespective of whether they are benevolent or malevolent. He elucidates that it is

African peoples’ conscious and sub-conscious awareness of and preponderant recourse to the transcendent in virtually all they do, irrespective of whether those activities are formal or informal, social or personal, political or economic, didactic or recreational. The religious components in any of these may be overt or covert; but however they are present, they undergird human existence. (Olabimtan 324)

For the African, the issue in the discussion of religion is not primarily ethics but function, as African religiosity is essentially utilitarian, not necessarily implying piety (Olabimtan 323). This understanding distinguishes religiosity in the African context from more classical definitions of religion such as Toft’s “belief in a supernatural being or beings”; belief in a transcendent reality; distinction between the sacred and the profane; and a code of conduct for a temporal community that shares a world view (Sanni 3). Andrew Fiala concurs with Olabimtan, noting that religion is more than belief in a single set of claims that are supposed to be true, rather, “there is a multitude of religions” (42) and no single thing is called religion. Indeed the discussion of religion is often blurred with ethical, theological and philosophical considerations which render it difficult to neatly define. Albert Ellis (2) contends that it seems silly to say that someone is religious because he happens to be philosophic or ethical; and

unless we rigorously use the term religion to mean some kind of faith unfounded on fact, or dependency on some assumed superhuman entities, we broaden the definition of the word so greatly as to make it practically meaningless. While this view may be true from a “militant atheist” perspective as Fiala (140) prefers to call it, it is based on an epistemological interpretation of religion and thus does not take into account the complex symbols of religion thus rendering this view reductionist especially with regards to African religiosity. Olusegun Oladipo (242) argues that religion is not only belief in a metaphysical being, but also a disposition *towards* that which one believes in. Thus religion and religiousness are essentially God-consciousness and the physical, personal and institutionalized articulation of such a consciousness in everyday life. These considerations of religion accommodate African Traditional Religion (ATR) which has been defined as “the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans” (Awolalu 1).

The criticism of religion traces its roots to and gained its impetus *inter alia* from the French Revolution of 1789 which owed its success in part to centuries of philosophical activism and volumes of literary expression bearing an anti-religious rhetoric by such philosophers as Hegel and Voltaire. This revolution was the culmination of a growing socio-political dissatisfaction with absolute power which in its highest form was God, and in its human manifestation was the oppressive system embodied in the tyrannical rule of monarchies who- like God- presumably enjoyed absolute power. By challenging the established order the revolutionaries epitomised the quest to bring about the fallibility of the idea and existence of God. Since then, the “major intellectual figures that influenced modernist thought—Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, and Darwin—were often perceived as offering ideas to replace or dissolve religious ways of thinking” (Erickson 7). These scholars challenged the notion of the religiosity of man. African Francophone literature draws significantly from Western philosophies, including those of the 1789 Revolution, with their tendency to discredit religion as a viable means of objectively viewing reality.

The success of the Enlightenment has however been challenged by such scholars as Olabintan (333) who provides the following perspective:

The twentieth century presented us with the dismal failure of the enlightenment movement in the two successive World Wars. In the consequent search for meaning beyond the pretensions of this movement, there re-emerged in the West the alternative view to the prevailing irreligion [...] This renewed search for meaning found expression in the appreciation of the profundity of human existence and the plausibility of a transcendent reality beyond the mechanistic view that the enlightenment had hitherto espoused. This search for alternative meaning to life and reality in the traumatized West brought into relevance again the presupposition of a religious worldview that understands reality as beyond the material and human beings as existential beings.

By asserting that the “Western scientific” approach ushered in by the Enlightenment gave way to a more inclusive approach after the reality of its failure following the two World Wars, Olabintan (327) postulates that this viewpoint was “only a phase in Western study of cultures”, thus not immutable. In other words, the age of scientific reason was arrived at as a reaction to circumstances unique to Europe at that time, which circumstances cannot be arbitrarily applied to the African context. This viewpoint is in harmony with the bulk of African anticolonial and postcolonial literature.

Titles of novels such as *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956); *Devil on the Cross* (1980) and *Allah is Not Obligated* (2000), to name a few, not only reveal the ubiquity of religion in African literature, but they also nuance a thinly-veiled hostility to religion-or more precisely “imported” religion, which John Sadiq Sanni (3) describes as religions which are not uniquely African, but which infiltrated African societies through their interactions with other continents. Our starting assumption in this study is that trauma is ubiquitous in Francophone African Literature. We also assert that, while religion is similarly ubiquitous on the continent, *homo religiosus* or *primitive religiousness* features simply as a footnote to the literature on ethnic tensions that provoked the Rwandan genocide. This study in no way seeks to discuss religion or philosophy, or limit the multifaceted traumatogenic experiences of the Rwanda genocide to canonical interpretations. Drawing on work published by a variety of scholars, this paper argues that trauma in modern postcolonial francophone literature is ubiquitous. It reveals itself in the post-independence contradictions and injustices as depicted by modern francophone authors and thinkers whose subject matter is largely dominated by such motifs as corruption, genocide, war, violence, insanity, rape, poverty, disillusionment, which all accommodate a direct challenge to religion. We will briefly discuss trauma, the concept of *homo religiosus* and close with a look at religiosity in the context of *The Poor Christ of Bomba* by Mongo Beti and Véronique Tadjo's *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the heart of Rwanda* published under the project “Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire”. The former literary narrative provides us with a rich literary exposition of the incipient perspectives on *religiosity* or *religiousness* in the traumatic colonial period, while the latter is a distinctively “African attempt to come to terms with the genocide in Rwanda” (West-Pavlov 115). Trauma in the postcolonial era follows on the heels of its colonial antecedent and African Francophone literary fictional narratives provide a scope into this ubiquitous trauma.

Ubiquity of trauma in the African imaginary

Kurtz (421) points out that colonialism, the African slave trade, the distorting dynamics of the East-West superpower conflict in the post-independence era as well as the current relegation of Africa to subservience and on-going unrest in the global community are traumatogenic experiences that have ravaged the continent. This view captures the historic, contemporary and on-going forces that impose a multi-layered traumatic

character to life on the African continent as depicted in literature. For example, the term “slavery” is almost naturally prefixed by the adjective “African” while meaningful contribution by Africans to global issues is something of a misnomer. Olufemi Taiwo (22, 23) highlights the disparity that arises from the fact that Africa was not the only continent to experience colonization. He argues that countries such as the United States, Canada, South Korea and Australia were also once colonies yet they have now risen to superpower status, becoming “secondary exporters of investment capital to Africa and exploiters of the continent’s resources” while Africa remains locked in underdevelopment and unending unrest. This renders the explanatory orthodoxy of colonialism as the major contributor to Africa’s underdevelopment and perpetual unrest rather problematic. It is quite apparent that the problems the African continent faces are a result of complex enduring forces, external in nature, but which find in the African psyche a conducive “petri dish” to thrive in. Could one of these factors be the African’s inherent religiosity? This consideration begs the question, is religiosity in itself strengthened or weakened by opposing paradigms?

Of the many negative pictures of Africa that make up what is referred to as Afropessimism, the Rwandan genocide is arguably the most significant in recent history. Not only was this event alarming in its occurrence but more so in its intense brutality. The free use of machetes to decapitate and dismember victims characterised this violence and through her fictional narrative, Tadjoo (11) captures this violence in her graphic descriptions of the anonymous “woman bound hand and foot”. Tadjoo (11) records, “She has been raped. A pickaxe has been forced into her vagina. She died from a machete blow to the nape of her neck.” The young “Zairean woman who looked like a Tutsi” witnesses the murder of a man whose throat is slit in front of her house; the cold-blooded murder of her baby; and suffers gang rape while unconscious. This dehumanizing brutality allows the reader to appreciate the extent of animality to which the perpetrators had sunk. Anna-Marie de Beer summarises the factors at the heart of the genocide, citing the question of identity as one of the most fundamental. The divisive discourse of Hutu and Tutsi rivalry which sought to elevate one *people* over the other; the question of “racialisation” of the two identities and of course, the influence of colonialisation upon the African psyche are among the causes. What role is played by African religiosity in this matrix of causes? Due to the sheer magnitude of the Rwandan genocide, much has been written and produced to immortalise the memory of this “failure of humanity” (De Beer 35).

Notorious religiosity: *homo religiosus*

Religion in much of world and African literature today is largely portrayed as being inimical to human progress, science and reason (De Maeyer). The religious point of view is largely seen as biased and prejudiced, while a secular view is objective and neutral (Wijssen 82)—and vice versa. John Mbiti famously declared that Africans

are “notoriously religious”. This manifestation of religion is referred to by Mircea Eliade as *homo religiosus* (Eliade, Wijzen). Dino Cervigni (16) citing Eliade postulates that, in the strictest sense, the great majority of the irreligious are not liberated from religious behaviour, theologies and mythologies. For example, he notes that Marxism reflects eschatological views in its belief in an “absolute end to history”; nudism and movements for sexual liberty veil an Edenic discourse of a return to an epoch of sexual purity before the fall of man; and psychoanalysis in its methodology betrays “initiatory descents into hell” (Cervigny 17).

Africans maintain strong ties with religious beliefs and practices, which form a solid foundation for the African world view and permeate its artistic and literary productions.¹ Mbiti’s observation of the notoriety of African religiosity cannot be underrated. By this statement, he highlights that the African is inherently *homo religiosus*. This appellation, far from being eisegetical, is based on an observation and recognition of the existence of religiousness in the various aspects of life for the Black African, be it in their religion, economic and legal practices as well as social, moral and ethical considerations. What Mbiti is essentially noting is that religion in the African context permeates every aspect of life and is not neatly compartmentalised as a separate domain. In fact, Africans in general distinguish between, but do not separate society, culture and religion as separate domains (Wijzen 59, 81). This further complicates religion in the African context in that it is always viewed as “cultural religion” and culture is always “religious culture” (Wijzen 81). We may therefore suggest that the framework by which Africans rationally or irrationally interpreted their world was founded upon an inherent religiosity. Daniel McIntosh (1) argues that religion, while operating from within a cognitive schema, goes beyond a simple organisation of beliefs but in a broad sense exists outside the person in the form of texts, symbols, and traditions, and in a narrower sense appears in the form of individuals’ rites, habits and other behaviours. The literature of the continent has long recognized and criticised the religiousness of its inhabitants and sought to demonstrate how this religiosity has been instrumental in advancing colonial ends or playing to the tune of a traumatic and traumatizing narrative discourse.

‘Imported’ religiosity in *The Poor Christ of Bomba*

The Poor Christ of Bomba is a literary narrative representation of the “notorious” *homo religiosus* of Africans. The narrative is presented by Denis, a young houseboy, through whose naïve eyes we trace the unsuccessful mission of the fictitious character Reverend Father Superior Drumont to “Christianise” the inhabitants of Tala. If Father Drumont is successful in proselyting some villagers, it should be partly attributed to the latter’s proclivity for religiousness. Sanni views this as “gullibility” (9) which, he adds, has a tendency to override the reflective impulse. Beti distinguishes himself in the use of types as representations of such institutions as tradition, religion and the

colonial administration. Father Drumont may be seen as representing the Christian religious and fundamentally Western philosophical paradigm whose systematic conquest of African minds is devastatingly efficacious, while Denis represents the African religio-philosophical landscape, yet innocent and uninitiated in the arena of global knowledge, cultural exchange and relevance, but threatened by the inexorable influence of Western ideology, philosophy and religion. Eloïse Brière (54) identifies this characterization as a phase in the evolution of Francophone African literature where authors—in particular Cameroonian authors like Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono—attacked religious proselytism as well as the evils of the time.

Beti's protagonist, Denis, is portrayed as being naïvely devoted to Father Drumont, attributing to him characteristics of Jesus Christ. He states, "Jesus Christ! Oh, I'm sure it's no blasphemy! He really deserves that name, that simple praise from innocent hearts. A man who has *spread faith among us; made good Christians every day, often despite themselves... A father-Jesus Christ*" (3, my emphasis). The ironic tone of this passage is very evident, revealing Beti's disdain for what seems to be sycophantic adoration of "imported religion". This irony is further exacerbated by Denis who implies that his people were without a faith, a kind of *tabula rasa* upon which Father Drumont, representing Christ himself came to rewrite religiousness. In other words Denis' understanding of Jesus Christ and Father Drumont's brand of religiosity was not based on first-hand personal experience but was rather dependent on Father Drumont's example. In spite of his best efforts, Father Drumont's mission ends in failure, revealing a gross miscalculation of the complexity of his African subjects' *homo religiosus*. His tour of the village after an absence of two years reveals a wholesale return to superstition and polygamy, practices that he had made it his mission to obliterate. He also finds the chapels in a state of disrepair and the "sixa", a preparatory home he instituted for women soon to be married is discovered to be a den of venereal diseases. He dejectedly leaves the village for his home continent Europe, with no assurance of a return. This unceremonious end can be viewed as Beti's veiled prophetic declaration of the fate of "imported religion" on the African continent.

It is indeed an undeniable fact that the African worldview and literature, unlike that of the West, take religion quite seriously. For Simon Gikandi (387, 379) it is not surprising that religion was one of the most important themes in African literature in the colonial period as Christianity made an important impact on the Africans' lives and practices. The Africans' attraction to the material things of European culture coupled with the new Christian system challenged the *doxa* of many African societies, including the institutions of marriage and the definition of the family, and, in the process, provoked a series of social crises. Christianity was "regarded as containing the secret source of power of the white man" (Opoku 525). Its effective erosion of the traditional fibre of the African was achieved in part by dangling the proverbial carrot of modernity before the African who summarily left all to embrace the new

prospects. This modernity came along complete with a new systematic religion and religious expression. Zacharia, Mongo Beti's spokesperson in *The Poor Christ of Bomba* gives his analysis of the progression and effect of religion on the inhabitants of Sogolo:

The first of us who ran to religion, to your religion, came to it as a sort of [...] revelation. [...] a school where they could learn your secret, the secret of your power, of your aeroplanes and railways [...] Instead of that, you began talking to them of God, of the soul, of eternal life, and so forth. Do you really suppose they didn't know those things already, long before you came? So of course, they decided that you were hiding something. Later, they saw that if they had money they could get plenty of things for themselves [...] Well, then! They are turning from religion and running elsewhere, after money, no less. (30)

Of particular interest is the repetitive use of the second person, "you", to suggest the alien nature of this new religion. The curiosity and submission of Africans is captured well here and suggests an innate response to what seems religious in nature- what we may consider as *homo religiosus*.

Trauma and religiosity in *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda*

The stylistic structure of the travelogue *The Shadows of Imana: Travels in the Heart of Rwanda* reflects the complex nature of trauma and the human response to it. Tadjó constructs her narrative using fragments of testimonies by perpetrators and survivors of the genocide. She also weaves in her personal observations with historical facts and presents the guilt-stained reflections of those who "abandoned" their homeland in a *flight* for survival. Gobodo-Madikizela and van der Merwe (cited in Samuel 37) note how traumatic representation in literature takes on an irregular narrative structure, disjointed, non-linear, dreamlike and fragmented. By this narrative style, Tadjó shows the subjectivity and therefore complexity of human suffering.

If religiosity is significant to this study it partly arises from the title of Tadjó's travelogue which evokes *Imana*, the Creator deity in the traditional Banyarwanda religion in Rwanda. Imana's imposing stature, can be viewed as mercifully providing respite from the sweltering heat of the genocidal bloodbath or it can be viewed as ironically blocking the light and casting a silent, heavy shadow over his people who submissively endure present hardship and await an uncertain and ignominious fate as did many of the victims cited in the travelogue. The latter view can be supported by historical evidence. However, is this shadow incomprehensible to the African? Or does the inherent religiosity of the African provide him with an interpretation of this "shadow"? Tadjó interestingly weaves a consideration of this reflection into her narrative. For instance, aboard Sabena Flight 565 an interesting contrast emerges when we consider the group of Rwandan passengers laughing boisterously while the nuns dressed in blue make "quiet conversation" (3). Recounting the massacre at

the church in Nyamata where approximately 35 000 people were killed, it is noted that “the Belgian priest was *no longer there* when the massacre took place” (13, my emphasis). We see emerging, a disturbing lack of engagement by the purveyors of organised religion. However, the startling revelation of the “Ten Commandments of the Hutus” comes in quick response to this lack of engagement. A clear reference to the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, Effoh Ehora describes the Hutu commandments as an extremely violent ideological manifesto which reduced the Tutsis to the level of animals. The perpetrators of the traumatic genocide seemingly acted in tandem with a culturally-recognised *homo religiosus* to *sanctify* the atrocities they would soon perpetrate. In essence, the absence of expected benevolent acts by the religious was replaced by a corrupted form of religious expression in the same way a traditional way of practising religion was replaced by an “imported one” whose tools and discourse the recipients were not well acquainted with.

Mahmood Mamdani (50) highlights a now widely accepted fact that in the pre-colonial era, Tutsis and Hutus shared a common language, religion and territory. Tadjó captures this in her travelogue:

The same faith in a supreme being, Imana.

A single king, the mwami, half-man, half-god.

The same customs. The same language, kinyarwanda.

The basic elements: God, the king, woman, cattle. (18)

If elements such as customs, language, royalty, humanity and property have been of importance in Africa, these are depicted as operating from within the context of a conscious or unconscious, all-pervading belief in a supreme being, Imana. As such, Tadjó’s narrative is interspersed with references to this deity-conscious conduct: “The royal drums were venerated like gods [...] they had a ‘heart’, a sacred object hidden inside, whose origin was known only to the king and the priest [...] The ritual objects were sprinkled with the blood of the bull calves used for divination.” (19)

The advent of Christianity and Islam on the back of conquest and mission brought about more than a simple superimposition of the colonial religion over the African, it effectively led to the systematic scrambling, confusion and re-writing of *homo religiosus* in the African context. It destabilized the very foundations of the African interpretation and representation of meaning and existence. Mongo Beti questions the legitimacy of uprooting a person from his traditional religion, established over millennia, and alienating him by imposing on him a culture, not his own, with which he will never feel at ease (Salaka 64).

African recourse to religious belief is depicted in the chapter “The Wrath of the Dead” in which Tadjó alludes to the restless spirits of the dead. The chapter resonates with the pervasive belief in the “spirit world” exerting a direct influence on the world

of the living. Tadjó gives the account of one particular spirit of a man tortured and beheaded, whose "ally was a torrential downpour" (42). Access to this disembodied entity, who "had loved life too much to leave it so", for the purpose of appeasement, is limited to the esoteric incantations of a soothsayer who suggests, "we must [...] bury the dead according to our rites [...] so that they may return to visit us in peace" (44, 45). He adds, "[w]e shall search for *phrases* to appease them, *prayers* to soften their hearts" (47, my emphasis). Here Tadjó captures one of the quests in African religion and religiosity, which is to maintain a peaceful balance with nature and the spirit world which are an integral part of Africans' beliefs. This quest is articulated in much the same way "imported religion" is expressed, through prayer and rituals, revealing an inherent penchant for religiousness. Mongo Beti contrasts the fear and quasi-reverence with which the Talans consider Sanga Boto, the powerful village sorcerer, and Father Drumont's disregard for and subsequent public humiliation of this local diviner. Interestingly though, Boto had been baptised and given the name Ferdinand. The Father's actions reveal an intolerance of other beliefs which is resident in Father Drumont's religion. However, when Father Drumont suffers a boat accident which almost costs him his life and is physically assaulted by a villager the Talans naturally interpret this as nothing but the inevitable consequence of disrespecting a diviner such as Sanga Boto.

Educating the African intellectual: rewriting homo religiosus?

In *The Poor Christ of Bomba* a characteristic feature of the community is the mission school. The relationship between Church and school is revealed during Father Drumont's visit to a school in Kouma. Father Drumont is welcomed by village children singing *La Marseillaise*. On this occasion however, after his mindset change caused by reflections on the religiosity of the Talans, Father Drumont does not appear to enjoy the national hymn of the French Republic (140, 141). Mortimer, in tracing the evolution of Francophone literature notes how early African intellectuals were privileged to attend missionary schools and imbibed European culture, glorifying it in their literary productions in the early twentieth century (530, 531). This trend continued well into the 1950s. Even Beti claimed to be of European culture, having been significantly influenced by its literary works (Sela 4). Beti captures this in the Vicar Le Guen's flattering offer to Father Drumont, "thanks to poetry, I shall one day sing your praises" (194). We observe that an important catalyst to the progressive annihilation of *religiosity* in the African context was the European education system.

Abdoulaye Gueye (267) observes that the majority of African intellectuals made contact with religion at some stage in their social trajectory. In fact, an important consideration of African literary history is that the founders of African literature were the most Europeanized. This was necessitated by the need by Africans at the dawn of foreign language-literacy to develop a discursive mode through which to represent

and mediate their location both inside and outside colonial culture (Gikandi 383). It is difficult to imagine that the early African intellectuals who studied in such exclusive schools as the William Ponty or Edouard Renart and from whence came the early African writers did not experience a rewriting of their *homo religiosus* when “colonial schools used textbooks sent from France that focused on French history, culture, and society and ignored Africa’s cultural heritage” (Mortimer 530, 531). The “imported education” bearing centuries of antireligious philosophical underpinnings coupled with its prospect of modernity and prestige effectively disconnected the African and set the stage for the minimization of the religious in African discourse.

The physical displacement of the African intellectual from his milieu or continent for Europe or European schools to master the culture of the colonizer mirrors the surrender of *African* religiosity to its European homologue complete with its own structures, language and expression. Though these intellectuals were to appropriate the language of the colonizer to challenge colonialism, it was to be from a new basis underpinned by a religio-philosophical foundation whose articulation was at variance with that of the African and thus beyond his control. The contact with the colonial element was by no means anodyne as it gave the African intellectuals the tools with which to pick apart not only colonial (and therefore traumatic) religion but also their own religiosity while at the same time redefining their African identity. Thus, we see the emergence of different layers or textures of religiosity which render trauma representation complex.

Conclusion

Mamdani (226) records that “the church was a direct participant in the genocide. Rather than a passive mirror reflecting tensions, the church was more of an epi-center (sic) radiating tensions”. The paucity of *homo religiosus* in the trauma literature on Rwanda reflects the complexity of the issues undergirding the genocide. It suggests a reversal of the socio-historical stereotype that frames Africans as highly religious, and whose opposition to religion is a result of enlightenment through education. *homo religiosus* exposes the problematic destabilization of the intrinsic fibre of identity which paralyses the individual’s responsiveness to realities surrounding him and convolutes his vision of his world. Colonialism as depicted in the anticolonial literature of Mongo Beti was founded on a systematic strategy to erode any notion of value in African identity. Hence, the African found himself questioning or despising his heritage, including his *religiosity*, which too was re-written according to a new religious discourse, similar in respect of an allegiance to a supernatural Being, but different in its estimation of African identity and value. The project “Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire” was embarked on by nine African authors seeking to comprehend and honour the memory of the genocide faced by fellow Africans. The fact that they were African suggests they were well acquainted with the fundamental

elements that make up the African psyche and identity and this paper contends that this includes *homo religiosus* which though present has been latently interwoven in daily life from the beginning of its recognition and its contribution in addressing the traumatogenic experiences on the continent remains salient.

Note

1. Although I use the term "African" in a somewhat generalising manner, I am cognisant that the African continent is not homogenous. I use the term rather to highlight the shared experiences, cultures and beliefs that at times override the superficial differences that may exist between descendants of the African continent.

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Gibson Ncube

Gibson Ncube is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages at Stellenbosch University.

His interests are in gender/queer studies, cultural studies in Africa.

Email: ncubegibson@yahoo.fr

Of dirt, disinfection and purgation: Discursive construction of state violence in selected contemporary Zimbabwean literature

Of dirt, disinfection and purgation: Discursive construction of state violence in selected contemporary Zimbabwean literature

This paper examines post-independent Zimbabwean literary narratives which engage with how the ruling ZANU-PF government frames dissenting voices as constituting dirt, filth and undesirability. Making use of Achille Mbembe's postulations on the "vulgarity of power" and Kenneth W. Harrow's readings of the politics of dirt, the central thesis of this paper is that the troping of dirt and state sponsored violence are closely related to the themes of memory and belonging. Literary works by writers such as Christopher Mlazi, NoViolet Bulawayo and John Eppel become self-effacing speech acts that are involved in reimagining and revising our understanding of power dynamics and how this affects human and social experiences. **Keywords:** discursive construction, dissenting voices, filth and disease, Gukurahundi massacres, state violence, Operation Murambatsvina, politics of dirt, power, memory and belonging, nationalism, Zimbabwean literature.

Dirt, filth and disease are tropes that figure prominently in Zimbabwean politics and political discourses. These tropes have been used by the ruling party and government to frame dissenting voices and all other forms of being that are perceived as deviating from the normative codes of the so-called Zimbabwean national identity. The hyper ethnocentric nationalist constructions of cleanliness and dirtiness, of purity and impurity have certainly drawn on the callous colonial patterns of the Rhodesian regime which used segregation to separate the "clean" whiteness from the rogue and not so clean blackness.

I will argue in this paper that the moralisation and politicisation of dirt has in Zimbabwe been demonstrative of diverse and multi-layered governmental misgivings and anxieties that it considered a challenge to its rule, power and control. Ashleigh Harris (44) rightly explains that the moralising discourses of dirt should be "read as a palimpsest, superimposed onto colonial and Afrocentric discourses of cleanliness and dirt, and as such, neither unexpected nor new, but rather, eerily predictable in their entanglement with the violent and exclusionary discourses of nationalist politics in Zimbabwe." Harris implies in this instance that post-independent state violence is predicated upon the violence of colonial Rhodesian state perpetrated acts

of violence. The post-independent government thus simply replicates, if not perfects, the “physics” and “anatomy” of violence that had been used by the colonial Rhodesian government. Such violence is thus not new in anyway. What is new or different is the perpetrator and, in some instances, the victim of acts of state sponsored violence.

There are numerous examples of the deployment of the trope of dirt in post-independent Zimbabwe. For instance, two years after the attainment of independence, the notion of filth was used to designate dissenting voices in the regions of Matabeleland and the Midlands in what has come to be known as the Gukurahundi massacres. In the early 2000s, the same trope was used to refer to white commercial farmers who according to government discourses had benefitted from a dirty history. In 2005, Didymus Mutasa, the then Minister for State Security and Land Reform, was blatant in his comparison of white farmers to filth:

Operation Murambatsvina should also be applied to farms that are still in the hands of the whites. White farmers are dirty and should be cleaned out. The government will not hesitate to take their farms to resettle the black people who failed to get land during the distribution exercise. They (whites) are similar to the filth that was in the streets before Operation Murambatsvina (Radio Africa).

In addition to the violent removal of white farmers from their farms at the beginning of the 2000s, Mutasa calls for a further “cleaning” by ensuring that all remaining whites are dispossessed of their farms. This narrative and “inflammatory anti-white racist rhetoric” (Coltart 269) in which white commercial farmers were framed as dirty and therefore undesirable is also aptly captured by the protagonist in Chenjerai Hove’s novel *Bones*. The protagonist points out:

There is disease on the land. Disease spreads on the land like a mat, with everybody seeing it and not wanting to shout it to the whole village. Disease spreads with the coming of those who have walked the land without knees. The people without knees have knelt and broken their legs on our land, so they will not leave to go to the land of their fathers. (Hove 54)

The whites, “people without knees”, are conceived as being diseased and carrying with them an infection that affects not just the moral and cultural fabric of the nation but more importantly the very land itself. Karin Alexander (194) explains that such a discourse “has subjected the white minority to a rhetoric that frames them as colonialist enemies not only of the state but also of the black majority”. This same metaphor and trope of disease is used to refer to opposition parties. The opposition Movement for Democratic Change, for example, was said to be a “dirty condom—smelly, sticky, damp, diseased and distasteful” (Kubatana Blogs). The condom is used usually to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. In this instance, the opposition party is said to be supposedly used by the

West. The ensuing adjectives are all negative and designate the opposition party as diseased and unclean.

Even the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community has not been spared from the inscription of dirt and filth on their bodies. Likened to dogs and pigs, LGBT individuals are considered “the festering finger, endangering the body of the nation” (Shoko 634) and therefore deserve to be cut off from the robust, healthy body of the nation. In August 2016, in the aftermath of citizen protests against the ZANU-PF government, the tropes of dirt and filth were evoked yet again. The Road Verges Maintenance, a statutory corporation which was promulgated as a means of ensuring that roads and verges, especially in the capital city of Harare, are kept in clean and tidy manner. Those found guilty of contravening this statutory instrument were liable to a fine or a prison sentence of three months or both fine and imprisonment. Although this is not bad in itself, the promulgation of this law seems to be in reaction to dissenting voices that have lamented the continued running down of the country. This is a similar reaction, as I have shown above, to all forms of other and dissenting voices that challenge the government.

Moreover, in the last five years, infighting within the ruling party has seen the same trope of dirt and disease constantly reiterated at public functions with the aim of inscribing dissidence of certain party functions. A faction led by then Vice-President Joyce Mujuru was called *zvipfukuto* which is the Shona word for weevils. A weevil is a small beetle whose larvae develop inside stems and seeds of different plants. Such a name implies that this faction of the ruling party is a destructive force which is attacking the party from within, the same way that weevils attack crops from within seeds and plants. The opposing faction, led by Emmerson Mnangagwa, was called “Gamatox” which is a pesticide. This faction thus proposes itself as a pesticide that attempts to rid the party of destructive pests. Oliver Nyambi in his analysis of naming of political factions explains that:

The nicknames are derived from a pest and pesticide metaphor used by Didymus Mutasa in one of his widely circulated verbal affront on the Mnangagwa faction when, disturbed by the relentless vilification of the Mujuru faction which often bordered on treason, Mutasa fought back by depicting the Mnangagwa faction as a group of infiltrators who wanted to destroy the party from within. He likened the Mnangagwa faction to weevils that deserved to be treated with Gamatox. (62)

Gibson Ncube and Bridget Chinouriri (9) also point out that “what is interesting with the two nicknames of the factions is the metaphor of pest and pesticide. The metaphor of the pesticide alludes to the state of decay that is found within that faction of the ruling party”. They conclude in this line of thought that “nicknaming the other faction as a pesticide frames that faction as a salvatory force that sought to ensure that the party was not infiltrated by putrefying agents” (Ncube and Chinouriri 9).

Such naming of political factions within ZANU-PF simply replicates the tropes of dirt and disease which this party has consistently deployed in its labelling of opposing voices and bodies.

In his seminal work *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe analyses the manner in which power is deployed. He contends that there is imperative need “to go beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination, such as resistance vs. passivity, autonomy vs. subjection, state vs. civil society, hegemony vs. counter-hegemony, totalisation vs. detotalisation” (Mbembe 103). Through an analysis of Cameroon, he proposed that the exercise of power in the postcolony is often “grotesque and obscene” (Mbembe 103). He further asserts that in the postcolony, “the state considered itself simultaneously as indistinguishable from society and the upholder of the law and the keeper of the truth. The state was embodied in a single person, the president. He alone controlled the law, and he could, on his own, grant or abolish liberties—since these are, after all, malleable” (Mbembe 105). Mbembe’s assertions are particularly relevant in the case of post-independent Zimbabwe where Robert Mugabe, through the ruling party and government, has had the prerogative of deciding what forms of being are deemed correct and therefore lawful.

As I have previously discussed, the government of Zimbabwe has since the attainment of independence made use of the tropes of dirt, filth and disease to refer to dissenting and other/othered voices. Such troping of dirt and disease in national discourse is intimately related to the exercise of state power and domination. Mbembe (110) explains on the exercise of power that: “To exercise authority is, above all, to tire out the bodies of those under it, to disempower them not so much to increase their productivity as to ensure their maximum docility.” By labelling dissenting voices and bodies as unclean and diseased, the post-independent Zimbabwean government has sought at once to keep under strict surveillance the nation whilst entrenching its own matrices of power and domination. The logic of dirt, as argued by Alicia Decker (491) in her analysis of Uganda, “provided the state with a more ‘legitimate’ means of eliminating political dissent”. In the case of Zimbabwe, the use of the trope of dirt has been perpetually redeployed to deal with and squash diverse forms of dissidence.

In her conceptualisation of dirt and purity, Mary Douglas (5) explains that in cultures and societies which are “richly organised by ideas of contagion and purification, the individual is in the grip of iron-hard categories of thought which are heavily safeguarded by rules of avoidance and punishments”. Douglas (4) earlier points out that “ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience”. In my analysis of the Zimbabwean situation after independence, I contend that “cleaning”, “cleansing” and “sanitising” proposed by the government did not necessarily bring order, but rather imposed a certain form

of order and logic that it views as appropriate. These “cleaning” exercises, often violent and fatal, evidently attempt to punish those considered dirty and unclean or responsible for causing dirt.

Such a state of affairs needs to be understood within the wider context of Zimbabwean nationalism. In his reading of modern nations and nationalism, Homi Bhabha (212) posits that there is need to “begin by questioning that progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion—the many as one” which reduces differences into “unitary collective experiences”. Citizens of a nation, regardless of race, gender, class or ethnicity, are merged through the homogenising discourse that creates a unitary “patriotic body politic” (Bhabha 212). Such a totalising and homogenising discourse inevitably downplays minority or dissenting discourses, leading to what Julia Kristeva (34) terms the “demassification of the problematic of difference”. Applying such reading of the concept of nation to Zimbabwe, Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger contend that the ruling ZANU-PF government since independence sought to create a unitary nation whose roots were grounded on Shona historicity and culture. They cite Robert Mugabe who states that Zimbabwe is a “natural Shona nation” given that:

The distinguishing features of our nation, cultural homogeneity, our biological and genetic identity, our social system, our geography, our history which together characterise our national identity, also combined in producing out of our people a national, vigorous and positive spirit which manifests itself in the consistently singular direction of its own preservation. (Mugabe cited in Bhebe and Ranger xxvi)

Such thinking of a singular homogenous nation, as accentuated above by the repeated use of the possessive adjective “our”, frames any form of straying from the collective as an attack on the stability, coherence and cohesion of the nation. It thus become imperative to clean out or punish destabilising elements or individuals.

The question of punishment fits neatly into Michel Foucault’s postulations in his pioneering text *Punish and Discipline* in which he discusses “ways of organising the power to punish” (130). Through processes he refers to as “panopticism”, Foucault (197) problematizes that human societies have sought to observe everyday actions of inhabitants. He describes such societies as being: “[E]nclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division”. This is relevant in considering how so-called dirty or diseased bodies are put under surveillance by the government of Zimbabwe. When dissenting voices and dirty/diseased bodies are identified, discipline and “methods of control” (Foucault 211) become necessary. Foucault (215) further maintains in this regard that: “‘Discipline’ may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set

of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology."

Through such a "physics" and "anatomy" of power, the ruling ZANU-PF has in Zimbabwe managed to constantly and effectively curtailed dissenting voices and this has operated in tandem with a "systematic silencing of alternative views" (Siziba and Ncube 518).

Instead of offering an exhaustive analysis of the deployment of the trope of dirt in state sponsored violence, I propose in this paper to examine two historical moments in which this trope has been used. I will analyse in the first instance the Gukurahundi massacres that took place in the Matabeleland and Midlands of Zimbabwe between 1982 and 1987. Secondly, I will look at "Operation Murambatsvina" which was an urban cleansing exercise which took place in the year 2005. The naming, grammar and vocabulary used in reference to these two historical moments is itself fascinating. Gukurahundi is the Shona term for the early summer rains that remove chuff and dirt from the fields whilst Murambatsvina can be loosely translated as "say no to filth/remove filth".

Through an exploration of literary narratives that capture various facets of the violently implemented Gukurahundi and Murambatsvina, I contend that literary works articulate the trope of dirt in an attempt to make sense, unpack and think through what it means to be Zimbabwean in the post-independent aftermath. As proposed by Michael Holquist (68), "literary texts, like other kinds of utterances depend not only on the activity of the author, but also on the place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and consumed". Lara (7–8) also concurs that literary narratives have the potential "to disclose previously unseen marginalisation, exclusion and prejudice [...] and that they are society's ways of coping with the past, the present, and a possible, utopian future". In this line of reasoning, literary narratives cannot be separated from the socio-historical context in which they are produced and ultimately received and "consumed". As argued by Ncube (477), literary narratives "offer a privileged space that is more than just a metalinguistic and autonomous edifice—more importantly, these texts offer a means through which individual, societal and cultural self-assessment and comprehension can be affected in the domain of quotidian life". What this means is that literary works play a pivotal role in constructing mediating spaces through which marginalised voices, discourses and histories are not only made visible but also rethought, revisioned and renegotiated.

I will begin by analysing the trope of dirt and the inherent state violence vis à vis the literary representation of Gukurahundi. Gukurahundi was initially used to refer to the protean armed force that was unleashed in areas of Matabeleland and Midlands provinces to quell dissent and unrest. The term is however now used to

refer to the period between 1982 and 1987. An estimated 20 000 civilians lost their lives during this period. David Coltart explains in *The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe*, the callous brutality of state violence against those who were considered dissidents:

From late January to mid-March 1983, the Fifth Brigade murdered and tortured thousands of civilians, burnt hundreds of villages, and raped and pillaged entire communities. There were horrific public executions, people were lined up and shot in cold blood; on many occasions soldiers would arrive at villages with lists of people affiliated to ZAPU and those found would be assassinated in front of their families. On other occasions, entire families were herded into grass-roofed huts, which were then set alight. Pregnant women were bayoneted, killing the babies in their wombs. Young Ndebele men between the ages of 16 and 40 were particularly vulnerable and were frequently targeted and shot in cold blood. (139)

Not only does Coltart highlight above the gruesome and ruthless of the violence of the government backed army but more importantly the tribal and ethnic basis upon which the massacres were established and grounded.

Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002), Christopher Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012), Crispin Ndlovu's *Gweya* (2013), James Kilgore's *We are all Zimbabwean Now* (2011) and the poetry of John Eppel in the anthology *Together: Stories and Poems* (2011) are some literary works that offer graphic representations of this period which Mugabe defines as "a moment of madness" (Ellis 40). However, for the purpose of this paper, I will concentrate on the literary works by Mlalazi and Eppel. Coltart (143) goes on to highlight in this regard that: "Mugabe was cunning enough to deny that atrocities had taken place or to couch his language sufficiently ambiguously to avoid a nexus being made between his statements and the actions that followed." Wilfred Mhanda (181) also highlights in his autobiography *Dzino: Memories of a Freedom Fighter*, that Mugabe, a leader of government since independence, has through his discourses and actions, "been intolerant of divergent views and will brook no opposition. He has always been single-minded in his pursuit of power and will, in that regard, deal decisively with any obstacle, real or perceived". The above-mentioned novels offer a ghastly representation of how dissenting voices in the predominantly Ndebele provinces of Matabeleland and Midlands were dealt with during the Gukurahundi massacres.

In the novel *Running with Mother* by Christopher Mlalazi, a girl called Rudo witnesses her family, home and village being destroyed. Rudo's father is Ndebele and her mother is Shona. When the soldiers arrive at Rudo's village, they capture and kill all Ndebeles. Rudo's mother explains to her what she witnesses when the soldiers arrive at their family homestead: "The soldier locked both your two uncles and their families in their homes and then burned down all the huts before the bus came. [...]"

And they came to our house but when they heard me speak in Shona they told me to run away” (Mlalazi 17). Rudo and her mother survive because they speak Shona and because they have Shona names. As an allegory, Rudo’s family represents the post-independent state. The father represents the Ndebele who are deemed dissident, thus dirty and needed to be eliminated through Gukurahundi, the rains that cleanse the fields of the chuff that prevents proper growth. The concept of rain certainly fits into ZANU-PF nationalism which in its functioning sought, and continues to seek, to cleanse and remove dirt from the metaphoric body of the nation. Gibson Ncube and Gugulethu Siziba offer an apt reading of this allegory of the family:

The absence and demise of the Ndebele father is particularly telling of the manner in which Gukurahundi sought to remove Ndebeles from authority. The role of the father figure in *Running with Mother* is taken over by the Shona mother who has to fend for and protect Rudo. The exclusion and demise of the father parallels the exclusion and demise of the Ndebeles in general in post-independent Zimbabwe (Ncube and Siziba 7).

The violent exclusion and elimination of the Ndebele father becomes an extended metaphor of how state violence sought to ensure that one ethnic grouping was viewed as dissident and thus undesirable. Rudo’s village is ironically named Saphela. This name can be loosely translated from Ndebele as “we are annihilated”. The soldiers seem to be out to completely annihilate all Ndebeles from this village. Such annihilation certainly fits in with the need to rid the post-independent state of all dirty and undesirable elements. Rudo, in her infantile reasoning believes that the massacring of the Ndebeles in her village was an attempt to enslave them: “Were those soldiers doing all those horrifying things - cutting of people’s hands, burning them in their homes, stripping adults naked, beating them and herding them like cattle into a pen - were they trying to turn the Ndebele people into slaves of the Shona?” (Mlalazi 117).

Rudo is unable to see that what was happening as more than just an attempt to enslave the Ndebele. In essence, Gukurahundi was a form of ethnic cleansing whose aim was to subdue any form of dissidence emanating from the Matabeleland and Midlands regions. It is worth pointing out that an exercise that sought to crush dissenting voices, through the cleansing of the Matabeleland and Midlands landscape, ended up being an ethnic cleansing in which Ndebeles were either tortured, maimed or killed.

John Eppel’s poetry equally depicts the trauma and the complexities of state violence that plays out during Gukurahundi. In the collection of poems and short-stories published together with the late Julius Chingono, Eppel portrays the violence of Gukurahundi through the presentation of vivid fragments in which the soldiers are perpetrating untold acts of sadistic brutality. In the poem “Songbird” the persona states:

She was harbouring a dissident in her womb;
they unseamed her with a bayonet;

it dangled from her umbilicus
like a jolly-jumper.

And the doves sang:

gukura

hundi,

gukura

hundi.

Little children of “traitors”,
transformed by heavy blows—
they use branches, batons, iron bars—
to pumpkins about to spill their seeds.

And the hornbills cry:

vana

we nyoka

inyoka

wo futi (118)

In the first stanza of the poem, Eppel captures the manner in which a pregnant woman has her womb ripped open as it was claimed she was carrying a traitor. The choice of the verb “unseam” is telling at once of the callousness of the act as well as the degree of brutality considering that this unseaming was being done by way of a bayonet. What is interesting in here is the manner in which the trope of dirt is amplified by the introduction of the metaphor of the *nyoka* or snake. This metaphor undoubtedly serves to vilify the dissenting voices and thus justify state violence. This allusion to the snake evokes Mugabe’s words at the onset of the massacres: “The only way to deal effectively with a snake, is to strike and destroy its head” (Chikhuwa 137). The snake usually symbolises betrayal. This biblical allusion casts the snake as cause of destruction and discord. By framing dissenting voices as snakes, this government discourse bestows upon itself a redemptive mission of ridding the nation of undesirable elements. Moreover, the crushing of the head of the snake justifies the state violence as pivotal to ridding the nation of treacherous and harmful and untoward elements. What is further remarkable about this poem is how Eppel ends each stanza with words in Shona. The use of the language of the perpetrator of violence serves to accentuate brutal acts being described in the poem. The poem however attributes the words in Shona to birds, doves and a hornbill. The dove often symbolises peace and love whilst the hornbill itself a bird on the brink of extinction. Attributing violent words to a bird associated with peace and love and another almost extinct bird serves to amplify the brutality that is expressed in the preceding lines.

This same unassuming and shocking candidness is evident in the depiction of Operation Murambatsvina. In elections held in 2000 and 2002, Mugabe and his party experienced the first formidable attack to his rule since Zimbabwe attained independence. Almost all urban centres voted for the opposition MDC party. As the ruling government had hitherto reacted to dissenting voices, the urban populace needed to be symbolically and literally cleansed for having erred in voting for the opposition party. Describing how Operation Murambatsvina began in Bulawayo with the attack of city vendors, Coltart (423) explains that: “armed police had arrived without warning, systematically ‘cleansing’ the area, expelling all the vendors and, at the same time, confiscating their wares”. Valerie Tagwira’s *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) offers a fascinating depiction of the tumultuous events surrounding Operation Murambatsvina. However, for the purpose of this paper, I focus on the depiction of this cleansing of urban centres in NoViolet Bulawayo’s novel *We Need New Names* (2013). This is because of the considerable scholarship that already exists on Tagwira and her representation of Operation Murambatsvina.

Although she does not explicitly state in the novel that she is describing Operation Murambatsvina, NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* aptly captures the tumultuous period when the government razed to the ground buildings and structures that were deemed too dirty to be part of the urban panorama. In the first part of the novel, Bulawayo describes the life of Darling, who grows up in a shanty town amidst a general environment of economic and social difficulties. Bulawayo ironically calls the shanty town Paradise and such naming beckons the reader to perceive of this space as a utopic home in spite of all the horrors and sadness that abound there. Darling describes the shanty town that she calls home in this way: “Paradise is all tin and stretches out in the sun like a wet sheepskin nailed on the ground to dry [...] The shacks themselves are terrible but from up here, they seem much better, almost beautiful even, it’s like I’m looking at a painting.” (Bulawayo 36)

Darling sees beyond the tin and the sheepskin that makes up the shanty town of Paradise. In fact, her description gives Paradise an idyllic sense of home in spite of the harshness and crudeness of quotidian life there. By comparing Paradise to a painting, Darling shows her attachment to her home and how it is not only dear to her but also how she finds it beautiful in spite of its apparent imperfections. However, the government views this place that Darling considers home as an eyesore that needed sanitising. Darling recounts the trauma associated with the destruction of their homes: “Then the lorries come carrying the police...and we run and hide inside the houses, but it’s no use hiding because the bulldozers start bulldozing and bulldozing and we are screaming and screaming” (Bulawayo 67).

When all the demolition and clearing of what is deemed dirty, it is not a clean and sanitised space that remains. In fact, the ruthless operation leaves more trauma and suffering than had been the case before. Darling explains in this respect: “When

the bulldozers finally leave, everything is broken, everything is smashed, everything is wrecked. It is sad faces everywhere, choking dust everywhere, broken walls and bricks everywhere, tears on people's faces everywhere" (Bulawayo 66). The repetition of the words "everything" and "everywhere" attests to how misery and brokenness abound in the aftermath of the operation. In his analysis of this operation and its effects, Harris (40) explains that "reasons for naming the operation "clean up filth" shows "how 'dirt' became moralised in the discourse surrounding Murambatsvina, and how this moralisation came to justify the operation in ZANU-PF view".

I further point out that the naming of this exercise in which people's homes and places of business were destroyed as an "operation" evokes the trope of disease. The medicalisation and pathologising of dirt and filth thus frames state violence against underprivileged bodies as necessary in order to remove the vile, foul and revolting constituent. Like a surgical operation, the clean-up intervention set out to bring about order and cleanliness. The exercise, however, caused more harm than good. As Coltart explains, "the long term consequences could not be fully spelt out then, but it is not unreasonable to speculate that Murambatsvina probably killed more people than the Gukurahundi because of the fatal combination of displacement, HIV/AIDS and poverty" (426). In spite of these abundant effects of the operation, state violence had achieved its objective of quelling dissenting voices that had burst forth in the urban areas after the March 2012 presidential elections which had seen the urban populations voting en masse for the opposition party.

The description of dissenting voices as dirt fits into the exclusionary practices of the Zimbabwean government which has sought to divide and rule. Susan Sontag (180) explains in this regard that the "militarising of language of dirt and disease" "not only provides a persuasive justification for authoritarian rule but implicitly suggests the necessity of state sponsored repression and violence (the equivalent of surgical removal or chemical control of the offending or 'unhealthy' parts of the body politic)" (180).

Douglas (2) expounds that "dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment". She goes on to develop that "ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience" (4). In as much Douglas' assertions are relevant in understanding how the poetics of dirt functions, I find that her claims can certainly not be applied when the offending dirt is a human being or group of human beings. Such a way of reasoning would indeed justify and vindicate cleansing exercises such as Gukurahundi and Operation Murambatsvina.

Literary narratives that broach the troping of dirt and dirtiness are in themselves important counter-hegemonic discourses. As rightly postulated by Pauline Dodgson-

Katiyo, such works “create a space for [...] the otherwise forgotten or absent to be commemorated, documented, narrated and even felt” (17). Literary and artistic works do not only have the potential to disclose state violence but also play an important role in reclaiming censored narratives and histories. Yvonne Vera expounds in this light that, “as a writer, you don’t want to suppress history, you want to be one of the people liberating stories” (cited in Bryce 226). Elsewhere, she points out that “to write is to engage possibilities for triumphant and repeated exits, inversion and recuperations of identity [...] Writing is resistance [...] to write is to banish silence” (Vera 93). As such, writing about the manner in which dissenting voices are framed as dirt becomes itself an act of defiance. This is achieved through giving voice to those voices that deemed deviant and dissenting and are thus muffled by dominant government discourses. Such voicing of muffled voices becomes a counter-discursive and counter-hegemonic process in which state violence is portrayed in its harsh brutality. The literary narratives that I have made reference to in this paper achieve more than just critiquing government sponsored violence and exclusionary practices. The narratives are involved more importantly in being edifices and processes of remembering the past. In this case I use the term remember in the sense of coalescing or bringing together dismembered histories, memories and indeed lives of those the government viewed as dirty and hence requiring silencing and cleansing.

I conclude that literary narratives are important in capturing diverse state violences in post-independent Zimbabwe and I quote Wade Adebaniwi, who clarifies why works of art remain vital in the societies in which we live:

In observing the social process, both past and present, they reflect, and reflect on, extant perspectives in understanding reality by creating new maps of existence through ideas that not only generate, but also transcend existing possibilities and ways of apprehending those possibilities. In contributing to the common store of social, political and moral ideas in society, they also become wellsprings of new ideas and new ways of thinking (407).

For as long as human societies continue to exist, literature will continue to capture its complex and diverse functioning. Violently marginalised, side-lined and muffled histories and discourses are afforded a space in which they cannot only be revisited but can be rethought in a bid to better understand them and to accord them the rightful recognition they deserve.

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Hein Willemse

Hein Willemse is Professor of
Literature in the Department of
Afrikaans, University of Pretoria,
South Africa.
Email: hein.willemse@up.ac.za

The writing of Arthur Fula: Modernity, language, place and religion

The writing of Arthur Fula: Modernity, language, place and religion

Arthur Fula's debut novel *Johannie giet die beeld* (lit: Johannesburg moulds the graven image) was well received in the beginning of 1954 but has in recent years been largely forgotten. The novel was promoted as the first "by a Bantu in Afrikaans", a designation that differentiated him, a third language speaker, from the typical Afrikaans writer who was ordinarily a white, first language speaker. The novel registers, in the tradition of the 'Jim-comes-to Jo'burg' novels, the migration of black characters to the urban areas with the persistent struggle between indigenous traditions and the presence of an unknown, even threatening Western modernity. In his second novel *Met erbarming, O Here* (With Compassion, Oh Lord, 1957) Fula made peace with the permanency of urban black Africans and their aspirations. This essay introduces the emergence of the autodidact Fula's authorship amidst a period of profound change and adaptation in South Africa during the 1950s, tracing his personal history, the circumstances of his writing and choice of language, and the reception of his debut novel. **Keywords:** Afrikaans literature, Arthur Fula, Black Afrikaans writing, 'Jim-comes-to Jo'burg' novels, South African literature

1

On a rainy and chilly Saturday morning, the conservators of the National Afrikaans Literary Museum and Research Centre in Bloemfontein, South Africa inaugurated a bust of the author Arthur Nuthall Fula (Britz). It was a moment of recognition long in the making. For years, the immediate past head of the Museum, tried to track down Fula's relatives to arrange an appropriate occasion to recognize the first black African Afrikaans author (Qoopane). The bilingual event—Afrikaans-English—of 14th May 2016 was his crowning achievement. Among those gathered were Fula's three surviving daughters and son, and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren (Qoopane). They appreciated the gesture even though their knowledge of the Afrikaans language was limited; none of them had read Fula's work in the original (Don Fula). They were not alone. Even among Afrikaans literary scholars his name remains relatively unknown and his literary works are consigned to oblivion.

There was a time, though, in the beginning of 1954, when Fula's story was told in several Afrikaans and English newspapers and magazines, especially in the northern parts of the country. His debut novel *Johannie giet die beeld* (lit: Johannesburg moulds the graven image) had just been published. For the Afrikaans reading public it was

a unique experience. Initially 5000 books were printed, followed by a second print run of 3000 books (Fula, Letter xiv). In the small Afrikaans readers' market this was a much higher than usual print run for the average novel in the 1950s. Fula became an overnight sensation (Staff reporter; NALN biography 2). In the idiom of the time his book was promoted as "a novel by a Bantu in Afrikaans" ("’n roman deur ’n Bantoe in Afrikaans").¹ Indeed, the publisher's announcement gives us a sense of the perceived anthropological uniqueness of the text. It at once proclaims the novel and at the same time differentiates its author from the typical Afrikaans writers who were ordinarily white, first language speakers.

2

The emergence of modernity in South Africa around the turn of the twentieth century can directly be attributed to the industrial and technological change that gold and diamond mining, the Anglo-Boer War, the formation of Union and the expansion of education precipitated. These changes impacted South Africans of all backgrounds, no less black South Africans who migrated to burgeoning cities like Johannesburg in the centre of the country. The key bearer of the modern was the Christian Church in its alliance with colonial capitalism while mission education played an inordinate role in the lives of urban black Africans. Much of these developments are evidenced in the writing of black South Africans where the conflict between the traditional and the modern is often played out: "The story of Christian emergence has its counterpart in acts of remembering; in other words, in narratives about traditional society or traditional society in its earliest encounters with colonial intrusion." (Attwell 67)

Arthur Fula was born in 1908, around the same time as some of the early pioneering Zulu writers such as R. R. R. Dhlomo (1901–71), H. I. E. Dhlomo (1903–56) and Benedict W. Vilakazi (1906–47). They, and several other black African, and indeed white Afrikaans writers of the first decades of the twentieth century recount in noteworthy works the period of economic modernization, and political and social transformation. For instance, the critic Jordan Ngubane viewed H. I. E. Dhlomo's epic *Valley of a Thousand Hills* (1941) as "a symbolic representation of the progress achieved by African people in modernity" (in Masilela, "New African" 336). Among the prominent black intellectuals from the southeast Cape were members of the Jabavu family: John Tengo (1859–1921), D.D.T. (1885–1959) and Noni (1919–2008), all of whom became notable writers or editors in the southeast Cape region and beyond. John Tengo became the editor of *Isigidimi samaXhosa* (The Xhosa Messenger) in 1876 and established *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Black Opinion) in 1884. Noni Jabavu became closely identified with the New Africans or the progressives and wrote *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts* (1960) and *The Ochre People: Scenes from a South African Life* (1963), both autobiographical accounts of contact between indigenous Africanity and Western modernity. Among the previous generation of black African writers

were Sol Plaatje (1876–1932), the author of inter alia *Mhudi* (1930), the first novel in English written by a black writer; S. E. K. Mqhayi (1875–1945) and Thomas Mofolo (1876–1948), the author of *Chaka*, who wrote primarily in their mother tongues, Xhosa and Sotho respectively.

Among the intellectuals and prominent writers was R. V. Selope Thema, the editor of the Johannesburg-based newspaper *The Bantu World*, “a great synthesizer of world historical experiences and visions” who influenced writers who would become prominent during the 1950s (Masilela, “Theorising” 90; “New African” 35). A new generation of urban-based, relatively well-educated black African writers emerged around *Drum* magazine in the 1950s, at about the period when Fula published his Afrikaans novels. Most of these writers such as Todd Matshikiza, Arthur Maimane, Ezekiel (later: Es’kia) Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, Casey Motsisi, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi and Can Themba among others depicted an urban world influenced by social trends informed by contemporary technologies like film, photography, modern theatre and music, the increasing repressive implementation of apartheid and the opposing volatile liberatory politics of urban South Africa. All of these writers were committed to writing in English and their writing narrated life in inner city townships like Sophiatown (in Johannesburg) or Marabastad (in Pretoria) which had become synonymous with the undeniable presence, if not permanency, of black Africans in the city, the singular space of the modern. The literary critic Ntongela Masilela (“New African” 334) attributes Peter Abrahams’ short stories *Dark City* (1942) and his novel *Mine Boy* (1946) “central in persuading *Drum* magazine to switch from celebrating ‘tradition’ in its earliest copies to emphasizing ‘modernity’ thereby capturing the zeitgeist of the 1950s.”

Arthur Fula, somewhat older than the generation of *Drum* writers, registers in his first novel the beginnings of urban migration and his characters’ persistent struggle between indigenous tradition and the looming presence of an unknown, even threatening Western modernity. In his second novel he has made peace with the permanency of urban black Africans and their aspirations to make a decent living in a rapidly industrializing Johannesburg. In this essay I intend presenting the emergence of his little known authorship amidst a period of profound change and adaptation in South Africa.

3

Much of the scant information on Arthur Fula was published and republished in various early commentaries (see Fula, Letter; Herdeck 193; Jahn, et al.132). He was born on 16th May 1908 on the southeast coast of South Africa, in East London and died of a stroke on his 58th birthday in 1966, in Soweto, Johannesburg. In 1910 his parents, Samuel and Alice (née Stuurman) Fula (Don Fula), migrated north to George Goch close to Johannesburg, where twenty four years earlier gold was discovered.

He received his school education at the Siemert Coloured School² and apparently continued to pursue teacher's training at the Eurafrikan Normal College (Lasker vii).³ However, he did not complete his primary school teacher's diploma. From the age of 17 he worked as a clerk, a miner and a labourer on two different gold mines. From his late-twenties until his early forties he worked as a cabinet maker at a local furniture factory.⁴ The factory went out of business and Fula tried to establish his own workshop, but it also failed (Lasker vii). For a period of time he was unemployed.

By 1952, after a spell of teaching, he was employed as an interpreter at the Johannesburg magistrate's court (Lasker vii; Staff reporter). Notwithstanding his lack of any formal qualifications as an interpreter Fula was exceptionally well qualified for the position. He was a multilingual person, a true polyglot. Apart from his mother tongue, Xhosa, he also spoke Zulu, and Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi. He wrote and spoke English and Afrikaans fluently and at the Alliance Française he learnt French (Staff reporter; Trekker; Lasker vii; see also Willemse).

For much of the twentieth century, literacy was particularly low among the broader black population, especially the black African sector of the South African population, whose educational advancement was curtailed by legislative restrictions, limited access and dismal infrastructural provision.⁵ Well-educated literary luminaries such as R. R. R. and H. I. E. Dhlomo or Vilakazi who received high school or university education were outliers. Most black South Africans and that may have included Fula, in the first half of the twentieth century did not have access to or even completed their primary schooling. With the failure of his carpentry venture Fula, during his time of unemployment, saw writing, one skill not reliant on external generosity, as a distinct economic possibility. In a biographical note he writes:

Ja, gedurende daardie vertroebelde periode van my lewe het ek baie dinge geleer. Ek het my getroos deur te redeneer. Ja, hulle het die geld, maar ek besit die pen, en in die pen lê my bestemming. Ek sal win. Weer het ek my verdiep in my letterkundige werk deur nog 'n roman te skryf. (Qtd. in NALN biography 1)

(During those troubled years of my life I have learned many things. I comforted myself. Yes, they have money, but I have the pen, and in the pen lies my destiny. I will overcome. I committed myself to my literary work by writing another novel.)⁶

Some of Fula's early writing includes letters to the press, several poems, and short stories; most of them remain unpublished and may have been lost to posterity. The largely self-educated Fula dates his conscious writing activities to the mid-1940s when he completed two novels in English which he tried to get published in "[...] Engeland, en Amerika. Selfs op die vasteland van Europa, het ek probeer maar alles [was] tevergeefs gewees." (Fula, Letter iv) ([...] England and America. I have even tried on the continent of Europe but all this was in vain). He even approached

international charity organizations without any publication success:

Verenigings, as ook (sic) mense daar in die buiteland wie (sic) voorgee tot (sic) die wêreld, dat hulle neem belang in die voorspoed van die Bantoe, het ek genader om steun, sonder sukses. Hulle het nie geld daarvoor nie, of hulle is te besig, en dus het hulle nie tyd nie. My (sic) is (sic) so teleurgestel gewees, dat ek byna daardie manuskripte aan die brand gesteeek [het]. (Fula, Letter iv–v)

(Societies whose people pretend to the world that they care for the well-being of the Bantu, I have approached, without success. They don't have money for it, or they are too busy, and therefore they do not have time. I was so disappointed that I wanted to burn those manuscripts.)

In spite of this disappointment Fula continued his writing, fired up by his belief that his voice must be heard, even after his death. What prevented him from burning his manuscripts was, on his own account,

[...] wat my vermy (sic) het [om my manuskripte te verbrand], is die gedagte [...] dat al slaag [die manuskripte] nie gedurende my leeftyd nie, dit kan miskien gebure (sic) dat dit 'n boodskap sal wees tot (sic) die [...] nageslagtes, wat die Bantoes gedink het van die beskawing, die oorloë, die vrede, as ook (sic) die oplossings vir die huidige wêreld probleme (sic) betreffende die mensdom in die algemeen. (Fula, Letter v–vi)

([...] the thought that even if [my novels] do not reach their audience during my life time, it may happen that they may be a message to those following after us of what the Bantus thought of civilization, the wars, the peace as well as the solutions for contemporary world problems regarding humanity in general.)

At the beginning of his writing career Fula contemplated writing in Xhosa, as he puts it, "'n werk in 'n Bantoe taal (sic) saam te stel" ("to write a work in a Bantu language"), but he soon realized that the market for such books was limited: "maar toe ek rond kyk op (sic) die leesstof wat my mense lees, het ek ontdek dat hulle belang stel in Engelse werke. Wie sou dan iets lees in die Bantoe tale (sic), het ek [ge-]redeneer." (Fula, Letter vi). ("I looked around at the material my people were reading and I discovered that they were interested in works written in English. Who would want to read something in the Bantu languages, I argued.") In the midst of this dead end, Fula's unemployment and undisclosed "domestic problems" made his life even more difficult.

During his extended period of unemployment Fula whiled away his time at "the Bantu library" (presumably the well-known Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg). This fact in itself is remarkable, since he worked for most of his life as a labourer, a miner and a woodworker—jobs not readily associated with reading as a

leisurely pursuit. It is also illustrative of his quest for self-education. Already at the age of 27 he showed himself to be an avid reader and writer contributing a letter with refined opinions to the editor of *The Bantu World*. It can therefore safely be assumed that he was a fairly regular visitor to the Centre, the only such facility available to black residents in the region.

It is instructive to contrast the novelist Peter Abrahams' experiences at the Bantu Men's Social Centre with that of Fula. Abrahams (1919–2017) was directed to the Centre as a school boy at the age of fifteen and the world of books set him on a path of discovery. He read voraciously, especially books related to the "American Negro." To these writers he owed "a great debt for crystallizing [his] vague yearnings to write and for showing [him] the long dream was attainable [...] [He] realized, quite suddenly, that [he] was rapidly moving out of [his] Coloured world [...]" (197). His "lust for learning," he records in *Tell Freedom*, also meant that he changed his language, a step that for him represented a broadening of his world: "Because everyone at the Social Centre spoke English, it became a habit with me. I thought in English. It took the place of Afrikaans as my first language. My range of words expanded, and with it, the range of my thoughts." (202)

In contrast, it was at the Social Centre that Fula conceived of the idea of writing in Afrikaans. Fula failed to find an English publisher and serendipity led him to Afrikaans writing. His choice for Afrikaans, in reality his third or even fourth language, as his primary literary language, came about incidentally.⁷ During the time of his unemployment he "[lees]vir ontspanning 'n Afrikaanse tydskrif [...] by die Bantoe biblioteek (sic)" ("read an Afrikaans magazine for recreation at the Bantu library") and toyed with the idea of contributing a short story to an Afrikaans magazine.⁸ The choice was not self-evident. Fula says, "Ek het gely om (sic) vrees en vooroordeel (sic) [...] Later het ek [ge-]redeneer dat ons spreek woord (sic) lui: 'Hoe diep 'n rivier is, is gewoonlik getoets deur die wandelstok.'" (Fula, Letter iv). ("I was anxious and prejudiced [...] later I reasoned that our saying goes: 'the depth of the river can only be judged by a walking stick'") Fula tested the waters of Afrikaans publishing and the rest is history: in 1954 and 1957 respectively his Afrikaans novels, *Jôhannie giet die beeld* and *Met erbarming, O Here* were published.⁹

Whereas English, the language of Empire and all things worldly, was perceived as the vehicle of modernity as illustrated in Abrahams' experience of the Social Centre Afrikaans became for Fula a mode of the powerful, a secondary vehicle of the modern. The overt choice against "the Bantu languages" that he became aware of among his potential readers was a choice against tradition. For someone whose primary instinct was the valorization of tradition the choice for Afrikaans was pragmatic rather than one of cultural identification: "If the Afrikaans-speaking people are to learn to know and understand us—we black people—then our writers must write in Afrikaans." Fula saw himself as stepping into a void that,

according to him, other black African writers such as Vilakazi, the Dhlomos, the Jabavus or the *Drum* writers did not recognise: “For years I have been waiting for the ‘big ones’ of my people—the men with titles who are better educated and better situated than myself—to do this. I have waited in vain.” (Staff reporter)

4

Fula’s name is generally not mentioned in summaries of Black South African writing of the 1940s and early 1950s even though his tenor and orientation are similar to those authors associated with the New African movement (see Masilela). Besides the actual novels, and several contemporaneous Afrikaans language reviews of his novels, very little critical appreciation exists in other indigenous South African languages or in English. Fula is a liminal writer, not present in indigenous African literary consciousness and on the fringes of Afrikaans literature. Interestingly, with reference to his presence in Black literature, publications published outside South Africa contain more information about Fula than local ones. Brief commentaries are published in Janheinz Jahn et al. *Who’s Who in African Literature* (1972) and David Herdecke *African Authors. A Companion to Black African Writing* (1973). In fact, shortly after its publication *Jôhannie giet die beeld* was translated into German and Finnish as *Im Goldenen Labyrinth: Erzählung aus Johannesburg* (In the Golden Maze: A Tale from Johannesburg, 1956) and *Kultaa ja kurjuutta* (Gold and Misery, 1960) respectively. Carrol Lasker’s English translation *The Golden Magnet* was only published in 1984 by Three Continents Press.

The Swiss librarian and Africana collector, Peter Sulzer (1917–2009) wrote an informative chapter on Fula in his unpublished manuscript *Südafrika im Spiegel der Afrikaans Literatur* (South Africa as mirrored in Afrikaans literature, 1965) (see “Peter Sulzer”). In this invaluable source the author presents us with the fullest description of Fula as a personality and writer that we have available. Sulzer writes that he and Fula corresponded over a period of eight years, and that the writer often sent him manuscript material, poetry, short stories and drafts of novels. Some of these were published in Sulzer’s collections *Südafrikanische Prosa und Lyrik* (South African Prose and Lyric, 1961) and *Südafrikaner erzählen* (South African Tales, 1963). On a visit to South Africa he even visited Fula at his place of work. He recalls their meeting as follows:

[...] indem mir einer von ihnen den Weg zum Gerichtshof wies, wo die nichteuropäischen Verbrecher abgeurteilt werden, und mich dort nach vielen Irrgängen durch ein Labyrinth von Trappen Etagen and Wandelhallen in dem Zuhörerraum eines Gerichtssaales führte. Hier wurde ein Sotho sprechender Dieb verhört; der Gerichtsdolmetscher, der seine Aussagen und die des Richters ins Englische übertrug, hieß Arthur Fula. Während der Pause begrüßte ich den Autor des “Goldenen Labyrinthe” im gang. Fula war sichtlich überrascht und erfreut, dass ich, unangemeldet, in Südafrika

aufsuchte, nachdem wir bisher nur schriftlich miteinander verkehrt hatten. [...] Er sah abgearbeitet aus, war ziemlich schäbig gekleidet, aber seine Augen schienen voller Leben zu sein.¹⁰ Er reichte mir beim Abschied immer wieder seine grosse, schlaffe Hand. Wie oft mochte Fula schon die Hand eines Weissen in Oeffentlichkeit gedrückt haben. Ich war ihm dankbar dafür, das er mich so freundlich empfing. (Sulzer, *Südafrika* 381–2)

([...] one of the colleagues showed me the way to the court where non-European criminals are sentenced. After straying through a veritable labyrinth of stairs, floors, corridors and foyers I eventually landed up in the courtroom. A Sotho thief was standing trial and the court interpreter, who translated the statements of the accused and the judge into English, was none other than Arthur Fula. During the break I greeted the author of *Johannie giet die beeld* in the corridor. Fula was clearly surprised and delighted that I had come to South Africa unannounced, as we only had written communication in the past. [...] He looked overworked and his clothes were rather shabby, but his eyes appeared to be full of life. He offered me his large and limp hand in farewell. How often might Fula have shaken the hand of a white man in public? I was thankful that he received me in such a friendly manner.)

What makes Sulzer's unpublished chapter particularly valuable is his firsthand report on Fula's unpublished manuscripts, his novel, *Dogter van die Zoeloe* (The daughter of the Zulu), an autobiographical text, *Die lotgevalle van 'n naturelle-skrywer* (The trials and tribulations of a native writer), and a Xhosa text *Lahliwe* (Thrown away) and the short stories "Matsiliso van Phomolong" (Matsiliso of Phomolong) and "Ulindipisi" (Runderpest), as well as several poems. None of the original Afrikaans texts survived and Sulzer's quotations and summaries give us a mere glimpse into them.

5

For South Africans, the first five decades of the twentieth century was a time of tremendous change, only equaled by their most recent past. Locally and internationally fundamental changes were under way. Thousands of people migrated to the goldfields of Johannesburg which held out the promise of social advancement; rural people from all backgrounds sought their fortune in the city. Many, in the process, fell by the wayside, displaced from the stability of old traditions, tribal rituals or established social connections. The formation of Union and the exclusion of nonwhite people from the governance of the country dominated the political landscape. The powerful emergence of Afrikaner nationalism, especially since the 1930s and the white election of 1948 which the Afrikaner nationalists won, and subsequent legislation placed the country on the road to increased racial conflict. Opposition politics, particularly among the broader black community, converted itself into active resistance, away from the placatory politics of delegation and quiet diplomacy. For people like

Fula who did not express himself overtly on contemporary politics, these were years of exclusion or at the very least of an uneasy in-between-ness.

Fula's best known work *Jôhannie giet die beeld* is set against these years of transformation and adaptation. The title refers to Isaiah 40: 19 in the 1933 Afrikaans Bible translation. The King James version reads: "The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains". In her translation Carrol Lasker draws for the title, i.e. *The Golden Magnet*, on the image of the big city as an attraction, foregoing, like Fula's Finnish and German translators, the direct reference to the original Biblical verse. The central theme of the novel refers to the experiences of migrants to the city, looking for work and life opportunities. Fula (Letter ii-iii) explains the theme of his first novel as follows:

'n Xhosa spreekwoord lui: "Iemand wie (sic) reeds in die weg gewandel het, ken daardie pad," d.w.s. neem raad van iemand met ondervinding. As ook (sic) lui 'n ander spreek-woord: "Die persoon wie (sic) weier om raad te neem [,] hoor gewoonlik deur die warm wind", d.w.s. [h]y wie (sic) nie wil geraai (sic) word nie, is verplig om te luister wanneer onheil hom tref. So seggend bedoel ek dat ek darem iets weet van die weë as ook die valle wat bestaan in ons groot goud stad (sic) van JOHANNESBURG. Toe ek die werk saamgestel het, het ek beoog om my rasgenote, as ook andere [te] probeer maan omtrent wat hulle te gemoet (sic) sal kom in die goud stad.

(A Xhosa saying goes that someone who walked the road knows the way, i.e. take advice from someone with experience. Another saying goes that he who does not accept advice will usually hear through the hot winds, i.e. he who does not accept advice will be obliged to listen when misfortune befalls him. With that I'm saying that I know something about the ways and troubles of our existence in our big city of gold, Johannesburg. When I put this work together I aimed to tell my people, as well as others about what lies ahead for them in the big city.)

The big city novel is not unknown in the South African literature. Previously, writers such as R. R. R. Dhlomo (*An African Tragedy*, 1928), John J. B. Khafula (*This Thing got to Stop*, 1946), S. V. Petersen (*As die son ondergaan* [When the sun sets], 1945), and Peter Abrahams (*Mine Boy*, 1946) wrote about similar themes. The best known of these "Jim-comes-to-Jo'burg" novels are obviously *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) by Alan Paton and *Swart Pelgrim* (1952; *Dark Pilgrim*, 1959) by F. A. Venter. The novels, and especially the latter two, developed a basic pattern, namely that of the rural male who comes to the city and gets confronted by its extremes, and he is faced with a simple choice: moral decay, social deviance and physical destruction or an escape from it as an act of self-preservation.

Jôhannie giet die beeld tells of two young friends, Maringo and Karlos, who arrive from Mozambique in Johannesburg, looking for work. They start out as miners and

shortly after their arrival meet up with characters representing different sectors of the city: the religious, moderates, hedonists, and criminals who are involved in all sorts of underworld activities. Karlos makes bad choices and eventually lands up in prison, causing grief to his mother. Maringo who himself also makes an initial mis-step redeems himself, becomes studious, turns to the ministry as an evangelist, and returns to his rural world to lead an exemplary life, with the future prospective of returning to the golden city to do mission work.

Fula propagated the idea of return to the land for some time before the publication of his first novel. As early as 1936, he advanced the view in *The Bantu World* that the “religion which we have practised today is foreign. It is not that of our ancestors and that is why we suffer”. Fula’s solution was a return to the land so that if “we set that right we will be a people, yes, a nation. The best course for our people is to go right back to the very old men of different tribes and ask them concerning the tribal rituals of olden days.” (Fula, “Ancestral Worship” 16) In an interview published eighteen years later in the newspaper *The Star* he maintains this view: “My people must get back to the country. There is only tragedy for them here in the city.” (Staff reporter) In the novel, Fula casts the same sentiment in lyrically terms: “Once again [Maringo] had had to adjust to a [changed] life [...]. But the trees, the animals, the colorful freshness of this wide world had remained the same and finally he could breathe easily, after the city’s suffocating crush. Again he had wandered on the land, beside the water and past the cattle pens.” (Fula, *Golden* 115–6)

Yet, given that the main character in *Jôhannie giet die beeld* harbours the future prospect of returning to the golden city to do mission work renders Fula’s proposed solution less absolute. Already in this character’s return to the old world of tradition and the soil combined with the modernity of Christianity lurks the future syncretism of his second novel *Met erbarming, o Here*. Further, Fula’s position in his debut novel has evolved from his earlier position published in *The Bantu World*, a newspaper edited by R. V. Selope Thema. Thema, in the words of Masilela “never wavered [...] [to] call for the destruction of African traditions, which he passionately despised since he associated them with ‘backwardness’, ‘heathenism’ and all sorts of ‘foolishness’”. Fula, implicitly, did not accept Thema’s principled position, neither as a personal point of view nor as a resolution for the key problematic of his novel. The view advanced in *Jôhannie giet die beeld* denotes a midway. It is his attempt at resolving the unbearable contradiction that Thema’s position represents.

Throughout his life Fula lived with the tension between modernity and the indigenous traditions of tribal rituals and belief in ancestral worship, a belief brought to a head in his second novel where an intelligent young woman character Adriana, also known as Naledi, represents his syncretic solution. On the death of her father the main character is left destitute and her childhood dream of becoming a medical doctor is thwarted. Adriana is forced to leave school and goes into domestic service

as a way out of her difficult situation. A well-loved nurse and a sympathetic white woman come to her rescue and through their support and with sheer personal determination she completes her secondary schooling, trains as a nurse and eventually becomes a medical doctor, much loved in her community. Having completed studies in Western medicine she seeks out a *sangoma*, a healer, to guide her into the mysteries of traditional medicine. She now prefers her traditional name, Naledi, meaning “Star” to her Western name, Adriana. As a well-known figure her views are often sought and on occasion she propagates greater co-operation between black and white people. The novel ends with Naledi’s wish for a child of her own with her lawyer husband.

This somewhat meandering novel is wholly situated in the big city; Fula had overcome his initial view expressed in *Johannie giet die beeld* of the city as a degenerate place where black migrants cannot survive unscathed. He now obviously accepts the permanency of black people in the city, and that good people could live in the city. Adriana/Naledi, the name is not incidental, becomes the bearer of one of Fula’s abiding interests: the co-existence of traditional practices along with Christianity.

In his prose works the theme is often revisited. In his short stories “Vader Kalashe” (Father Kalashe) and “Matsiliso van Phomolong” (Matsiliso of Phomolong) the debate between indigenous tribal rituals and Christianity is played out, just as in the novel *Dogter van die Zoeloe* (Daughter of Zulu). According to Sulzer (382–3) the text tells the story of Sibusisiwe, the daughter of a *sangoma*, who falls in love with Velile. The relationship reveals the struggle between modernity and traditionalism and falls apart under the strain of family members from both sides, from within their defined positions as Christians and traditionalists. Velile eventually marries a literate woman, while Sibusisiwe converts to Christianity and marries a medical doctor, who after the completion of his studies goes on study to traditional medicine, a move that agrees with *Met erbarming, O Here* where Adriana/Naledi also explores the co-existence of these two knowledge systems. It seems that Fula, in later life, pivots towards syncretism, a mixture between old and new, where indigenous traditions are adapted to a modernizing environment. This is not a moment of sheer assimilation with a ruling political and social order but rather an attempt at keeping alive a positive, essential African identity amidst fundamental changes in the surrounding political and economic environment. Today, we recognize this moment as one of liminality: the old world is disappearing, the new one has arrived and those living through it find themselves at odds.

For Peter Sulzer (*Südafrika* 386) Fula’s poems stand at a higher level than his prose works such as “Father Kalashe” or “Matsiliso of Phomolong”. However, little, if any, of his poetry is available in Afrikaans. Truth be told, none of the original versions of Fula’s poetry in Afrikaans exist or are accessible. In some of the poems that are available through Sulzer’s translations, themes, similar to his novels and short stories are revealed, i.e. the tension between the rural areas and the city, evil and good, and

romantic pastoral imagining. The loss of Fula's original work, not only the poems, but also his other work, is a severe loss, since no records apparently exist. In a letter to the Afrikaans poet Barend Toerien the librarian Sulzer (Letter) writes that he, after receipt of the material, returned it, after he made copies of it, and at a later date he "could not find his copies."

6

We do not know how the black readers' community reacted to Fula's work; besides several press statements there is no evidence of critical commentary. In his letter to a member of a reading club Fula wrote that his acquaintances tried to dissuade him from writing in Afrikaans, but he said his ears were "doof op daardie tyd teen (sic) sulke praatjies gewees" ("deaf to such talk"). After the appearance of his debut some, in his own words, congratulated him with the words: "Man jy het goed gedoen. Veels geluk". ("Man, you've done well. Congratulations".) Others insulted him, and even threatened him with violence, because he exposed the "die swakheid van ons mense" ("the ills of our people."). He could not escape the snide remarks of those who were critical of his role as an Afrikaans writer:

"[D]aar loop die man wat die kultuur van sy eie mense verag het en daardie van andere nasies op bou(sic) deur daartoe by te dra. Hy is 'n NASIONALIS. Hy behoort (sic) tot die BOERE. Fula is 'n NASIONALIS."

("There goes the man who despises his own people and shore up other nations by contributing to them. He is a NATIONALIST. He belongs to the BOERS. Fula is a NATIONALIST.")

There were those who praised him as the man upon whom they have "waited", "whose pen writes so well in the Afrikaans language" (see also Staff reporter). Then there were those who encouraged him not only to praise the rural areas but also to explore the "advantages" of the city. Some wanted to see Fula as a protest writer "om die Afrikaans sprekende (sic) mense in kennis te stel in hulle eie taal van ons griewe" met die hoop dat sou hulle dit in hul moedertaal hoor, hulle "sou luister en dan die jukke wat swaar op ons skouers druk [...] onthef") (Fula, Letter vii-ix; see also Staff reporter); "to give notice to the Afrikaans speaking people in their own language about our grievances" with the hope that should they hear about these in their mother tongue "they will listen and remove the yokes from our backs."

Fula, in his very being, could not be a protest writer. At a time of fundamental political and social change in the 1950s, Fula who was obviously conservative in his social beliefs, was caught in the middle. Here was a culturally sensitive man who would not commit himself expressly one way or the other, at least not publicly, to an overt political position. Yet, in a remarkable passage in *Jôhannie giet die beeld* he allows

one of his morally positive characters to formulate views that gently remind us of the apartheid injustices of the time:

“Muruti, you speak of the general condition of the world, but here also we are not at peace. We Bantu have many problems and difficulties and it seems to me there is no solution for them. In any case, who will listen to us?” [...] “Do you know, Muruti, the white people at my job say that we have no brains. They say we are more foolish than children.”

The Honorable Ditsebe answered reassuringly: “Well, brother, it is fruitless to reason with those people—most whites think that. They live in the past. They have much against the Bantu. We can guess very well what it is. But they do not want to perceive that times have changed. It is now a fact that our land is part of the world, and our Bantu population is therefore also a part of the world. Things that happen in other places in the world reach us too and yet we are regarded as the most trivial people on the world scene.” (Fula, *Golden* 92–3)

Fula’s conservatism prevents him from seeking a militant or radical solution. In this he was not alone. The political tradition of the first half of South Africa’s existence as a political union was one of gentle persuasion, of assimilation and most political parties, and indeed some of the early black African writers shared similar beliefs. For Fula, like many conservatives in times of stress, the solution to political and social problems was not activism but the quietism of religious belief, “the friendly brotherhood of all people.” His Reverend character says: “At the moment I am full of hope and confidence, because I feel that the solution cannot be sought among people. The destiny of the entire human race lies in the hands of the Great Father. He sees all and who is compassionate. This I read in the Holy Scriptures—the greatest Book of all times.” (Fula, *Golden* 93)

In the Afrikaans literary community Fula’s debut was met with enthusiasm, mostly because of the fact that someone with his social and linguistic background originally wrote the text in Afrikaans. For critics like T. T. Cloete (77) there is an additional positive feature, namely that *Jôhannie giet die beeld* “’n boek sonder wrok en sonder verwyte is, ’n boek waarin die kontras nie is: blank x Bantoe nie, maar: goeie Bantoe x slegte Bantoe.” (“is a book without any vengeance and resentment, a book in which the contrast is not: white x Bantu, but good Bantu x bad Bantu.”) He appreciates the “beheerste stem van sy roman [wat] oortuigend en weldadig aandoen” (“controlled voice of his novel that convinces and comes across as well-meaning”). It is especially the goodwill of Fula that emerges from the newspaper clippings of 1954. For the columnist *Trekker* it is “soete musiek in my ore om vir die eerste keer met ’n naturel oor Afrikaanse geestesgoedere te gesels. By Fula [is] geen van die pretensies van die Bantoe wat sy geleerdheid op Fort Hare of Lovedale ontvang het en net uit Shakespeare en Byron wil aanhaal nie.” (“melodious music to my ears to speak with a

native about the Afrikaans spiritual heritage. With Fula there is none of the pretence of the Bantu who got his education at Fort Hare or Lovedale and only quotes from Shakespeare or Byron.”). Trekker has further appreciation for the man Fula:

Hier [...] ’n naturel is wat die ekonomiese stryd van de Boere aan die Rand van naby leer ken het. Toe hy na die staking van 1922 by die myne gewerk het, het [Fula] eenkeer vyf sjielings aan ’n Afrikaner geleen om brood vir sy gesin te koop toe ’n Engelsman hom weggejaag het.

Here is a native who got to know the economic struggle of the Boer on the Rand up closely. When he worked on the mines during 1922, Fula once gave five shillings to an Afrikaner to buy bread when an Englishman chased him away.

While the novel may indeed have intrinsic value the critic Rob Antonissen wonders whether the overall positive reaction from Afrikaans literary critics was not “gekon-disioneer [...] deur die welwillendheid van die skrywer [...] Wat sou ons reaksies [...] gewees het, as Fula ons, blankes, nie op so ’n manier sou verskoon of ontsien het nie?” “conditioned by the goodwill of the author. [...] What would our reactions have been, if Fula did not absolve us or let us off the hook, as he has done?” (Qtd. in Willemse 123)

7

As a third language speaker and autodidact, Arthur Fula reaches beyond the social and political boundaries which in time seemed virtually unbridgeable. As a writer he worked with literary models that were limited, which he with his natural story-telling talent converted into tales that give us an insight into a relatively unnoticed worldview in the changing environment of the 1950s and the emerging syncretism of the modern world. The different reactions that his publications received from black and white readers give us a sense of the ambivalence that a writer like Fula encounters in societies like a modernizing South Africa.¹¹

Notes

1. I retain the original racial labels, since these reveal the political positions and social orientations of the period. At the time, the term “Bantus” referred to indigenous black (primarily Bantu-speaking) South Africans to be distinguished from “Coloureds”, non-Bantu speaking South Africans of indigenous and European extraction, or “Asians” referring mostly to South Africans of Indian extraction.
2. If as Lasker (vii) avers Afrikaans was the language of instruction in the Siemert Coloured School, the school would have been an early adopter of mother tongue educational instruction. The language of instruction in such institutions was English, with Dutch /Afrikaans taught as a subject. Fula who evidently had a knack for languages in all probability picked up his fluent Afrikaans from his playmates and later, his fellow pupils. At the beginning of the 20th century the social divide between nonwhite people on Johannesburg’s gold fields was fairly fluid, and Fula would have had relatively unfettered access to the Siemert Coloured School. On the other hand, Fula’s parents’ choice to send him to a school designated for Coloureds may have been an informed one, considering the choices on offer for

a black African pupil. Coloured schools—there were 22 with 3741 pupils in the whole of the Transvaal Province—followed more or less a curriculum similar to those for white pupils. The curriculum for black African students was directed at creating a class of low-level manual labourers (see van Rooyen 99, 405, 410).

3. Lasker (vii) states confusingly that Fula attained “a Std. IV Certificate in 1930” (that is at age 22) and that he started working in 1925. While it is plausible that he commenced his working life at the age of 17, it is further unclear whether he completed a Standard IV certificate, a primary school certificate, which represents six years of primary schooling, or a Form IV certificate, which is a secondary school qualification, that represents at least eleven years of primary and secondary schooling. She also mentions that he attended the Vrededorp School, which according to van Rooyen (404) became the only primary school for Coloureds in 1918 to have included a secondary section. No other source references this particular school as part of Fula’s education. If he attended the Vrededorp School, he would have had the opportunity to attain Form IV. This is not clear though. In general, most pupils did not progress beyond Standard IV, and in 1922 only 76 pupils made it to the secondary levels of Vrededorp School (van Rooyen 405). It is more likely that Fula attained a Standard IV certificate rather than a Form IV certificate. The state of black schooling in Transvaal generally was dismal, racially biased with relatively few employment prospects. Schooling for black Africans in particular was at best uncertain, of low quality and based on extremely low expectations. According to van Rooyen (409ff) the threshold for black African teachers’ education was “Standard III” or the minimum age of 15 years. Besides confident assertions in various literary commentaries, as yet no documentary proof of Fula’s schooling has been located.
4. If Fula attained a Form IV qualification he would have been able to qualify as an artisan. Under the onerous provisions of the Apprenticeship Act, Act 26 of 1922, Standard VI, eight years of primary and secondary schooling, was the minimum qualification to be apprenticed as an artisan. Very few, if any blacks, qualified to become artisans since the policy deliberately advantaged white youth. There is no evidence that Fula became fully apprenticed as a carpenter or cabinet maker.
5. Sir John Adamson, the Transvaal Director of Education in the first decades of the twentieth century, designed a curriculum for white boys which included the two official languages, Dutch and English; Woodwork; Science; Mathematics and Draughting; History and Geography” (van Rooyen 99). Education for white pupils was free and compulsory up to primary school level (van Rooyen 56, 60–1). Schools for whites were state schools; the schools for blacks generally were mission schools with voluntary attendance and limited state support (van Rooyen 60, 405). In 1912 Adamson designed a curriculum for black African pupils to reflect the “native point of view taking into account their desires, aspirations and possibilities”. The pupil’s mother tongue was replaced as a medium of instruction with either Dutch or English after the first three school years. Boys could choose between the following “industrial subjects”: “(i) gardening and the upkeep of trees (ii) agriculture, tilling of soil and irrigation (iii) the building of roads and footpaths (iv) native industries such as pottery, mat and basket weaving (v) the use and handling of common tools.” (van Rooyen 410)
6. All translations in this article from the original Afrikaans or German are mine.
7. Judging by Fula’s available writing such as his 1936 letter to *Bantu World* it is obvious that his written English was probably more fluent than his written Afrikaans as evidenced in extant manuscript material. We do not have any documentary evidence of his written competency in his mother tongue Xhosa (or another Nguni language such as Zulu) or the Sotho cluster of languages such as Sesotho, Setswana and Sepedi) but we can assume that it would have been more accomplished than his English writing.
8. Lasker (vii) suggests that Fula’s writing career took shape when he won “a consolation prize in a newspaper essay competition.” In his cited letter Fula does not refer to the award but there is a clear indication that he submitted a short story to an unidentified “Afrikaans magazine.”
9. In comparing Fula’s hand-written manuscript and published version of *Met erbarming, O Here* it is obvious that the white Afrikaans editor, Prof P. J. Nienaber, played a considerable role in organizing, editing and finalizing the text. One can safely assume that the same happened to his first novel. There is no doubt, however, that the initial Afrikaans language manuscript, the tenor, the development and intricacies of these tales are uniquely Fula’s.
10. Fula’s shabby appearance was due to his practice of washing his suit by hand rather than having it dry-cleaned—much to his family’s mirth. This, according to them, was indicative of stinginess (Fula celebration).
11. Based on my nomination, the President of South Africa awarded Fula the Order of Ikhamanga in Bronze posthumously for “excellent achievement” in literature on 27 April 2017 (*National Orders Booklet 2017* 8).

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Steward van Wyk
Steward van Wyk is Professor and
Head of the Department of
Afrikaans and Dutch at the
University of the Western Cape.
Email: svanwyk@uwc.ac.za

Narrating the past: Reflections on recent Black Afrikaans writing

Narrating the past: Reflections on recent Black Afrikaans writing

A return to the past has been a dominant feature of recent Afrikaans writing. This is evident in the many novels re-visiting the Anglo-Boer War or recounting incidents from the apartheid past. The approaches include the debunking of myths and a nostalgic longing for the good old days. Whether this is true of the small body of Black Afrikaans writing, given its ambivalent relationship to the canon, needs to be investigated. A number of texts that was published recently either had a clear autobiographical background or emanated from the desire and imperative “to tell our own stories from our communities”. A feature of the texts is also the way it engages with the past and makes use of diverse narrative strategies to recount circumstances and experiences and portray an image of how characters lived through the historical events during the apartheid years. The paper draws on David Scott’s distinction between romance and tragedy as two distinct narrative forms in which the past can be represented and narrated. Scott’s typology is applied to a critically reading of selected texts by inter alia Fatima Osman, Simon Bruinders, Ronelda Kamfer and Valda Jansen. In the case of the texts by the firstmentioned authors the narrative is about survival, determination and the triumph of the human spirit in the face of a dehumanising system like apartheid. In the latter texts one finds elements of dystopia and disillusionment with the past as an idyll. It also gives an unsentimental view of the state of mind and events playing out in communities in the present. The texts furthermore grapples with textual strategies to represent history and the inability at times to comprehend the past. **Keywords:** Black Afrikaans writing, dystopia, history, nostalgia, romance, tragedy

1

Studies on the South African literary landscape after the transition to democracy in 1994 emphasised the turn to history as a dominant feature. André P. Brink for instance finds in his contribution titled “Interrogating silence: new possibilities faced by South African literature” that “History provides one of the most fertile silences to be revisited by South African writers; not because no voices have traversed it before [...] but because the dominant discourse of white historiography [...] has inevitably silenced [...] so many other possibilities” (Brink “Silence” 22). (See also the contributions to the *Litnet* online seminar “Poolshoogte” in 2015, and in particular Burger, Viljoen and Willemse (“Oor sosiale betrokkenheid”) for other views on recent developments in Afrikaans literature).

As a writer who in novels such as *An Instant in the Wind*, *A Chain of Voices* and his last one *Philida* undertook a critical revisit of the past, it is no surprise that Brink

would find history to be fertile ground to turn the myths of apartheid and its false histories on its head.

Little more than a decade later Brink concludes in his lecture "Ground Zero: The South African literary landscape after Apartheid" that "one finds traces of the past in the midst of the new South African literature in the continued re-visits to the landscapes of apartheid" (Brink, "Ground Zero" 2). He expands by saying that the literature is "a re-appreciation, even re-discovery of the past through memory as a key to identity" (Brink, "Ground Zero" 3).

Although David Medalie is critical of Brink's hyperbole, utopian tendencies and suggests that it is rather the dystopian nature of recent South African literature that is more characteristic, he also finds that the literature "is rather inclined to a pre-occupation with the past than an embrace of the future" (36). He ascribes it to the uncertainties of the transition period and observes: "in historical periods which feel strongly their own transitional status [...] there is an inclination to look at the present with dismay, the future with trepidation and the past with nostalgia" (Medalie 36). He continues by saying that "the recurring, even obsessive preoccupation with the past in a great deal of the fiction and even non-fiction of this period may be understood as a form of nostalgia, and that it may even be pertinent to characterize it as a literature of nostalgia" (Medalie 36). The element of nostalgia is indicated as a common characteristic in a number of studies on recent South African literature (Robbe 2015; Worby and Ally 2013). These studies are generally critical of nostalgia as a longing for a past of white privilege. This sentiment is expressed by Fanie Naudé in a recent Memorial Lecture: "Rural or retrospective bonhomie, even the perpetuation of 19th century bucolic fantasies [...] a few false notes of nostalgia, often focusing on a white childhood under apartheid, regularly with a child protagonist displaying an instinct for injustice lacking in the adults" (Naudé 12).

Critics are aware that the way nostalgia is handled is very complex and that there are nuances in the approaches. Robbe (325) distinguishes between "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia and Medalie (40) discerns a "critical and evolved nostalgia as against an unreflecting one". In both cases it is about a nostalgia that sanitises the past of its atrocities and transgressions and creates an idyll as against the conviction that recreating the past can be a tool for critical reflection on the present. An important question posed by Naude is how black writers engage with nostalgia and referring to Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* he finds that the responses are ranging in nature.

A dominant theme in Black Afrikaans writing since 1994 was the return to the past, to forgotten histories as an answer and response to the collective quest to "tell our own stories". This theme was introduced by A. H. M. Scholtz's highly acclaimed *Vatmaar* and E. K. M. Dido's *'n Stringetjie blou krale* (A string of blue beads). This tendency is continued in the recent publications of a number of writers which is the subject of this article. In my opinion the key issues for these writers are:

- How do I write about a past from which I was excluded in the official historiography,
- How do I write myself into that history in the language from which I was excluded?

In reviewing the South African political setup at the end of 2015 Achille Mbembe makes an interesting remark about the current state of mind, that coincides with these issues that I have identified:

Tropes of pain and suffering had come to saturate current narratives of selfhood and identity [...] These tropes had become the register through which many now represent themselves to themselves and to the world. To give account of whom they are, or to explain themselves and their behaviour to others, they increasingly tend to frame their life stories in terms of how much they have been injured by the forces of racism, bigotry and patriarchy.

2

Fatima Osman's autobiographical narrative *Ek's g'n Slams (I'm no Slams, 2013)* is the account of someone who has struggled her whole life against racism, bigotry, male chauvinism and patriarchy and whose psyche was scared by it. It is a *Bildungsroman* in which the main character, a girl of Indian descent growing up in a traditional Muslim family, rebels against the orthodox family setup in which the young woman has no say in her life and often finds herself at odds with tradition and eventually lands up in an arranged and unhappy marriage. Fatima is a strong and wilful woman and after a life in which she was the victim of her husband's reckless business transactions and always having to bounce back from it, she takes control of their lives as the primary provider in their household.

The first part of the narrative contains stories about the traditions and customs of immigrant Muslim families from India. It gives rare insights into a part of the Cape community never before told in Afrikaans. An important element is the dialogue in the Cape vernacular Kaaps of District Six. The narrator says the following about how the cleric—*galifa*—taught them about the Koran and *kop-les* (I am responsible for all translations):

Met groot trots het ons galifa ons geleer [...] Altyd met sy vinger in die lug sou hy in sy Distrik Ses-Afrikaans begin [...] "Wiet djulle, as djulle 'n roos pluk sonner toesteming in iemand se tyn, da' gat Allah djulle straf! Djulle gat jahannam toe! As die malaaikats (engele) na julle kabr (graf) toe ko' en djulle kennie djulle Kalima Shahada' nie, da' gat djulle behoo'lik innie jahannam brant! (14).

Our cleric taught us with great pride [...] Always with his finger in the air he would begin in his District Six Afrikaans "Do you know that if you pick a rose in somebody's garden without the consent, then Allah will punish you! You will go to hell! When the angels come to your grave and you do not know your lessons, then you will burn in hell.

The construction of identity is foremost in the opening pages and the references to group identity are all important: "Die mense daar buite is Kaapse Maleiers en Kleurlinge en wit mense [...] Ons meng nie. Ons is Indiërs. Ons is 'n rein nasie (11). Ons bly rein." ("The people out there are Cape Malay and Coloureds and white people [...] We do not mix. We are a pure nation. We stay pure.") It is ironically that this emphasis on group identity drives Fatima to assert herself as individual in her own right. Against the traditional customs she chooses her own husband, she starts to wear tight jeans, cuts her hair in a short style and starts to befriend the charismatic, evangelist women in her neighbourhood. She fights the preconceived ideas of men and the fact that everywhere she goes she has to defend herself. The title of the novel gets particular resonance when she defends herself against the gangsters on the street corner: "Ek's g'n slams nie ... Ek issie! Ek issie! ... 'n slams is 'n stukkende gebou! Ek's 'n Moslem. Ek's 'n mens! O's is ammal mens!" (45). (I am no slams ... I'm not! I'm not ... a slams is a derelict building! I'm a Muslim. I'm a person! We're all people!)

As a way of defining her own life and taking charge of her future she starts to experiment with diets and becomes the victim of its secondary effects. She suffers from depression and lands in an asylum. After different forms of therapy which inter alia included sketching, she finally finds respite. In a vision that she experiences during a visit to the dentist she comes to the conclusion:

My lewe lank loop ek sonder 'n identiteit rond en ek kon dit nie verwerk nie. Die skets het iets in my wakker gemaak. Ek weet wie ek is! Daar het 'n gestalte in die lig gestaan en hy het my naam geroep. [...] Dis Allah sub-ga-nallah se gestalte wat ek langs myne gesien het en wat my laat besef ek moet net op Hom vertrou en alles val in plek [...] Dis die groot deurbraak waarop ek al so lank wag [...] Dit is 'n wonderwerk van Bo, van Allah sub-ga-nallah self wat tot my redding gekom het [...] Ek het my lewe terug omdat ek oorgegee het aan Allah sub-ga-nallah. My naam is Fatima en ek het innerlike vrede [...] Dit is opwindend en verfrissend om te weet ek het my identiteit gevind [...] Ek is vry van alles. Vry. (266–9)

My whole life I wandered without an identity and I could not handle it. The painting awakened something in me. I know who I am! There was something in the light and He called my name [...] It is Allah sub-ga-nallah's image that I saw next to me and made me aware that I should rely on Him and everything will fall into place [...] This is the big breakthrough that I have been waiting for so long [...] This is a miracle from above, from Allah sub-ga-nallah who came to my rescue himself [...] My life is returned to me because I submitted to Allah sub-ga-nallah. My name is Fatima and I have inner peace [...] This is exciting and refreshing to know I have found my identity [...] I am free from everything. Free.

It is a story of individual triumph over adversity that plays off against the backdrop of

the apartheid histories in District Six and other rural, black communities in the Southern Cape. In *Conscripts of Modernity* David Scott (8) makes the following statement:

Anticolonial stories about past, present, and future have typically been emplotted in a distinctive narrative form, one with a distinctive story-potential: that of *Romance*. They have tended to be narratives of overcoming, often narratives of vindication; they have tended to enact a distinctive rhythm and pacing, a distinctive direction, and to tell stories of salvation and redemption. They have largely depended upon a certain (utopian) horizon toward which the emancipationist history is imagined to be moving.

I will return to Scott's alternative for the way in which the anticolonial past and postcolonial future should be construed. His previous statement is relevant to Osman's *Ek's g'n Slams* as well as the debut novel of Simon Bruinders.

3

Die sideboard (2014), translated as *A Handful of Land* (2017) is the story of Abraham de Bruin who battles his whole life against the unjust apartheid system that robs him in a devious and heartless manner of his dream to have his own little piece of land where he and his family could build their own future. As a smart, hardworking young man who firmly believes in Biblical and traditional values and after being devastated by the senseless expropriation of his land by the authorities, he often rises to start anew in the conviction that God will provide them with a sensible outcome.

Abraham joins the Cape Corps, the separate army unit for Cape Coloured troops, after he was promised ten hectares of land in addition to his military pay. They fight on the side of the Allied Forces in the Second World War in Abyssinia but after the war they feel duped because after demobilization they receive only a bicycle and a coat and not the promised piece of land. The physical and emotional scars threaten to overwhelm him and he concludes:

Hy het as 'n gewonde mens teruggekom. Maar 'n dankbare mens. En tog het hy sy beloofde land nooit gesien nie. Vir baie jare het hy verneuk gevoel. Hy het geglo die grondbelofte was van God. Dit was helaas die belofte van mense. 'n Windeier. (226)

He returned as a wounded person. But a thankful person. Although he never saw the promised land. For many years he felt conned. He believed that the promise of land was from God. Alas, it was the promises of people. A farce.

The sideboard of the title gets symbolic meaning and provides closure. Abraham saw the piece of furniture the first time in Abyssinia where he was so overawed by its beauty and workmanship that he decided to make a replica for his wife Stella on his return. It occupies a special place in their home and becomes the altar on which their family Bible rests. It also symbolises their hardship when it is nearly destroyed

in a fire and Abraham could save it with superhuman strength. Thereafter it is sold for a trifle when they are forced to relocate from an area with ample land, called the Island to a smaller house in Rosemoor, one of the Coloured townships, created by the post-1948 apartheid administration. The circle is closed on a happier note when their former conscientious white neighbour buys the sideboard at an auction and returns it to them on their wedding anniversary as a symbol of atonement. Closure is brought to Abraham's travails and suffering, and in gratitude he proffers a jubilation: "Dankie, dankie, dankie, Here, U is groot en genadig" (262) (Thank you, thank you, thank you God, You are great and merciful).

Against the background of the tradition of the plaasroman/farm novel in the Afrikaans literature and the central role that land and identity plays in this genre *The sideboard* gives an important perspective from the bottom up, from communities dispossessed from their land (see Willemse, "Sideboard" 252). Despite the happy and fortuitous end to the narrative the overwhelming feeling is of deceit and injustice and it fits squarely within the postcolonial theme of place and displacement.

In the words of Scott it is a story of survival and determination and the triumph of the human spirit in the face of a dehumanising system that endeavours to bring him down. But as Scott indicates the romance presents itself as an answer to questions about the past and the present and faced with the unsatisfactory nature of those answers one needs to pose a different set of questions to get another perspective on this problematic. In Scott's view the narrative mode of tragedy could provide an answer:

We live in tragic times. Not meaningless times, not merely dark or catastrophic times but times that in fundamental ways are distressingly off kilter in the specific sense that the critical languages in which we wagered our moral vision and our political hope (including, importantly, the languages of black emancipation and postcolonial critique) are no longer commensurate with the world they were meant to understand, engage, and overcome. (Scott 210)

4

With this in mind I want to reflect on Ronelda Kamfer's latest poetry anthology *Hammie* (2016). These poems have a tragic and elegiac tone. The "Hammie" of the title, which is a term of endearment for the loved and deceased mother, is eulogised in a number of poems that serves as a way to come to terms with death and bereavement.

A wish but futile hope for consolation is found in the poem "Seymour":

die oggend toe ek die ICU instap
het ek
gehuil
op my knieë geval
en gehuil
ek het vir myself gesê

soos mens mos sê as iemand doodgaan
sy is na 'n beter plek
en ek het dit geglo
totdat die suster my kom troos het
en vir my fluister
jou mammie is op 'n beter plek
toe sê ek nee suster
my ma is op die worst possible plek
waar 'n mens kan wees (40)

The morning when I stepped into the ICU I cried and I fell to my knees, and I cried and I told myself as one always says when someone dies: she is in a better place, and I believed it, until the sister came to console me, and whispered to me, your mommy is in a better place, then I said no, my ma is in the worst possible place where one can be.

And in "Nathan" (21) the irreversible nature of the news is underscored in the way it breaks into the ordinary chain of events of a day that was supposed to be ordinary:

vandag was veronderstel
om 'n boring dag te wees
ek en my ma was van plan
om my babaklere uit
die lay-bye te gaan haal

Today was supposed to be a boring day, my mother and I planned to fetch my baby's clothes from the lay-bye.

There are epic poems addressed to working class women who make sacrifices for their families, as in "antie Gerty, suster Kamfer, antie Trui" (74). It sketches an image of women who in the face of poverty fights to keep a sense of normality but are disarmed by situations in which they do not know how to express emotion—"Torrying" (49) ("Nuisance")—who are forced by circumstances into a business-like and unsentimental handling of death and bereavement, for instance in the poem "Troupanne" (33) ("Wedding bands") where the narrator is forced to pawn the wedding bands of her deceased mother so that she can buy food and medicine for her own child. A number of poems express an ambivalent and complex relationship with faith, religion, God and the Bible.

But it is not only a lament; the imperfections of the mother and her generation are mercilessly exposed. In the poems "Humble brag" (93) and "Wees lief vir mekaar, kyk agter haar, Neldie, sy is jou suster..." (94) (Love each other, look after her Neldie, she is your sister...) the neglect of parental duties is disclosed. As such the anthol-

ogy avoids the romanticising of working class women who in their nurturing and supportive role heroically withstand the onslaught of society.

Relevant here, are Scott's remarks about tragedy as the form in which the anti-colonial past can be represented. Dalleo's paraphrasing of Scott is apt:

In contrast to the assured optimism of romance, the tragic vision wonders if we are ever fully masters of our fate and if the past can ever be entirely left behind [...] tragedy emphasizes contingency and conflicting, often irreconcilable demands: for these reasons, it is especially well suited to ambiguous moments of historical crisis and transformation, when old certainties are coming apart. (Dalleo 134)

The anthology takes a hard look at the travesties in communities: family violence, sexual assault, gangsterism. The view of the apartheid past and the postcolonial, postapartheid present in the townships and fruit farms of the Western Cape is one of disillusionment and unhomeliness. Dystopian elements abound, the past is not the idyll to which can be returned with longing and the present is not the fulfilment of heroic and utopian desires.

5

Of the aforementioned texts Valda Jansen's debut novel *Hy kom met die skoenlappers* (He comes with the butterflies, 2016) shows mellowness and comes across as the most considered approach towards the past and history. The novel is presented as an elegy on lost love, cast in a hybrid form of memoir, diary and epistolary novel in which the narrator goes in search of the happy times and lost chances of a romance in her days as a young German language teacher on a yearlong exchange in the former East Germany. The pasts of herself and her lover Anders are revealed in the process. They are wounded not only by personal and family tragedy but also as a consequence of the histories of apartheid South Africa and Germany during the Nazi and DDR regimes. Anders puts it this way: "Ons probeer nog om vandag te verstaan. Daarom moet ons soms weer stil word en terugdink, onthou hoe dit was. As ons dit nie doen nie, sal ons lewe vandag geen betekenis hê nie" (73). (We are still trying to understand today. That is why we sometimes need to be still and think back, remember how it was. If we don't do it, our life will not have meaning).

The narrator expresses a similar honest and bold acceptance of the past. She says for instance: "Wit Suid-Afrikaners kan nie die wandade van apartheid ontduik nie." (155) (White South Africans cannot escape the travesties of apartheid), and on p. 75: "Ons moet almal nog leer om met ons verlede saam te leef, om vrede te maak met wie ons was" (We must all learn to live with the past, to make peace with who we were).

The inability to fully comprehend the past is here shown at a textual level. The deficiency of language to represent the past is signified in the failure of punctuation and capital letters, elliptical sentences and stuttering utterances e.g. p. 158:

ek vertel my storie jy leen my jou oor my storie is my voete wat om 'n vuur dans ek dans
die taal van dooie woorde

I tell my story you lend me your ear my story is my feet that dances around a fire I dance
the language of dead words

It shows the working of amnesia and the repression of hurtful memories from the past, the quest to fill in pieces of memory and the emotional pain lying underneath the words. A similar point is made by Robbe (329) when she refers to the Antjie Krog's textual strategies to reconstruct the past.

Jansen's formal experiments illustrate how difficult it is to write about apartheid and create a meaningful account of the past. In this regard the narrator remarks: "In my weergawe van my geskiedenis is ek in die middel van die storie saam met my ouers en my familie wat ek van foto's af ken. In vele ander se idee van die geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika is ek uitgesluit [...] die ou geskiedenisvertellers lieg die waarheid en die nuwe heersers is nie veel beter nie" (129). (In my version of my history I am in the centre of the story with my parents and my family who I know from photo's. In many others' idea of history in South Africa I am excluded. The old historians lied the truth and the new rulers are not much better).

Some of the moving scenes in the book are the times when the narrator recounts her experiences as a young child with the apartheid laws. It is told in an understated manner but in such a way that the hurt and humiliation are unmistakable. For example when she tells about the times that they have to go around the back of the hotel to get a meal of left-overs (118). The emphasis that falls on the local in this small town installment of apartheid accentuates the working of apartheid machinery. The narrator describes her experiences with the Group Areas Act in her hometown the Strand with its long white beaches in this way:

Ek en my broers stap dorp toe [...] Ons loop op die sypaadjie tussen die witmense se huise [...] Ons mag nie daar woon nie, ons mag net inkopies doen en dan die dorp verlaat, ons mag nie in restaurante eet nie, veral nie in die Wimpy nie. (99–100)

My brothers and I walk to town [...] We walk on the pavement between the houses of white people [...] We are not allowed to stay there, we can only do shopping en then we must leave the town, we may not eat in the restaurants, especially not in the Wimpy.

The emphasis on white here and in other passages should be noted. It is as if the narrator uses it as a curse and turns it on itself. The narrator's ambivalent relationship with the Afrikaans language is another aspect that is explored in the book. Despite the fact that she was raised in an Afrikaans home with her father scolding them in his perfect Eastern Cape idiom and pure Afrikaans (63) her Afrikaans is perceived

as strange when she and her child speak it on the school grounds. Here she plays in on the notion that Afrikaans is the white man's language. She alludes to the fact that her humanity was stifled in Afrikaans and that it was through German that she found her way back to the language (170).

An important intertext are the passages in German that are sometimes translated and sometimes not. She finds solace in German and in the multiple references to Bertolt Brecht. It becomes a meta-textual reflection on writing in times of crisis. She remembers the words of her German lecturer during the struggle years of the eighties: "Bertolt Brecht kon net sowel met ons gepraat het, vandag, hier in hierdie land." (94) (Bertolt Brecht could just as well have spoken to us, today, in this country").

In the same vein these words can be relevant in the present in which the narrator is intensely aware of the socio-political role of the writer and the need to write about societal issues: "Watter soort tyd is dit waarin ons leef dat 'n gesprek oor bome eintlik 'n misdaad is omdat dit beteken dat ons oor soveel ander dinge swyg." (94) (In which times do we live that a conversation about trees is really a crime because we remain silent about so many other things).

This makes the novel not just another love story or elegy about lost love, but a reflection on the role of literature in times of crisis and the impossibility to escape the past even though you wear the scars of that past.

6

Narrating the past from an insider's view will for some time be a preoccupation in writing emanating from particular communities. For Black Afrikaans writing this is clear from the number of work that is self published or produced by little known publishers (see the debut anthologies of Paulse and Rhode). Against the backdrop of a society in which dystopia plays out on a national level this writing brims with a pride in local communities and its histories, customs and language and is produced with a distinct utopian desire to restore the humanity of its subjects after apartheid. The poet, play wright and academic Adam Small evinced this sentiment in the first column of the series "Counterpoint" which he wrote for the *Cape Times* newspaper after his return to public life and resuming his role as public intellectual and writer after more than a decade of silence: "One's writing is probably better for not being a tepid post-script to people's being, but designed to bring tribute to their humanity." (Small 2015)

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Patrick Kabeya Mwepu

Patrick Kabeya Mwepu is the Head of School of Languages & Literatures at Rhodes University. He is the editor of French Studies in Southern Africa.
E-mail: p.mwepu@ru.ac.za

La traversée de l'Atlantique ou la mort ? Une réflexion critique sur la notion d'échange

Crossing the Atlantic or dying? Critical reflection on the concept of exchange

This paper investigates the validity of the concept of "cultural exchange" through a few African novels, comparing different perspectives of journeys. While some African writers attempt to depict their most immediate environment, making themselves appear as "nationalist" as possible, one can notice however that more and more other African writers choose to encapsulate their literary universe in changing geographic settings: their writing depicts the mobility of characters aiming at reaching new frontiers. These new spaces, always to be discovered, provide African writers with a platform to depict subjectivities that cognitively enrich themselves on contact with newer and different world visions. However, the crossing into the other world (on the other bank of the river) seems not always to offer a space for mutual cultural exchange; it might be fatal and lead to identity "assassination", "a journey of death".

Keywords: Julien Kilanga Musinde, Henri Lopes, lost identity, the other, return to Africa.

Maintes fois la thématique de l'écriture littéraire francophone africaine, celle du roman en particulier, se fonde dans la majorité des cas, sur la description des voyages ou des itinéraires des protagonistes.¹ Se basant sur la recherche de Mohamadou Kane, Locha Mateso fait ce constat en ces termes : "Le temps et l'espace subissent dans le roman africain un traitement particulier. Loin de s'immobiliser en un temps ou en un espace unique le récit se modifie au gré de l'itinéraire du héros, suivant une structure triadique". (Mateso 342)

Si certains écrivains tentent de dépeindre, avec un succès relatif certes, leur environnement le plus immédiat, au point de se faire passer pour des "nationalistes",² il est cependant évident que bon nombre d'autres auteurs africains francophones choisissent de placer les vicissitudes de leurs héros dans des cadres géographiques qui changent selon les occurrences en déplacement: les aventures des héros commencent sur le continent africain avant de se dénouer dans des "nouveaux mondes" et / ou dans l'espace initial dans le cas des récits triadiques. Le passage dans ces nouveaux espaces, toujours à découvrir, pourrait s'interpréter, dans la plupart des cas, comme une opportunité dont se servent ces auteurs pour dépeindre des subjectivités qui s'enrichissent au contact de différentes visions du monde.

La métaphore de la mort

Cependant le passage dans un autre monde (sur l'autre rive) n'offre pas forcément un espace d'échange culturel mutuel. L'on pourrait également l'interpréter comme un transfert métaphorique de la vie à la mort. Kane emploie également ce concept de la "mort" en insinuant qu'on "voyage inlassablement dans le roman africain" et qu'au bout de ce voyage "le héros rencontre souvent la mort" (Mateso 342). Cette mort, qui apparaît dans l'analyse de Kane (cité par Mateso) comme un phénomène physique et naturel, trouvera une interprétation figurative dans cet article. Il s'agit d'interroger à travers cette image la notion d'"échange" culturel dans un espace mouvant. L'analyse a cherché à comprendre en amont la cohabitation entre des éléments hétérogènes dans des subjectivités qui s'interrogent sur leur vraie identité, dans un contexte où des subjectivités "mineures" ou marginales se font absorber par des subjectivités dominantes. Loin de procéder à une investigation sociologique, quelques romans africains ont permis d'analyser cet aspect et d'interroger par ce biais les enjeux de la notion d'échange.

Dans le commerce triangulaire sous-tendu par la traite des esclaves, on a vu des descriptions, comme celles apparaissant dans les documents historiques dont l'un des plus recommandables, à notre avis, serait *La traite des Noirs et ses acteurs Africains* de Tidiane Diakité, des Noirs arrachés de leur Afrique matricielle et nourricière pour être vendus au-delà de l'Atlantique.³ Ce coup de force lugubre, que l'opinion actuelle a tendance à jeter dans les oubliettes de l'histoire, résonne encore comme une menace de mort dans le penser de certains écrivains pour qui la traversée de l'Atlantique continue à s'identifier à ce voyage fatal. Il va de soi que dans certaines cultures d'Afrique, dont la culture luba en République Démocratique du Congo, être / vivre à l'étranger, surtout au-delà de l'Atlantique, c'est être en brousse (*mu cisuku* en langue ciluba), c'est-à-dire vivre temporairement dans un milieu de la débrouille ou d'incertitude qu'il faudrait tôt ou tard quitter.

Une lecture de certains romans africains révèle que l'écriture des voyages ne décrit pas uniquement un espace géographique conçu comme cyclique, ou triadique selon la terminologie de Kane (1986), dans lequel le héros revient au point de départ. Certains auteurs choisissent une représentation linéaire de l'espace dans laquelle des héros font des voyages allers simples, sans (ou après avoir perdu l') intention de retourner. Au cours de ces voyages, le héros rencontre souvent la mort (Mateso 342).

Cette appréhension linéaire de l'espace voudrait se lire aussi bien géographique-ment que cognitivement. Sur le plan purement spatial, le roman *Sur l'autre rive* d'Henri Lopes, publié aux Éditions du Seuil en 1992, pourrait être considéré comme l'un des bons exemples de ce type de voyage. Le titre "Sur l'autre rive" n'est pas sans charge affective. Le lecteur comprend au cours de la lecture que l'autre rive de l'Atlantique, les Caraïbes, constitue pour l'univers romanesque, un idéal à atteindre, pour des habitants de cette rive-ci, l'Afrique. Marie-Ève Atipo, la protagoniste de ce roman, s'exprime de

la sorte : “Moi à qui le travail fait habituellement tout négliger, tout oublier, j’ai souffert comme une bête blessée à mon retour à Brazzaville. Déjà, à cette époque, j’avais songé à m’enfuir pour aborder d’autres rives et me métamorphoser en une autre.” (Lopes 201)

Ces propos écrits à la première personne, avec *moi* en tête, voudraient d’abord singulariser l’intention de la protagoniste. Ce singulier serait de nature subjective, un “je” qui se conçoit malaisé dans une société à laquelle le personnage ne voudrait plus appartenir. Le “je” est au bout de ses souffles et se voit ravalé au plus bas de l’échelle sociale: “j’ai souffert comme une bête blessée”.

Pendant ce “je” ridiculisé n’a qu’une seule alternative immédiate: s’enfuir. Cette fuite dans le penser pourrait être considérée comme un renoncement du terroir, de la terre matricielle à laquelle appartient la protagoniste. Néanmoins, ce renoncement est d’autant plus radical que l’espace renoncé est avant tout élargi; l’héroïne refuse de quitter Brazzaville pour Lagos ou Libreville; elle pense accoster sur des rives lointaines. Il s’agit explicitement et délibérément de traverser non pas le Fleuve Zaïre à l’époque (ou le Fleuve Congo actuellement), mais de franchir l’Atlantique pour accoster aux Caraïbes, en Guadeloupe précisément, un espace à comprendre comme une insertion dans l’hégémonie culturelle et économique de la France. Dans ce contexte, l’en-deçà se perçoit aux yeux du personnage comme un lieu de désenchantement qu’il faudrait à tout prix abandonner. L’au-delà est idéalisé, “sur l’autre rive”, “*illo loco*”, un espace idéal de conquête.

Dans cette perspective de séparation, le rejet de l’Afrique contraint le sujet à l’exil. Cet exil, qui est dépeint dans ce texte au moyen d’un trajet aller-simple, est aux antipodes des voyages qui seront décrits et au bout desquels le voyageur revient sur sa terre natale.

Sur le plan cognitif, le voyageur qui va en exil indéterminé prend des distances importantes vis-à-vis de sa vision du monde: il renonce catégoriquement à un système de penser du départ pour se verser délibérément dans un autre.

Cette interprétation est dictée par les propos du personnage de Marie-Ève dans la citation précédente: “me métamorphoser en une autre” (Lopes 201). On comprend l’exil dans ce texte comme un moyen de représenter dans l’imaginaire le reniement de soi dans la vision du monde d’un sujet. Ce renoncement d’un système de valeurs qui définit une vision du monde dans laquelle le personnage a toujours évolué constitue une tentative, au moyen de la plume, de remettre en question des éléments d’une culture qui jusqu’alors régentait le comportement du personnage dans son milieu d’origine. “Se métamorphoser en une autre” est une prise de position consciente de se redéfinir et de devenir comme l’Autre, cet Autre qui n’est pas sur place, mais qu’on doit retrouver sur des rives lointaines.

Dans cette perspective, on pourrait en déduire que le déplacement effectué par un sujet vers un autre espace est une expression ou une reconnaissance d’un manque; aux yeux du personnage, l’espace premier manque de modèle fiable lo-

calement auquel le protagoniste désenchanté pourrait se référer. Ce modèle, quand bien même il existerait, se verrait défié par la rigidité d'une tradition incontestable. D'où, l'importance d'atteindre l'au-delà de la mer: "Pourquoi avoir tout abandonné, brûlé ce qui m'était le plus précieux, changé d'identité, avoir franchi le fleuve, la mer, l'océan, pour changer de plumage, comme un oiseau à la veille d'une saison nouvelle? Il aurait suffi de lever les ambiguïtés, de rompre et continuer à vivre là-bas." (Lopes 227)

On pourrait donc en déduire, et selon le texte, que ce changement radical, d'espace et d'essence, se conçoit dans l'esprit du personnage non pas comme une lointaine tentation, mais plutôt comme un impératif catégorique auquel on ne saurait se dérober: "Une force irrésistible, quelque part dans ma poitrine me répétait de couper les liens et de m'en aller" (Lopes 227).

Vu sous l'angle d'un impératif et surtout dans le penser de ce personnage, "couper les liens" équivaudrait à se libérer. Il s'agit de se libérer d'un système de penser dont le personnage ne voudrait plus faire partie. À ce titre, l'exilé et le nomade deviennent indissociables. Qu'en pensent Édouard Glissant et Julien Musinde?

Le nomade ne serait-il pas déterminé par ses conditions d'existence? Et le nomadisme, non pas une jouissance de liberté mais une obéissance à des contingences contraignantes. (Poétique 24)

Je veux aller vers un univers inconnu ou aucun guide fiable n'est prévu. Et pourtant, il faut que j'y aille. (Musinde 13)

"Il faut que j'y aille" de Musinde illustre littérairement cet impératif dont parle Glissant sous le signe de "contingences contraignantes". Même si le sujet semble choisir de quitter son milieu (contrairement aux victimes de la traite), ce choix, tout compte fait, n'est que l'inconséquence d'un désenchantement longtemps intériorisé. La fuite s'avère donc comme une coercition, et le sujet, contre tout son gré, est poussé à l'extrême et finit par prendre une décision inéluctable de séparation.

Que pense-t-on alors de cette nouvelle conquête, de ce nouveau système de penser auquel des subjectivités exilées ou nomades voudraient adhérer? À travers le roman *Sur l'autre rive*, Lopes ne s'acharne pas à en décrire les valeurs les plus fondamentales sur lesquelles la vision du monde est construite; le personnage exilé (de l'Afrique en Guadeloupe) ne semble pas d'emblée établir un jugement de valeur sur le vrai motif de son acte, ni déclarer sans ambages l'injustice de sa culture: "Était-ce la voix de l'ange qui me chuchotait à l'oreille ou la main du démon qui m'entraînait alors? Ai-je agi par courage ou par lâcheté? Même aujourd'hui, je n'ai pas de réponse à toutes ces questions. Que des suicides demeurés sans réponses!" (Lopes 227)

Néanmoins, le personnage de Marie-Ève affirme avoir atteint l'idéal en étant sur l'autre rive; et sa satisfaction est totale, ce qui pourrait dévoiler son jugement de valeur qui jusqu'alors n'était pas explicitement exprimé dans l'ambiguïté de ses

propos dans la citation précédente. En substance, elle déclare ce qui suit :

Aujourd'hui, j'ai oublié le pays, et quand j'y pense c'est par inadvertance. Quand j'entends des professions de foi sur l'amour de la terre natale, je me tais. Quand la voix d'un poète exilé me trouble, je m'accuse d'avoir un cœur de bête. S'il m'arrive d'être interrogée sur mes origines, je réponds, sans aucune hésitation, que je suis fille du Moule, la commune de Rico. (Lopes 227–8).

L'intention de tout oublier, voire de gommer toutes les traces d'un passé africain pourtant rattaché à son être, est affichée dans le penser de ce personnage qui s'est envolé vers des rivages lointains qui, à ses yeux, s'impose comme un havre de paix, un lieu de réconfort jamais connu. Et Glissant d'écrire à ce sujet: "Et je me souviens qu'il y a quarante ans ou cinquante ans, les Antillais qui étaient en France prétendaient volontiers qu'ils étaient descendants de Caraïbes pour pouvoir échapper à la part africaine qu'ils avaient en eux et dont, sans doute, ils avaient honte, sous la pression culturelle du colonisateur." (*Introduction* 61)

Un présent heureux opposé à un passé dont on ne veut plus se souvenir, voilà qui constituerait la métamorphose dont parle le protagoniste du roman *Sur l'autre rive*. C'est ce changement de soi, ce reniement de valeurs initiales qu'on retrouve également dans l'œuvre de René Maran où le personnage de Jean Veneuse se veut français: "La France est ma religion. Je ramène tout à elle. Enfin, hormis ma couleur, je me sais Européen" (Maran 184.). Dans cette perspective, Lourdes Rubiales a fait une étude intéressante intitulée: "JE HAIS MA RACE! Un homme parmi les autres de René Maran". Rubiales écrit je hais ma race en lettres capitales, suivis d'un point d'exclamation. Il va de soi que son étude se base sur ce constat de Fanon: "le noir ne s'attendant plus à transformer le regard que l'Autre, en l'occurrence le Blanc, a porté sur lui pendant si longtemps, s'acharne à devenir l'Autre" (Rubiales 121–2).

Et Fanon de dire de surcroît: "Aussi pénible que puisse être pour nous cette constatation, nous sommes obligés de la faire: pour le noir il n'y a qu'un destin. Et il est blanc" (Fanon 8). Des personnages comme Marie-Ève (*Sur l'autre rive*), Jean Veneuse (*Un homme pareil aux autres*), etc. n'affichent aucune intention de retourner en Afrique. Ils choisissent d'adhérer inconditionnellement à une vision du monde définie par l'Autre sur le sol d'arrivée. C'est dans cette perspective qu'on peut penser que la traversée de l'Atlantique se lit métaphoriquement, du moins dans certaines œuvres, comme le passage à la mort. Il s'agit d'un aller simple dans l'au-delà, mais que l'on comprend comme une représentation de la négation délibérée de soi. L'image de la mer que l'on traverse avant d'atteindre l'autre rive est symboliquement chargée. Mais son rôle cathartique est souligné surtout par Lopes dans ce passage du roman *Sur l'autre rive*: "Jour après jour, s'insinuant en moi à pas de loup, la mer a accompli sa tâche. Elle m'a envahie, a noyé tous les paysages de la mémoire, et les bougies de l'enfance se sont éteintes." (Lopes 7)

À la lumière de ce passage, qui constitue le début du roman, on peut entrevoir le fait que le personnage qui entre dans le nouveau système de pensée, en passant par la mer, n'a pas de base de sustentation préalable qui pourrait lui servir de point d'attache. Il s'agit d'une représentation d'un terrain fertile, presque rendu à nouveau vierge, susceptible de recevoir et d'adopter de manière inconditionnelle une vision du monde jamais connue auparavant. C'est la mort symbolique d'une culture que la mer efface du cerveau du protagoniste le libérant ainsi, de manière symbolique certes, de toute empreinte d'une identité initiale que possédait le protagoniste.

Mourir sans mourir

Mais alors, en dépit de la motivation de ceux qui décident de traverser la mer, comment l'écriture préconise-t-elle d'éviter cette mort transatlantique? L'œuvre de Musinde semble indiquer que la mort est inévitable: *Quis quis es morieris*. Néanmoins, elle présente la renaissance comme un remède efficace dans la recherche de soi : "Toute productivité n'est possible que si le grain meurt. Au juste, pour devenir arbre qui porte des fruits succulents, le grain meurt sans mourir" (Musinde 108). Mais comment l'œuvre représente-t-elle donc ce fait de "mourir sans mourir"? Y a-t-il moyen de remettre en doute la démarche de la *tabula rasa* de la culture antérieure pour en adopter une autre.

Dans le roman *Retour de Manivelle* de Julien Kilanga Musinde on peut lire ce qui suit : "Mon fils, je sais que tu veux aller vers ces pays lointains au contact d'autres cultures. Je ne veux pas te l'interdire. Mais il faut d'abord assimiler ta propre culture avant d'aller vers celles des autres." (Musinde 10)

Ces propos du père ne méritent pas d'être interprétés comme une simple exhortation ; ils vont au-delà d'un conseil tout en exprimant un très haut degré de conscience consécutif à une observation minutieuse des tendances à la mode. Le père parle à son fils, "mon fils", et le fils entend "voyager" vers des contrées lointaines. Cette hiérarchisation des rôles des personnages dans la répartition des rôles n'est cependant pas gratuite. Le père est considéré, du moins dans cette œuvre sinon en général, comme détenteur, de par son âge, d'un savoir ésotérique auquel "le fils", vu son âge, ne pourrait accéder que par une initiation spécifique. La hiérarchisation revient donc à la mystification du savoir, exigeant au fils un certain degré d'ouverture avant que son corps, réceptacle bien préparé, ne reçoive une nouvelle connaissance.

Ainsi les propos du père, "il faut d'abord assimiler ta propre culture", sonnent comme une obligation morale faite par un maître (le père) à un novice (le fils). Ces propos, qui sont une coercition morale, sont renforcés dans le texte, sur le plan stylistique, par l'emploi par le père des impératifs du genre "regarde cet arbre (Musinde 10), regarde ces feuilles, regarde-les bien" (Musinde 11), etc. Ces impératifs mettent l'emphase sur l'initiation au secret de la nature locale au terme de laquelle, en guise de couronnement rituel, l'initié est convié à "boire du vin de palme dans une corne

de buffle" (Musinde 11). Ces injonctions, dont certaines constituent des interdits, remettent en question l'élan originel d'un départ motivé par le désir de faire une amnésie quasi totale.

Cependant l'aspiration du "fils" de voyager dans les contrées lointaines s'identifie à la modernité et à l'époque au cours de laquelle les relations transatlantiques sont de plus en plus à la mode. En fait cette modernité a pris de l'élan il y a environ quatre siècles, et cette époque ne constitue qu'une étape. Musinde inscrit les subjectivités de son univers romanesque dans une logique classique : celle des héros voyageurs incarnés entre autres dans les romans *Aventure ambiguë* (Cheik Hamidou Kane), *Un homme pareil aux autres* (René Maran), *Sur l'autre rive* (Henri Lopes), etc.

Les héros voyagent et reviennent comme des entités différentes. Ces entités se sont enrichies de (ou ont subi) l'expérience tribulaire du contact avec différentes cultures. Le moi est doté de nouvelles connaissances qui des fois se présentent comme des défis par rapport aux normes de la société d'origine. C'est cela qu'on retrouve dans l'itinéraire des héros voyageurs qui servent bien de l'expérience accumulée lors de longs voyages pour envisager et comprendre leur propre vie. Il s'agit de l'expérience aussi bien positive que négative. L'accumulation des expériences dans un espace autre que l'espace natal pourrait être perçu comme une évolution positive dès lors que les héros s'en servent pour le bien de la société du départ. Lorsque le personnage de Kolélé, dans un autre roman de Lopes, revient sur sa terre natale, elle ramène le sens de propriété qu'elle a acquis de ses voyages. "Revenir sur terre" (*Le Lys* 393), telle est sa manière de s'exprimer.

Par contre, lorsque le héros ne revient pas cela équivaldrait à la mort. Musinde insinue cependant dans son œuvre que la mort n'a de sens que dans la renaissance. Cette renaissance est à comprendre, à la lumière du passage "mourir sans mourir" (Lopes 108), comme la revalorisation de soi et l'acceptation de l'Autre. Il s'agit bien non seulement d'être parmi les autres mais aussi et surtout d'atteindre un degré fiable de mélange non prévisible, qui est la créolisation selon Glissant ou le métissage selon les autres. Il s'agit d'arriver à ce moi différent mais pluriel que Marc Gontard définit comme "une figure étrange, ambivalente, et bien souvent indéchiffrable" (Gontard 8). Cependant en terme de créolisation, Glissant estime que: "La créolisation exige que les éléments hétérogènes mis en relation "s'intervalorisent", c'est-à-dire qu'il n'y ait pas de dégradation ou de diminution de l'être, soit de l'intérieur, soit de l'extérieur, dans ce contact et dans ce mélange." (*Introduction* 19)

Dans cette lancée, peut-on penser que certains voyages transatlantiques décrits en littérature africaine entendent, de manière consciente, représenter ou imaginer ce "moi étrange" et pluriel? S'agit-il d'inventer une nouvelle tradition, celle du moi multiple?

S'appuyant sur Deleuze et Guattari, Édouard Glissant fait la distinction entre la pensée racine et la pensée du rhizome (*Poétique* 59). Dans cette réflexion, "la racine

unique est celle qui tue autour d'elle alors que le rhizome est la racine qui s'étend à d'autres racines (*Poétique* 59). Glissant lie le principe d'une identité rhizome à l'existence des cultures composites, c'est-à-dire des cultures dans lesquelles se pratique une créolisation (*Poétique* 60).

Cette créolisation, en tant que résultante d'une vision du monde *rhizomatique*, est indissociable de la renaissance que dépeint Musinde, aussi bien dans un espace cyclique (*Retour de manivelle*) que dans un espace linéaire (*Jardin secret*).

Conclusion

Qu'arrive-t-il sur l'autre rive? La réponse serait une certaine mort, du moins de par certaines œuvres citées dans cet article. Et probablement, la renaissance. La métamorphose de Marie-Ève ou celle de Jean Veneuse, et de tant d'autres, peut servir d'exemple illustrant cet anéantissement de soi. L'identité de l'*ego* se perd alors que le reniement de soi se consolide. Ainsi vient la mort d'une identité, cédant la place à une nouvelle identité qui souvent est en contradiction avec la première.

Que faire devant la mort? Musinde pense qu'il faut mourir sans mourir, peut-être mourir pour renaître dans sa progéniture, comme dirait la Grande Royale dans *l'Aventure ambiguë*. Ainsi, la contradiction, le paradoxe apparent dans la métaphore "mourir sans mourir" insinue un changement, un renouvellement perpétuel où tout être meurt pour renaître. (Musinde 69)

L'injonction faite au fils par le père, "maîtrise d'abord ta propre culture avant d'aller vers les contrées lointaines" (Musinde 10), paraît un baume de vie susceptible de ressusciter le moi dissout dans l'autre monde ou mieux de le réveiller. C'est bien sûr une bonne métaphore, la prise du vin de palme dans la corne de buffle, qu'emploie Musinde comme une bonne protection contre la mort (une mort culturelle et métaphorique sur l'autre rive). Cette acceptation de soi se pose comme condition *sine qua non* de la créolisation ou de l'échange et surtout de la renaissance. L'acceptation de l'Autre, qui semble être imposé uniquement aux Africains et pas aux autres (le personnage de l'œuvre de Musinde s'étant vu dans l'interdiction de s'exprimer dans sa langue africaine sous peine d'être expulsé de l'école), est aussi condamnable que le reniement de soi :

Un jour, ne pouvant pas supporter ma solitude, j'ai frappé à la porte de ma voisine pour faire sa connaissance. Cette dame m'a brutalement répondu en menaçant de faire venir la police. Quand j'ai parlé à des amis qui avaient assuré mon accueil à Vouillé, ils se sont moqués de moi en me recommandant de ne plus tenter cette expérience dangereuse. Qu'y a-t-il d'anormal à prendre contact avec des voisins lorsque ma culture l'autorise? (Musinde 114-5)

Il est évident, à la lumière de ce passage, de penser que ce n'est que lorsque le métissage sera multilatéral qu'il permettra de s'éloigner, comme le pense Nathalie

Davis, “des autels impurs du nationalisme et des races, tout en pressant de penser par-delà les frontières” (Diop 107). Avec espoir, ce jour-là, les morts de part et d’autre de l’Atlantique ressusciteront. Les voyages seront triadiques et cycliques. C’est à ce jour-là que pense Aimé Césaire dans son *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, lorsqu’il écrit :

Partir. Mon cœur bruissait de générosités emphatiques. Partir... j’arriverais lisse et jeune dans ce pays mien et je dirais à ce pays dont le limon entre dans la composition de ma chair: “J’ai longtemps erré et je reviens vers la hideur désertée de vos plaies.” Je reviendrais à ce pays mien et je lui dirais : “Embrassez-moi sans crainte... Et si je ne sais que parler, c’est pour vous que je parlerai” (Césaire 61).

Notes

1. La liste des romans africains de voyage ne peut pas être exhaustive. On peut citer parmi ces romans de voyage, entre autres: *L’aventure ambiguë* de Cheik Amidou Kane (1961), *La nouvelle romance* d’Henri Lopes (1976), *Le chercheur d’Afrique* d’Henri Lopes (1990), *Loin de mon père* de Véronique Tadjo (2010), *L’appel des arènes* d’Aminata Sow Fall (1982), *Celles qui attendent* de Fatou Diome (2010), etc.
2. L’allusion est faite ici à l’analyse faite par Samba Diop sur l’écriture sénégalaise (Diop).
3. Allusion est faites ici aux écrits de Senghor (*Hosties noires*), Césaire (*Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*), etc.

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Lesibana Rafapa

Lesibana Rafapa is Full Professor in the Department of English Studies, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
Email: rafaplj@unisa.ac.za

Indigeneity in modernity: The cases of Kgebetli Moele and Niq Mhlongo

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The study of South African English literature written by black people in the post-apartheid period has focused, among others, on the so-called Hillbrow novels of Phaswane Mpe and Niq Mhlongo, and narratives such as Kgebetli Moele's *Book of the Dead* (2009) set in Pretoria. A number of studies show how the fiction of these writers handles black concerns that some critics believe to have replaced a thematic preoccupation with apartheid, as soon as political freedom was attained in 1994. However, adequate analyses are yet to be made of works produced by some of these black writers in their more rounded scrutiny of the first decade of democracy, apart from what one may describe as an indigenous/traditional weaning from preoccupation with the theme of apartheid. This study intends to fill this gap, as well as examine how such a richer social commentary is refracted in its imaginative critique of South African democratic life beyond its first decade of existence. I consider Mhlongo's novels *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007) together with Moele's narratives reflecting on the same epoch *Room 207* (2006) and *The Book of the Dead*. For the portrayal of black lives after democracy, I unpack the discursive content of Mhlongo's narratives *Affluenza* (2016) and *Way Back Home* (2013), as well as Moele's *Untitled* (2013) respectively. I probe new ways in which these post-apartheid writers critique the new living conditions of blacks in their novelistic discourses. I argue that their evolving approaches interrogate literary imaginaries, presumed modernities and visions on socio-political freedom of a post-apartheid South Africa, in ways deserving critical attention. I demonstrate how Moele and Mhlongo in their novels progressively assert a self-determining indigeneity in a post-apartheid modernity unfolding in the context of some pertinent discursive views around ideas such as colour-blindness and transnationalism. I show how the discourses of the authors' novels enable a comparison of both their individual handling of the concepts of persisting institutional racism and the hegemonic silencing of white privilege; and distinguishable ways in which each of the two authors grapples with such issues in their fiction depicting black conditions in the first decade of South African democratic rule, differently from the way they do with portrayals of the socio-economic challenges faced by black people beyond the first ten years of South African democracy. **Keywords:** Black South African English literature, post-apartheid South Africa, transnational, institutional racism, colour-blindness, indigeneity, modernity.

Introduction

In this paper I compare how, in their individually distinctive ways, the post-apartheid black authors Niq Mhlongo and Kgebetli Moele handle concepts such as persisting institutional racism, hegemonic silencing of black antiracist critiques, and white talk insidiously seeking to perpetuate white privilege in an ostensibly equal democratic South Africa. I do this through a consideration of Mhlongo's

novels *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007) together with Moele's narratives handling the same epoch *Room 207* (2006) and *The Book of the Dead* (2009). For the portrayal of black lives after ten years of democracy, I unpack the discursive content of Mhlongo's narratives *Affluenza* (2016) and *Way Back Home* (2013), as well as Moele's *Untitled* (2013). I put more accent on the novels of the first decade of freedom from apartheid. As my analyses of this specific category of narratives will demonstrate, in this period the black writers meet an equally more virulent euphoria with freedom with equally more radical discourses against faked demises of institutional racism, against hypocritical deployment by some commentators of pro-transnational critiques, and against a hegemonically imposed colour-blindness—more than they do in their second decade works when focus understandably shifts from extant apartheid attitudes within white discourse to metonymic introspection pivoted on black societal leaders. Apart from comparing Moele's and Mhlongo's individual mainly novelistic handling of the specified concepts, I also distinguish ways in which each of the two authors grapples differently with such issues in their fiction set within the first decade of South African democratic rule, and in their narratives depicting black conditions beyond the first ten years of South African democracy.

I argue that their evolving approaches interrogate literary imaginaries, presumed modernities and visions on socio-political freedom of a post-apartheid South Africa, in ways deserving critical attention. I demonstrate how Mhlongo and Moele continue to assert a self-determining indigeneity in a post-apartheid modernity, unfolding in the context of some discursive notions such as colour-blindness and transnationalism.

That the key terms I enumerate above are inevitable building blocks for the conceptual framework apt for the post-apartheid novels I consider is revealed by remarks such as this, "While much South African criticism has moved away from a concern with institutional racism and white supremacy, reading [...] recent novels by black writers through a critical race lens shows that post-apartheid literature continues to provide imaginative windows into racial inequality, racial ideology, and the struggle for freedom" (Milazzo, "Reconciling racial revelations" 142). Institutionalised racism, according to Milazzo ("Rhetorics of racial power" 11), should not be obfuscated through simplifications into "individualized conceptualization" of "racial categories". I look at the six post-apartheid novels of Moele and Mhlongo in order to test whether they affirm what Milazzo ("Rhetorics" 129) laments as "racism viewed merely as individual prejudice" evident in much of post-apartheid criticism that excludes "the true nature of racism having institutional and structural dimensions." In Milazzo's ("Rhetorics" 129) view, this kind of a post-apartheid "shift away from a concern with institutional racism and white supremacy" that commentators on South African literature employed appropriately in critiquing apartheid-era

literary discourses, leads to inadequate analyses of South African literature on the socio-economic crossroads faced by black people in the post-apartheid period.

De Kock (26) decries the same flaw in the interpretation of post-apartheid literary discourses in his observation that,

At a planning colloquium [of a then forthcoming essay collection entitled *Cambridge History of South African Literature*] at Wits in 2008, the editors urged writers to imagine they were writing for an audience conceived of transnationally, with little prior knowledge of the field. Writers were urged to let go of the “internal” or older national disagreements and controversies in South African criticism.

The so-called “older national disagreements and controversies in South African criticism” the predominantly white setters of agenda (De Kock 26) forbade in this impactful meeting refers literally to discourses on institutional racism and its structural deprivation of the blacks continuing to be oppressed during democratic rule. Such a stance by dominant literary critics in South Africa continues to this day, where epistemic hegemony surreptitiously protects white privilege in the name of a transnational nonracialism. This is why I saw the need to re-interpret the post-apartheid novels of Moele and Mhlongo. My first aim in doing this is to redress what Milazzo (“Racial power and colorblindness” 37) has debunked as “the ways in which the ‘post-apartheid canon’ has been (mis)represented”. Using Moele’s and Mhlongo’s narratives as examples, I demonstrate how the works of black post-apartheid authors disprove, rather than affirm, such views by dominant critics of post-apartheid South African literature assuming that this group of imaginative artists has forsaken apartheid-era censures of white privilege and other related themes.

The rationale for post-apartheid scholarly hegemony in South Africa invoking the notion of transnationalism in order to silence what I see as continuing literary engagements with structural racism and white privilege is clear. The significant South African literary critic Leon De Kock (28), using such a rationale, argues that while remaining important or even necessary for a sense of history and drive in making distinct some sort of national imaginary, “the category ‘South African’ as a marker of a literary field [...] has irrevocably entered into the fluid waters of ‘trans’, the transitive cusp of crossing and recrossing, of absorbing the fictional self into (now easier, more fluid) spaces of related elsewhere and of absorbing the otherness of such elsewhere into the fictional self”. Recognising what De Kock and the other critics describe as “a transnational turn” of South African literature starting from the 1990s in post-apartheid South Africa thus, includes their ideological acknowledgement that nationally, apartheid has collapsed while transnationally the world had begun to flatten out laterally, with national boundaries “suddenly [becoming] superfluous in the wake of economic and technological flows uniting people within global networks” (De Kock 22, 28). In South African post-apartheid transnational “literary-

cultural pursuits the desire [is] to step beyond the enclosure of the 'national' [...] 'the struggle' terrain," in order to adapt to a post-apartheid modernism in which the "new horizon" is distinctly transnational (De Kock 22). It is from this vantage point that I describe the historical literary engagement with apartheid as indigenous, as opposed to a South African post-apartheid modernism seen by some as necessarily iconoclastic with regard to what I presently posit as an indigeneity.

Unfortunately for post-apartheid South African literature produced by blacks which I argue continues in interesting ways to pursue the liberation struggle as in the era of apartheid, "the increased salience of cultural hybridity and hybridization" forbidding any mention of institutional racism in the new democracy politics, coupled with "the rise of 'world literature'" (De Kock 23), is an index of "how colonial structures of power are reproduced in our time on a global scale" (Milazzo, "Reconciling" 134). Lund (xv) is lamenting such a hegemonic silencing, in his description of the invocation of a transnational episteme such as one manifest in mainstream South African post-apartheid literary analysis in the form of "transnational discourses of racial hybridity that white elites often invoke to delegitimize claims to reparations made by people of color." As may be argued with cross-racial post-apartheid South African fiction of the post-apartheid period, black writers' nuanced handling of issues carried forward from the apartheid era should not be mistaken for a simplistic disregard of what Titlestad (677) describes as the inevitability of South African cities like Johannesburg and Pretoria "engag[ing] African and global modernity."

Mhlongo's and Moele's post-apartheid novels have been produced in a social context where, according to Milazzo ("Racial power" 36), "literary imaginaries, academic scholarship, and public racial discourse in post-apartheid South Africa" have been shaped into a denialism purporting that "economic power is primarily a consequence of individual merit and personal responsibility; and that racial categories should therefore preferably *not* be invoked." I argue that it is in their response to such a context that the novels assume their distinctive textures.

This betrays the continued existence in the democratic government of institutional racism bolstering unequal white privilege. I thus approach the six novels and one collection of short stories in a manner responding to the invitation articulated by Milazzo ("Reconciling" 129), "to rethink the shift away from a concern with institutional racism and white supremacy that is evident in much post-apartheid criticism." In this way, I attempt to determine the extent to which the seven post-apartheid South African publications of prose fiction "[speak] to striking continuities between colonial past and postcolonial present" (Milazzo "Reconciling" 139) within an inef-ficacious scholarship "that silences structural racism and reinscribes color-blindness" (Milazzo, "Reconciling" 36). This situation marks more than twenty years after the dawn of an ostensibly nonracial democratic South Africa.

Mhlongo's and Moele's narratives set in the first decade of post-apartheid South Africa

As far as Mhlongo's oeuvre set in the first decade of South African democracy is concerned, I consider his novels *Dog Eat Dog* (2004) and *After Tears* (2007). Moele's books that I consider, handling the same epoch, are *Room 207* (2006) and *The Book of the Dead* (2009).

Milazzo's ("Racial power" 34) interpretation of the discourse of Moele's *Room 207* as "both challeng[ing] and reinforce[ing] colorblindness discourse and, in mystifying institutional racism, appear[ing] emblematic of the ideological ambiguity and dearth of antiracist militancy that inform much twenty-first century black fiction written in English," incisively identifies the ideological concepts of colour-blindness and its concomitant effacing of institutional racism, to be the concerns of post-apartheid South African fiction by black writers, known during apartheid for their unambiguous antiracist militancy congruous then with the general spirit of fighting for freedom. However, unlike her and the other scholars interpreting a novel like *Room 207* (2006) as discursively ambivalent, I see a consistent combating of apartheid ideologies and a continuity with anti-apartheid narratives of the past in this and the other novels I focus on. I argue that the narrator of *Room 207*'s "seem[ing] terribly split, torn" point of view (Murray 89), is a mere discursive appearance belying the truly constant presence of the counter-colour-blind narrative of the novel.

One of the six friends living in Hillbrow's Room 207, Modishi, has a rural background, and has inherited a farm and his parents' house in the Soweto township of Mapetla (*Room 207* 48–51). The narrator Noko is from a background where his father has told him, a while back, not to expect any financial support from him although he is still in his formative years as an adult (74–5). The characters Zulu-boy and Matome come from rural KwaZulu-Natal and Bolobedu in Limpopo respectively, and like the rest of their roommates have been staying in Hillbrow for eleven years yet continue to regard the urban flat as their 'locker room' away from their real homes in rural South Africa (13). For me, the adult characters and idealised rural landscape forming the psyche of all the inhabitants of the Hillbrow flat symbolise dynamic African ethical dimensions a new democracy in South Africa promised to the formerly marginalised.

The "thousand condoms" forming part of the room's scanty yet ambitious furniture reveal right at the opening of the novel *Room 207* the invincible hugeness of a culturally alien Hillbrow culture (13). The metropolitan allure of Hillbrow thus includes pleasures that, without inner strength and caution, can easily destroy—in the same way healthy, ethical sex contrasts with HIV-AIDS crawling close to it. The primacy of inner strength is a motif of the novel. The character D'nice, has been to "a rural public school" before coming to study at Wits University (36). Moele's description of D'nice's mind as "different" highlights the presence of his rural cultural strength that he has brought along to the new world of Hillbrow. Liquor, as one of

the symbols of debauchery associated with the urbanization/globalization of well-bred rural people, entices D'nice to abandon the inner strength with which he can survive the challenges of a new kind of life in Hillbrow.

D'nice's inner self is not crushed however, hence his confession that he has to keep his mind "forever in a state of intoxication" in order to control such a restive consciousness chafing against Hillbrow city life (36). The communal values of his rural life, symbolised by his continuing briefly during his stay in Hillbrow to wear a smile in relating with fellow citizens, disappears from his face only to survive in his consciousness. This is revealed when he resolves with his inner self to remain his rural self, with the words, "They have to take me as I am, because I am what I am" (36). Some research has shown that such a feature of associating the urban locale with destructive habits concealed in evidently pleasurable attractions like drinking and smoking permeates oral literature, South African indigenous language literature written during apartheid, and post-apartheid English literature written by people from black cultural groups, such as Moele and Mhlongo (see Rafapa). Comments like the present one on the interaction of Room 207 mates with Hillbrow urban life thus fit within a bigger literary-genealogical matrix.

Significantly for the ideological context of post-apartheid South Africa, the surviving African sensibility of the six friends provides them with ammunition to conquer the divisive effects of tribalism, otherwise threatening much needed black racial consciousness even after the political defeat of apartheid. Such a victory is seen when the six young friends accept each other as they are. As a result, Noko the narrator praises the character Zulu-boy as "a Hillbrowean in true nature" (62). Vicariously for the entire circle of friends, the narrator embraces the typically Zulu Zulu-boy, with his temperament of hating the Pedi ethnic group even more than he dislikes the black foreigners from African states described as *makwerekwere*, and his associating every individual "with their tribe or the land they were from" (65). Although for Zulu-boy "the Zulus were the supreme race and after that everybody was subhuman", the author reveals that none of his friends blame him (65). The reason for their attitude, displaying their subversive stance against post-apartheid undermining of black unity, is that Zulu-boy has "inherited" his tribalist terminology from somewhere "in their apartheid past" (65).

In fact, by being who he is and wanting people to take him as he is, Zulu-boy endears himself to everyone around for adhering to their credo echoed earlier by D'nice, of being allowed to be who one is (36). In addition, Zulu-boy subscribes to black solidarity by perpetuating the rural self-preservation of his black people and heeding the exhortation of the parent of one of his flat mates as he leaves his rural home to come to Hillbrow, to stay "away from the ways of the city" (36). The "ways of the city" or the foreign lifestyles it symbolizes here includes forgetting one's pride in ethnic identity or abusing ethnic identity to break away from fellow blacks.

This Zulu-boy achieves in his attractively Zulu way. Moele thus sees ethnic identity positively as a weapon to be appropriated to forge black unity needed in the post-apartheid combat against continued institutional racism, rather than cause division. Otherwise his manipulating characterization to include the six Hillbrow residents always fondly calling each other by their tribal appellations would be gratuitous.

There should be no doubt that Moele's discourse is that of asserting ethnic identity as a weapon against the structural racism keeping blacks in South Africa poor beyond apartheid rule. Extant structural racism serves to maintain the socio-economic privilege of whites, who continue to be institutionally elevated above the majority blacks. The consistency with which the author paints Zulu-boy in heroic terms should dispel any such doubts about the six friends appropriating apartheid-induced tribalism into an empowering self-valuing. Towards the end of the novel Zulu-boy's body has metaphorically been destroyed by Hillbrow's silencing ways, resembling post-apartheid colour-blindness discourses that have translated into a similarly annihilating outcome of institutional racism against underprivileged blacks in a democracy. Rather than elicit anti-heroic pity in the reader, Moele portrays sustained Zulu pride in the dying Zulu-boy "having Aids" and left with only one day to live.

Zulu-boy calls Noko to invite him to his funeral, so that he should "be there when they are closing the Zulu out" (210). As the dying Zulu-boy rounds up his friends to bid them goodbye, he addresses Matome over the phone as "Satan of a Pedi boy", remarkably concluding with an unbroken spirit to valorise metaphorical sexual intercourse with women suffering from AIDS, with the loaded words, "hope you are enjoying the sex" (210). HIV/AIDS clearly provides a metaphor for a sick democratic South Africa relating with marginalized black citizens in a way similar to unsafe sex with an infected partner. By a thematic crescendo where Zulu-boy robustly proclaims that at his own funeral "Mfana womPedi" will continue to meet with the former's Zulu-Africanist resilient spirit in the form of the former's mother, meaningfully described as "a big Zulu woman with a big Zulu heart" (211). Concluding the conversation with the affectionate words "Mfana womPedi", after opening it with the deceptively caustic "Satan of a Pedi boy", should nullify any possibility that Zulu-boy's reference to the ethnic identity of his Hillbrow friends is hateful. Differently from extant apartheid racist agenda, Moele does not utilise such ethnic diction to signal tribal friction within the black people. Finally, Zulu-boy makes a similar phone call to D'nice, declaring unfazed that "Mfana woMtswana, I'm going to sleep today and you will not see the Zulu tomorrow" (211).

D'nice's words, as the exchange unfurls, enhance Moele's use of the HIV/AIDS pandemic as a metaphor of the destructive immanence of institutional racism continuing to devour blacks during the first decade of South African democracy: "Don't we all have [AIDS] and it's just that we don't know yet? It's fashion. If you don't have it you aren't living yet and when you start living you will have it somehow" (212).

The other, more literal, point Moele is making is that under the constraints black people suffer in the kind of skewed democracy we have, and the structural poverty of blacks spawned by an institutional racism favouring whites socio-economically as a group, it is impossible to stop the racialized scourge of HIV/AIDS among blacks.

Such a theme of not disaggregating poverty and HIV/AIDS from institutional racism is reinforced when the dying Zulu-boy himself highlights the inexorability of the pernicious limitations of institutional racism in the democratic South Africa by opening his statement with the allegorical Afrikaans word thus, "Ja! That I have it doesn't make me inhuman, nor does it make me a fool" (212). The Afrikaans word *Ja* metonymically points to an ironically continued apartheid mentality in the new South Africa often referred to in hollow words such as "rainbow nation". Rather than blame the suffering of black people on their own weaknesses, which Milazzo cautions against in her highlighting of potential thematic contradictions in *Room 207*, by such a technique Moele actually delivers a discursive message similar to that of Milazzo herself when she highlights that "AIDS, xenophobia, dispossession, or identity displacement are deeply racialized realities in South Africa" (Milazzo, "Racial power" 38). To disassociate these concepts from racial domination "reinforces colorblind arguments and prevents us from understanding the socio-political function of race" (Milazzo, "Racial power" 38).

Not only do Moele's characters in *Room 207* upset the apartheid institutional racist plan to set black against black by means of a negative emphasis on ethnic difference. The culturally affirming relationship among Zulu-boy and his friends converges with the notion of an underlying African consciousness binding together the different African tribes (see Mphahlele, "What's New" 252-5). Symbolically in their behaviour, the *Room 207* friends exemplifying the post-apartheid South African populace striving to defeat a white privilege society reveal Moele's message that the black characters derive their self-determining spirit from their common Africanness underlying all African consciousnesses and lifestyles (see Mphahlele, "Notes towards" 136). Recourse to African proverbs, idioms and customs that are repositories of African spirituality transcending African ethnic identities are a universal cultural language all the six friends understand in solidarity, as they recline in *Room 207* killing time.

This is why after Modishi's girlfriend has aborted his child, Zulu-boy exclaims, to the laughter of everyone, "I don't know what your ancestors are going to say about that"; as bereaved Modishi appears to invite pity from his friends, the narrator taunts him by saying that "Hillbrow life is not *komeng*" i.e. an initiation school, so no-one is going to comfort Modishi; as the narrator reminisces around Windybrow Theatre about a hustling life in Hillbrow, he makes reference to the African spiritual notion of life after death being invariably blissful, for the reason that punishment for whatever wrongdoing happens during one's existence on earth (56, 158). According to Mphahlele ("Notes towards" 138, 139), African spirituality differs from foreign modes

of religion such as Christianity in that whoever disturbs the harmony between him/herself and other humans and with the universe suffers punishment during his/her physical life through the intervention of the ancestors, and not after death. By means of such characterisation, Moele addresses Milazzo's justifiable concern with the achievements of black post-apartheid South African literature "being potentially contradictory" (Milazzo, "Racial power" 39).

While I agree with Milazzo's ("Racial power" 39) observations that "the realities of racial dictatorship over-determined apartheid fiction" and that "black novelists are finally experimenting with the self-regulating subject and with narratives of free will", I do not see the outcome of such novel crafting playing a reactionary role. Once we concede that the construction of such non-determinist yet socio-politically constrained fictional characterisation demands more profound skill and a much more nuanced decoding by critics, we should uncover continued resistance among black post-apartheid authors such as Moele and Mhlongo. Consummately with the new, more sophisticated post-apartheid weapon among white supremacists of insidious hegemonic discourse, the crafting of such deceptively inane characters require a more profound skill than was the case with overtly protesting characters in the face of crass racial segregation of the past.

In Moele's *The Book of the Dead* (2009) HIV-AIDS deaths are now so large scale as to hint at the climactic drawbacks of a persisting structural racism combined with what Murray (86) has accurately described as the negative impact of the excesses of the predominantly black ruling class on "many black people's lives under the elitist, self-serving variant of democracy that has come to dominate post-apartheid South Africa". As young migrant workers from the protagonist Khutso's rural village of Masakeng occasionally return from the big cities, they are "home to visit their ancestors; to give thanks, to ask for a better tomorrow" (10). The African spirituality premise shows up again when Khutso has passed his matric exams and his mother "dance[s] a ritual dance, thanking all of her ancestors" (27). The defying of ethnic partitioning introduced by Moele in *Room 207* is once more employed to obfuscate whatever ethnic difference might threaten much need black unity in the fight against worsened neo-liberal freedom conditions. Khutso's girlfriend Pretty, hailing from an extraneous tribal identity, puts Khutso's mother at ease with her readiness to partake of goat meat during festivities (52). Significantly she motivates with the universal African spirituality reason that goat meat "is the gods' preferred meat" (52).

The economic lowliness of a family affording only goat meat during a celebration, and the high-class Pretty's cultural solidarity with Khutso's people, satirically points to the democratic South Africa's creation of a new black middle-class co-opted by the economically advantaged whites. Pretty's character speaks to Moele's discourse on a phenomenon whereby few upwardly mobile blacks joining the whites whose affluence has been structurally and institutionally favoured through racial power

from the days of apartheid, refuse to aid a post-apartheid colourblindness that, according to Milazzo ("Rhetorics" 12), seeks to de-politicise institutional racism by denying collective advantage in its appeal to a "shared humanity that precludes any critique of white privilege." Although *The Book of the Dead* (2009) paints on a larger canvas the regrettable co-option of blacks into a self-defeating episteme of colourblindness, Moele does introduce such a social critique in the earlier *Room 207* focusing more on cryptic institutional racism. Before Zulu-boy resurfaces on his deathbed he disappears with a Swazi girl while also collaborating unsuccessfully in a music project with the superstar Brenda. He tells the narrator Noko that he does not "have any complaints because if the song had been a hit he could not walk Hillbrow as a free man" (210–1). The freedom of mingling with his fellow economically struggling people on the streets of Hillbrow signifies a resistance to be co-opted as a token of false noracialism into the white middle-class in post-apartheid South Africa.

It should be Moele's progressive intensity from *Room 207* published in 2006 to *The Book of the Dead* published in 2009 in censuring post-apartheid silencing of white privilege, that has led Murray (89) to repeat her stylistic observation of a conflicted narrator in *Room 207*, this time echoing the same sentiment in the word, "Readers of *The Book of the Dead* have had problems with the unevenness of the work." Observations of such a "splitness" of the narrator of Moele's debut fiction, and "unevenness" of his second novel, stopped short of the kind of unpacking I undertake in this paper.

It is the "indigeneity" Moele's characters bring along to the "modernity" of Hillbrow and post-apartheid South Africa, that strengthens them against a persisting structural disadvantage bolstered by white privilege. White privilege or racial power is still guaranteed by institutional racism—ironically in an equal, democratic South Africa the black characters are in today. Niq Mhlongo's 2004 and 2007 novels (*Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears* respectively) do also confront such a blemish on the face of the new democratic South Africa. In my discussion of the two novels I demonstrate that "a place of belonging" that Mhlongo attempts to define is a post-apartheid South Africa straddling suburban and township black lives, where what Murray (78) describes as the depiction of "a younger generation's battle with unemployment, poverty, AIDS and disillusionment" involves the same issues of reinscribed institutional racism as well as a faked nonracial creation of class.

The protagonist of *Dog Eat Dog* Dingz confronts a white dean at the University of the Witwatersrand where he is studying, so that he can be granted an aegrotat exam under false pretences of having been to a family funeral. In a manner supporting the discourse that "You must lie to the whites in order to survive in this country," he has no scruples about lying to the dean (168, 210). When the dean sees through Dingz's lies and disbelieves his fabricated reason for missing the exam, the latter confronts the former with a metonymic accusation of racism. Dingz's dishonest accusation of the dean with racist supremacy using the words "Meaning that blacks always lie

about their situation,” symbolises post-apartheid black arrogance (210). When the dean invokes the idea of Wits rules having to be respected by students irrespective of their racial identity, the cheating black student Dingz retorts, “Those rules, I think, must also take cognizance of the cultural diversity in this country” (211). After ironically threatening to take his quarrel with the dean to the SRC for justice, Dingz gets away with murder and is “granted a deferred examination” unjustly (211).

Earlier on when this stratagem is hatched, Dunga provides a false justification for Dingz’s truant lying as the fact that in early post-apartheid South Africa “the whites themselves already live in the web of a big lie” (168). Such a justification does contain some truth in as far as persistent white privilege exists in post-apartheid ‘nonracial’ South Africa, where blacks continue structurally to be disadvantaged by institutional racism. However, the author’s technique results in the reader’s sympathy going to the whites. The pathetic position of the white section of post-apartheid South Africa is highlighted when the two white friends Dingz eavesdrops upon in the toilet, amplify it metonymically: “Can you say anything nowadays? They will just dance that toyi-toyi dance of theirs and call you a racist [...] Us white people no longer have a hope in this country [...] They’ve got the power now and there’s nothing we can do.” (169)

In a manner differentiating emphases in Mhlongo’s discourses from those in Moele’s, the two white friends’ ascription of white group insecurity to power abuse by blacks as a group does echo even the sentiments of some blacks in post-apartheid South Africa, as when Dunga encourages his friend Dingz to act irregularly with the words, “Nearly everything in life is a gamble, including your own existence at Wits. If you look for certainties, you have far to reach and little to find in this world; our very existence is uncertainty itself.” (167) The deceptively literal isolation of white blame evident in Dunga’s claim that “the only language that whites understand in this country is lies”, figuratively dissolves confinement of castigation to the whites (167) in post-apartheid democracy. A close scrutiny of this dialogue yields a paradoxical fusing of races in post-apartheid capitalist South Africa where middle-class blacks and whites connive in their economic monopoly to exploit the majority blacks who on the whole remain alone in the lowest economic strata.

Due to existence of the employment equity pursuing affirmative action in post-1994 South Africa, the dean could as well have been a black person with the required qualifications. Mhlongo opts to leave some white characters such as the dean in some management positions in order to negate views by some extremist whites that “Unless you apply some black shoe polish to your face and shave your beard [...] then [...] demand affirmative action” you will not be empowered in the democratic South Africa (170). Mhlongo’s two white characters working next to Dunga complain that “This affirmative action is killing us white people, it’s just racism in reverse” only to bring out the antithetical message that affirmative action does not benefit working-class

black people as it is purported to be due to institutional racist limitations regulating it (170). One of Mhlongo's discourses through such a characterisation is democratic government's need to explode the myth that personal effort for blacks and whites amounts effectively to equal opportunities since the defeat of crass apartheid, and therefore there is no need within structures of government to accelerate economic opportunities for blacks through employment equity policies like affirmative action.

The sardonic tone of the two white men Dingz hears complaining about what they see as "racism in reverse" in the implementation of affirmative action turns facetious with the image of a white face painted black with shoe polish (170). The idea that such a black veneer will wash off and fail any genuineness or permanency test is Mhlongo's way of satirising the black democratic government's cosmetic nonracialism that attempts to camouflage the economic advantage of whites who should not be painted with the same brush as the blacks. Such opposition to colour-blindness resonates with censure of white privilege a post-apartheid literary critic such as Milazzo ("Racial power" 39) subverts, in a remark like this one that "in [...] various twenty-first century fictions of the black self-regulating subject including *Dog Eat Dog*, *After Tears* and *Room 207*—there is tension between the role played by personal responsibility and the societal constraints that limit the characters' possibilities for survival, self-fulfillment, mobility, or ascent to the middle-class."

We should remember that in black township parlance the word white or *ngamla/mlungu* refers to more affluent members of society, irrespective of their skin colour, who are even capable of offering employment to the less fortunate. From such a perspective, the baseless protest against blacks purportedly benefitting from affirmative action signals a paradoxical transcendence of race in some colour-blind solidarity between historically advantaged whites and the neo-colonial black bourgeoisies together counteracting a widening of economic mobility for working-class blacks. The blacks now enjoying economic middle-class status live as much a lie about an egalitarian society, as the whites do regarding an equal post-apartheid South Africa while continuing to be favoured by institutional racism in *Dog Eat Dog*. Mhlongo reinforces this discourse of an untenably neoliberal middle-class consisting of blacks and whites, in his characterisation of the black Zulu woman externalizing the suffering of black masses while waiting in an inefficient Home Affairs office. In words that could as well be lambasting a white apartheid government, the elderly woman reveals that, clients are treated with disdain under a black government that no longer cares about blacks, lacks respect for them and treats them as "useless [...] like dogs", "now that the elections are over" and the black politicians have won (203).

Mhlongo continues his concerns with the co-option of black parvenus into a predominantly white middle-class, in his later novel also set in the first decade of South African democracy *After Tears*. Consonantly with his discourse in *Dog Eat Dog*, Mhlongo manipulates his protagonist University of Cape Town dropout Bafana Kuz-

way to yield to ephemeral pleasures distracting him from a self-defining project to qualify for the benefits of a modern post-apartheid South Africa. Although Mhlongo accentuates lack of personal effort and individual depravity as a cause of Bafana's failure to heave himself out of apartheid era structural deprivation, Mhlongo discursively makes community protests against post-apartheid institutional racism and a token colour-blind deracialisation of the new capitalist middle-class coincide with Bafana's antiheroic establishment of a fake law practice (154–67). The profundity of such a juxtaposition of climaxes of individual failure on the part of Bafana and a vicariously national fiasco in black post-apartheid leadership, is an index of the novel's function as more than what Titlestad (682) perceives as a "picaresque [...] [mode] in which black urbanity is represented." The criminality of Bafana's attempts at facing the new post-apartheid city's challenges is of epic black-national levels.

Bafana's friend Zero expresses joy with the fact that there is a "revolution" in which the black Soweto residents will teach the democratic government the same lesson as "the apartheid government before them" in their fight against the post-apartheid "monster of capitalism" manifested when residents "have this expensive prepaid with a black ANC government? Why are we, the poor people, discriminated against by our own government?" (156, 157–8). Mhlongo's continued discourses from *Dog Eat Dog* include Zero's observation that ever since the formerly oppressed blacks "voted for them they don't give a fuck about [them] any more" (156). Significantly, the symbolic protest of black people against the ruling party includes one of the new black elite's distractions as being "only interested in exchanging the riches of this country with white people" (157). In a manner revealing Mhlongo's intensified focus on failures of the new black rulers rather than merely the silencing of white privilege, Zero echoes the black residents communal voice thus: "We used to pay cheaper flat rates for water and electricity during apartheid" (156).

Mhlongo strengthens blame on the black post-apartheid government for creating a neo-liberal, capitalist dog eat dog culture in South Africa's democracy in *After Tears*, after he has charted its unfortunate existence in his earlier novel *Dog Eat Dog*. In *Dog Eat Dog*, the words written on a taxi whose occupants have just abused and robbed Dingz and his friend Themba in Soweto, "THOUGH I DRIVE IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH I FEAR NO HIJACKERS, BUT ANOTHER FUEL INCREASE", enhance the image of a partition between black workers and the black middle-class, with a ripple effect where the mantra is survival of the fittest (92). A black led new nonracial middle-class exploits working-class blacks symbolised here by the taxi-drivers, who in turn exploit weaker members of society such as Dingz and Themba who have some multiple protection fee extorted from them before they can feel relatively safe to walk the streets (92). Mhlongo's juxtaposed depictions of the oppressed classes across race psychically remove racial labels from lower classes. The effect is such that the plight of the forgotten black lower classes merges with

highlights of a similar situation for whites of the same lower working-classes, as when the two white friends in the toilet with Dingz regret that "Everything in this country is about the dance nowadays: you want promotion at work, you just dance in the street. You want reduction of electricity or telephone bills, you go to the street and dance. You want a house, you just dance. You think your boss is a racist, you just dance." (168)

In words that should be seen as a nuanced imaginary of the future nonracial society of South Africa, the two white male youths provide what they see as a solution of their social challenges: "Then we must also start learning to dance or the gravy train will pass us by." (168) In the modern South Africa where indigenous racism will be history, both black and white working-class people will have to dance before a new, aloof black-and-white elite opens the economic empowerment door for them. Characterisation in Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* thus hints at a transition from polarised South African societies of the apartheid period. Precursors to a future, racially fused mass of deprived working-class people are Mhlongo's portrayal of white uncertainty through the example of the two white friends about a democratic South Africa, and that of uncertain blacks symbolised in Dingz's image of a train moving between white Johannesburg and black townships where, "crammed like sardines [...] Some people [are] even sitting precariously where the two carriages [join] (171). It should be this unnerving uncertainty about the nature of nonracial society in store for a democratic South Africa Murray (78) is hinting at, by remarking that in *After Tears* "the township is rendered increasingly uncomfortable."

Similarly, to Moele in his early post-apartheid novels *Room 207* and *The Book of the Dead*, Mhlongo's novels of the former phase of democracy *Dog Eat Dog* and *After Tears* do handle the drawbacks of the lingering effects of institutional racism in this epoch. This is why Dingz and his friends in *Dog Eat Dog* protest against institutions like Wits remaining "ivory towers to black South Africans" while blacks lucky enough to enter such exclusive institutions suffer from 'a subtle form of racism practiced by some white lecturers' in cahoots with the black democratic government (142). This is seen when, inter alia, silencing of institutional racism by black democratic rule has victimised structurally disadvantaged black youths such as the acutely parodied Stomachache into "[dropping] out of Wits" (142).

For me, such socio-economic disillusionment with the modern post-apartheid South Africa where empowering African cultural indigeneity has taken the back seat conflicts with a view like Murray's (79) that, "Mhlongo's novels affirm a perhaps idealizing *msawawa*, endorsing homeliness over alienation." As Titlestad (685) accurately observes, there is indeed a difference in tone between Mhlongo's and the other post-apartheid black novelists' discourse on the modern city anxieties faced by people with a black cultural indigeneity. However, the existence to a certain extent of an indigenous cultural anchor to the characters' actions warrant a re-look at Murray's

observation, as well as Titlestad's (685) stretching of Mhlongo's mediated tone to seeing the author's style as "playfully [indulging] the local colour of [...] township/location culture, generally eschewing gravity in favour of narrative momentum." Of course such an analysis by Titlestad is consistent with his rather reductive view of a novel like *After Tears* as normatively picaresque.

In a manner, I see as differing from Mhlongo's artistic moral, Moele's discourse foregrounds resilient black cultural identity in black characters' heroic self-definition as subjects forging their own existence in a post-apartheid state. Such an interpretation should temper more pessimistic critiques of Moele's discourse in *Room 207*, such as Milazzo's comment that, 'From the first page, *Room 207* paints a bleak and uncompromising picture of post-apartheid South Africa that leaves no room for celebration' ("Racial power" 41). Mhlongo's approach is that of exposing institutional racism in ways valorising more the solidarity of working-class citizens across race, in a well-defined fight against a disempowering class hierarchy drawing perpetrators from both races. Derivation of a self-describing agency from an African cultural consciousness in the case of Mhlongo is presumed, rather than characterised in the way Moele handles his novelistic discourse.

This is why in *Dog Eat Dog*, the character Dworkin's laudatory allusions to black citizens who cling radically to historical dates in a manner opposed to a superficial nonracialism in the post-apartheid Johannesburg milieu are relegated to a merely psychic level, not patently enacted in the drama of the novel. Mhlongo achieves this kind of laid back psychological concession of a resilient African cultural identity through the character Dworkin's cryptic reminder to his circle of friends that conforming to post-apartheid colour-blind discourse is "liberal lightweight politics" (213). He calls for pride in "our [black] history" where black heroes like Dingane of the Zulu are not historically marginalised into feebly acknowledged "kaffir king[s]" (213, 214). Such serious talk among Dingz and his friends happens only in the background, while the main action of the novel unfolds within a Reconciliation Day carousel in a bar, where the black youths studying at Wits socialize and celebrate raucously in the most hip of ways—congruously with a modern post-apartheid South Africa in which there is freedom of movement and association even in formerly white residential areas (214–6).

Despite their discursive variations, Mhlongo's and Moele's novels reveal the complex texture of post-apartheid South African society in ways that assert a need for a more introspective and profound political leadership. Milazzo's ("Racial power" 39) concession that "These novels continue to direct our attention towards the multifarious legacies of apartheid and invite us to witness the enduring differential value of black and non-black lives," thus makes a significant point about the invaluable contributions of Mhlongo's and Moele' works.

Mhlongo's and Moele's narratives set beyond the first decade of post-apartheid South Africa

In *Way Back Home* (2013), Mhlongo continues his greater focus on the neo-colonial flaws of black rulers in post-apartheid South Africa by painting more their ironic intensification of black disadvantage. This is seen when former exile Kimathi disrupts the exclusively white middle-class life of Willem and Jacoba by buying Mr Redelinghuys's next door mansion (130). Clinging to evanescent class structure inherited from apartheid segregated economic opportunities, the white couple initially mistake Kimathi for the white neighbour's servant, and only discover days later that the former exile Kimathi is the new owner of the mansion when they see him "drive out in his BMW, wearing a very expensive suit" (131).

The reader tends to empathise with the white neighbours for their failure to adjust to change, as when their inability to afford the luxury life of a former exile now turned a corrupt tenderpreneur comes to the fore. The white couple, unable to afford "a bottle of Glenfiddich single malt whisky" of which there were "only three in the whole country" which Kimathi boasted to a fellow struggle exile turned tender swindler Sechaba to have bought for twenty-eight thousand rands, steal from the whisky after the tormented Kimathi has passed out near the swimming pool (131).

Fortunes of the now flimsy white middle-class have changed so much that it is now they who rummage through leftovers from vulgar rich blacks. In a sense, the reader cannot but pity Willem as he confesses, "Well, after we tried to resuscitate him, I did help myself to half a glass of that stuff [...] The kitchen door was open, so I got myself a glass" (131–2). Kimathi's white neighbours are as pathetic as the only white man in a planned project team George. Although George's construction company has in the past "benefited from government tenders of more than one billion rand" he remains an exploited token engineer to push through tender application documents, hence his wearing "a cheap blue shirt [and] a beltless pair of old blue jeans" (38–9).

This is not to say that Mhlongo's discourse on post-apartheid life beyond the first decade of democracy silences colour-blindness. Mhlongo uses the voice of the veteran struggle figure Yoli, whose father was "caught in 1972 and hanged" after going back to Middelburg and killing a white man named Viljoen following the latter's acquisition of the former's farm in the wake of the forced removals of blacks by the apartheid Boer government, epically denounces cosmetic nonracialism informed by democratic rulers' colour-blindness in her loaded remark, "Now they want to reconcile? Reconciliation se voet", i.e. to hell with Reconciliation (29). Rather, in *Way Back Home* Mhlongo blames colour-blindness more on the corrupt black rulers than the whites whose continued benefits from apartheid period institutional racism are obfuscated more by black rulers. Mhlongo identifies priority on corrupt self-gain as responsible for continued impoverishment of blacks and a heartless consolidation of an unconcerned new black middle-class. Yoli's family, like many more families

whose members sacrificed painfully for the attainment of democracy, continues to live from hand to mouth in a humble township house (29).

On the other hand, former struggle comrades such as Ganyani Novela who has been in exile with the likes of Kimathi, Sechaba and Ludwe lead a lavish life gained from rapaciously using political connections to gain irregular tenders, like Ganyani's "thirty million rand" when the ruling party "promised to build one million new homes for the poor during its first term of office" (38, my emphasis). To shine a spotlight on the corruption preoccupying the symbols of a self-enriching black ruling class, characters such as Kimathi are described spending almost all of their life in expensive hotel negotiating corrupt business deals with government, where Kimathi, for example displays his self-important arrogance when he puts "all three of his cellphones on the table, including the one he had just taken from his cream Dunhill jacket" (38). Ganyani turns down an offer of "seven per cent [...] of nine hundred million" rands, for the reason that he "cannot betray the spirit of [black South Africans'] noble revolution by taking such a small percentage," in his ignoble justification that he "didn't join the struggle and go into exile to be a poor man when liberation came" (39). Mhlongo's dialogue satirises these representatives of the new democratic government for parodying the noble goals of the liberation struggle, of uplifting the quality of life of the entire nation as opposed to corrupt self-aggrandizement.

In what appears to be the common approach of Mhlongo's and Moele's novels commenting on post-apartheid South African life beyond the first decade, emphasis on blacks' personal responsibility grows in inverse proportion with diminishing a chastisement of white privilege inherited from a past unequal society. This is why the entire unfurling of the return of Senami's spirit home takes place within the matrix of her and other freedom fighters' sexual abuse and criminal brutalization by movement leaders at the Amilcar Cabral camp in Angola. Kimathi, then known as Comrade Pilate conspires with other movement leaders such as Comrade Idi (real name Ludwe), among others to torture, assault, rape and eventually murder Lady Comrade Mkabayi (real name Senami) for trumped up charges meant to cover the movement leaders' immorality and criminality. Before torment overpowers Kimathi, who commits suicide (208), it is Senami's ghost tormenting his conscience in spite of his apparent peace of mind brought by corrupt plunders in the name of now achieved freedom.

Unlike with Moele's earlier use of heroic African cultural values to defeat colour-blindness, in Mhlongo's *Way Back Home*, corrupt government officials and their former struggle combatants, livestock is "slaughtered to thank the ancestors" for dubious reasons having nothing to do with caring for the other human being. This is why Kimathi slaughters a sheep to "thank the ancestors" after "winning the tender to fix the potholes in Bassonia" (131). With such a narrative manipulation Mhlongo

seems to indicate that beyond the first year of democracy a salvaging African cultural consciousness has not only been eclipsed, but has been so distorted by rampant corruption that it has completely lost meaning. Indeed, African cultural values in Mhlongo's novels are as distorted for corrupt financial gain as in his 2016 collection of short stories *Affluenza*. After the protagonist of Pedi cultural identity has died in a car accident in the Eastern Cape, culture is invoked to exploit the Xhosa family she was visiting when she met her death (63). In the pretext of honouring Pedi customs, the Maja family make the emissaries of the Xhosa traditional family pay a bride price of thirty-five thousand rands in cash and two expensive suits "bought at Markham in Phalaborwa"; ten thousand rands for a surviving three month old girl before she can stay with her late mother's "in-laws"; and ten thousand rands towards her funeral—over and above the costs for transporting the corpse from Eastern Cape to Limpopo and footing the mortuary bill (77–8).

In what may be described as a call for a return to indigenous African cultural morality at the hands of Moele in his novel *Untitled* (2013), abuse of women traced back to exile days in Mhlongo's *Way Back Home* assumes a central place. In *Untitled*, the teenager protagonist Mokgethi drops out of a private school located in a ritzy suburb due to the general post-apartheid economic strife of blacks and enters, and finds herself in a public school that does not "have a school bus, established sports facilities or modern sports equipment, a library or a laboratory" (183). For Moele at this phase of his writing career looking at post-apartheid life beyond its nascent euphoria, the national impact of a still-racialised economy is relegated as a backdrop against which the excesses and overall depravity of black leaders themselves.

Genuine nation builders such as Mokgethi's lady teacher Miss Kgopa do exist, yet they are overwhelmed within black self-rule by the immoral and corrupt majority (87). Mokgethi's new school principal Shatale rapes and continues for a long time to abuse one of Mokgethi's friends Lebo, and the other girls (74, 88). School dropouts and upwardly mobile black males see less powerful males and women as objects of their sadism and libido. Moele employs the voice of the narrator Mokgethi to challenge the black communities themselves to take the lead in moral regeration: "Cry, little girls of my beloved country, the Bonolos, the Pheladis, the Lebos and the Dineos that have to live, are living, in communities full of men who prey on us every day." (208)

If in *Room 207*, as Milazzo ("Racial power" 49) has observed, Moele "avoids falling back onto a deterministic victimization of blacks and represents a post-apartheid South Africa in which racial pride, knowledge, and personal choice can contribute to escaping destitution," such a theme is enhanced and covers a wider scope in *The Book of the Dead* (2009). The metaphor of HIV/AIDS as extant institutional racism requiring black people to counteract with their survival kit of adaptive African cultural indigeneity introduced in *Room 207*, explodes to all consuming proportions in *The Book of the Dead* where the scapegoat of apartheid has receded further into oblivion.

Moele's discourse to rally black people to fight self-destructive social tendencies as a nation transcends a mere magnification in *The Book of the Dead*, to acquire pandemic dimensions menacing to self-destruct a democracy that should otherwise regenerate in exuberance through a versatile indigenous morality relayed from the older to the younger generations—in order for a properly constituted post-apartheid modernity to be forged.

Conclusion

Close analyses of Mhlongo's and Moele's novels set in the first decade of South African democracy reveal differing ways in which each of them interrogates views such as Milazzo's ("Rhetorics" 8) that, "Twenty years after the official end of apartheid, racial inequality remains rampant in South Africa." I have demonstrated also how in *Room 207* Moele's discourse problematises a statement like Milazzo's ("Racial power" 46), about 'emphasis on ethnic differences' not providing 'a useful antiracist strategy.'

My discussion above has differentiated Mhlongo's prioritisation of the evil of institutional racism and colour-blindness above the primacy of black rulers' moral introspection. At the time Moele castigates the black leaders and their followers in *Untitled* in his more pronounced call for a return to their liminal indigenous cultural values, Mhlongo through the imaginaries posed by the discourse of *Way Back Home* demystifies the origins of corruption not to be inherited from a scapegoat apartheid, but as inherent among a power abusing black leadership since its days of exile. This is an important negation of the stock tendency in post-apartheid South Africa to practise a denialism whereby everything is blamed on the legacy of apartheid.

There are more ways in which a reading of the novels I adopt in this study refines and enhances how critics so far have charted their contribution to South African post-apartheid literary discourse. One example is how both Mhlongo and Moele progressively confirm in their novels that 'the incisive anti-establishment critique that characterized most apartheid literature by black writers can no longer be taken for granted,' as Milazzo ("Reconciling" 132) has observed in her earlier discussions. Only, the two novelists champion such a stance in ways stretching Milazzo's original ("Reconciling" 132) notion of "anti-establishment"—to imply speaking truth also to a modern, post-apartheid order led by a regrettably flawed black elite.

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Rodwell Makombe

Rodwell Makombe is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of the Free State, South Africa. He holds a PhD in Literature and Philosophy. His areas of research interest include postcolonial studies, literary representations of crime and violence and cultural studies.
Email: makomber@ufs.ac.za

Images of woman and her search for happiness in Cynthia Jele's *Happiness is a four-letter word*

Images of woman and her search for happiness in Cynthia Jele's (2010) *Happiness is a four-letter word*

Over the years, African 'feminist' scholars have expressed reservations about embracing feminism as an analytical framework for theorizing issues that affect African women. This is particularly because in many African societies, feminism has been perceived as a negative influence that seeks to tear the cultural fabric and value systems of African communities. Some scholars such as Clenora Hudson-Weems, Chikenje Ogunyemi, Tiamoyo Karenga and Chimbuko Tembo contend that feminism as developed by Western scholars is incapable of addressing context-specific concerns of African women. As a result, they developed womanism as an alternative framework for analysing the realities of women in African cultures. Womanism is premised on the view that African women need an Afrocentric theory that can adequately deal with their specific struggles. Drawing from ideas that have been developed by womanist scholars, this article critically interrogates the portrayal of women in Cynthia Jele's *Happiness is a four-letter word* (2010), with particular focus on the choices that they make in love relationships, marriage and motherhood. My argument is that Jele's text affirms the womanist view that African women exist within a specific cultural context that shapes their needs, aspirations and choices in a different way. **Keywords:** African culture, sisterhood, male companionship, womanism.

Introduction

Happiness is a four-letter word (2010) delineates the challenges that professional African women experience in their personal lives and the choices that they make in order to attain what they perceive as "happiness". Although economic freedom and education enable them to satisfy their material needs and gain leverage over their male partners, the four sisters, Nandi, Princess, Tumi and Zaza believe that they can only be fulfilled through marriage, childbearing and male companionship. What is particularly unsettling about the protagonists' choices, especially from a radical feminist point of view, is that they endure difficult relationships—sometimes with men that appear to be useless—in spite of their economic freedom. Nandi wants to marry Thomas although she is aware of his suspicious ties with his former girlfriend, Pinky. Tumi opts to forgive her husband, Tshepo, after he has betrayed her trust by impregnating another woman. Similarly, Zaza forgoes her sexually satisfying relationship with Bongani for the sake of her marriage and children. The same can be said of Princess who opts to rehabilitate her drug-addicted and thieving boyfriend

instead of getting him arrested. In order to critically interrogate the representation of women in *Happiness is a four-letter word* (to be abbreviated *Happiness* henceforth) and the choices that they make, I draw from ideas developed by a range of womanist scholars such as Clenora Hudson-Weems (“Africana womanism”), Tiamoyo Karenga and Chimbuko Tembo (“Kaiwada womanism”) among others. These theories are particularly relevant to this analysis because they capture the specific cultural context that informs and shapes the decisions and choices of African professional women as portrayed in *Happiness*.

Background: Cynthia Jele and *Happiness is a four-letter word*

Cynthia Nosizwe Jele is a South African writer of the post-apartheid era who was born in the Northern Province of Mpumalanga. She studied Environmental Health at the Natal Technikon and later obtained a BA in International Business from North Central College in Illinois, USA (Jones 2). Although *Happiness* is her first novel, Jele has written two short stories that won the 1st and 4th prize in the 2008 BTA/Anglo-Platinum Short Story Competition. These stories brought her name into the limelight of South African literature. Looking at her academic and professional background (she worked as an *au pair* in the United States of America and a Public Health Officer in Mpumalanga’s Health Department), it is clear that Jele did not receive any professional training in creative writing. However, she claims that she was inspired to take creative writing seriously when she attended a creative writing workshop in the United States (Jani 3). Probably, Jele draws from her own personal experiences as a professional-cum-business woman to tell the stories of career women in her debut novel. *Happiness* was not only successful as a book but also reworked into an equally successful film. In 2011, the book won the Commonwealth Award for first book: Africa region, and the M-Net Literary Award in the Film category. The novel was also shortlisted for the 2011 Booksellers Choice Award. When it was adapted into film in 2016, it competed with famous Hollywood movies such as *Fifty Shades of Black*, *Hail Caesar* and *The Danish Girl*. *Drum Digital* (2016) reports that the film grossed over R10 million on the South African box office circuit.

When it was first published, *Happiness* received favourable reviews particularly for its attempt to represent the “new South African woman” (Gqola 120). While other texts by South African women writers such as Angela Makholwa and Sindiwe Magona have focused on gender violence and exploitation of women in the domestic sphere, Jele recognises that some women in South Africa have transitioned from the drudgery of domestic exploitation to the public sphere which for a long time, has been a preserve of men. Jele’s characters do not necessarily depend on men for financial sustenance. As a result, their love relationships (except for Zaza’s relationship with Bheki) are not guided by financial considerations. James Murua (2) claims to have learnt a few things about South African women from Jele’s novel. Firstly, he

learnt that “South African women are way too forgiving” and secondly that they are “way too kind”. While this reading seems to paint all South Africa women with one stereotypical brush, the point is that Jele’s characters behave in a way which is not expected of educated and financially independent women. Oftentimes, financially independent women are perceived as strong-willed and intolerant of difficult and exploitative relationships. The reason Jele’s women appear to be “way too forgiving” and “way too kind” is probably because of the unique cultural context that shapes their aspirations in a different way. Jele’s protagonists are intolerant of patriarchal oppression, however, they also value culturally sanctioned institutions such as family, heterosexual relationships and marriage. What is important here is that these women chose certain relationships because they believe that their personal happiness is bound up in those relationships. Thus, from this perspective, *Happiness* seems to advance the womanist view that men and women in African societies are complementary sexes and not antagonists. While some feminists may consider this as a cowardly approach that gives patriarchy a lifeline, womanists view this as a much more effective strategy especially in societies where patriarchy is still deeply entrenched. This approach resonates with Obioma Nnaemeka’s (1999) nego-feminism or “no-ego feminism” which emphasises “issues of peace, conflict management and resolution, negotiation, complementarity, give-and-take, and collaboration” (Alkali *et al.* 247). Jele seems to embrace the nego-feminist view that “it is only weak people that seek revenge; strong people forgive, while intelligent people ignore” (in Alkali *et al.* 247). Womanists do not fight patriarchy to become new oppressors but to bring about an equitable society where both sexes treat each other with mutual respect. Ego-feminism envisages a future where male chauvinism is not replaced by feminist ego but by a “coming together of men and women for harmonious survival where there is no victor nor vanquished” (Alkali *et al.* 250).

African professional women and the quest for ‘happiness’

One of the major tenets of Clenora Hudson-Weems’ *Africana womanism* is that it is grounded in African culture. Although some scholars have argued that the notion of “African culture” is essentialist, I argue that Clenora Hudson-Weems uses it, not to suggest that there is one African culture, but to recognize specific cultural contexts of African women as opposed to white European women. Nah Dove (516) embraces *Africana womanism* as an Afrocentric theory and sees “the concept of culture as a tool of analysis for understanding the nature of African women’s experiences”, “a weapon of resistance and a basis for defining a new world order”. The question of culture is particularly important in *Happiness* because it is culture that influences the decisions of the protagonists regardless of their educational and economic status.

Nandi, Tumi, Princess and Zaza belong to two of South Africa’s major cultural groups, namely the Zulu and the Sotho. Arguably, these cultures still perceive mar-

riage, family and child-bearing as well as male companionship as important, particularly in the life of a woman. Like womanists, Jele's protagonists seem to believe that cultural practices need to be reformed, rather than discarded, so that they can meet the specific needs of women. This is evident through Nandi's wedding dress which has to be adjusted so that it could fit her. In other words, the marriage institution (wedding dress) should not be discarded, rather it should be adjusted/reformed to suit Nandi's big body (needs). Womanist scholars such as Hudson-Weems, Karenga and Tembo argue that African women have never been perceived as the "second sex" in African culture. Karenga and Tembo (36) argue that ancient African religious and cultural practices as seen in Kemet (Ancient Egypt) never constructed women as appendages, but rather as equals, of men. It must be noted, however, that this argument is not meant to defend some oppressive African cultural practices but to recognize the specific cultural context of African women which is significantly different from that of Western women. I appropriate these views in order to interrogate the choices and aspirations of the four women in Jele's text.

Clenora Hudson-Weems (206) argues that Africana womanism is a "theoretical concept designed for all women of African descent" whose "primary goal [...] is to create [Africana women's] own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and in action". Nikol G. Floyd-Alexander and Evelyn M. Simien (68) have criticized Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism for claiming to speak for all women of African descent. However, in my view, Hudson-Weems' theory is not designed to essentialise African women but to recognize and appreciate their cultural context. Africana womanism departs from feminism in that it focuses on issues that affect black people such as racism, classism and sexism. Although Hudson-Weems enumerates eighteen characteristics of womanists in her book *African Womanism: Reclaiming ourselves* (1993), I will focus on a few that are relevant to this article. Alexander-Floyd and Simien (70) put Clenora-Hudson Weems' eighteen tenets of womanism into three categories, namely agency, alliances and attributes. Agency has to do with self-determination. African women need to self-name, self-define and self-identify rather than wait for others to do so on their behalf. It is through self-definition that Africana women "assert their own vision of their reality in opposition to that of the dominant culture". The second theme, alliances, speaks to commitment to family and community. It includes tenets such as "family-centeredness, wholeness, authenticity, flexible role-playing, adaptability, political alignment with black men, and 'genuine sisterhood' with black women" (Alexander-Floyd and Simien 70). Alliances are attained through political alignment with black men and "genuine sisterhood" with black women. The third and final theme—attributes—speaks to the qualities of Africana womanists, which include strength, male compatibility, respect, recognition, and respect for elders, ambition, mothering, nurturing, and spirituality.

Africana womanism significantly departs from mainstream feminism because of its focus on emancipating both men and women. It also departs from Alice Walker's womanism because it does not advocate lesbianism as a way for women to satisfy sexual needs. Hudson-Weems (209) posits that Africana womanists share an important bond of "genuine sisterhood" as opposed to what is perceived as false sisterhood between black and white women in western feminist movements. Karenga and Tembo (43) define sisterhood as a relationship between women and girls united in mutual support and appreciation, and in common views, values, interests, work and struggle. The notion of "genuine sisterhood" is demonstrated in Jele's *Happiness* through the four sisters who support each other emotionally. Their sisterhood can be construed as genuine because they all belong to the same social class and experience similar life challenges. More importantly, Africana womanism advocates "positive male companionship" which is seen as vital to family and the mutual survival of black men and women.

Cynthia Jele's novel explores the lives of four middle class professional women that live and work in Johannesburg. Nandi Hadebe is an accountant by profession and a junior partner at Le Roux, Mathaba and Associates accounting firm. She is in a relationship with Thomas Phiri and, at the beginning of the novel, they are busy preparing for their upcoming wedding. Tumi is a teacher, married to Tshepo Modise, a businessman and co-founder of an information technology company named SA TeleCom Inc. Zaza Zulu is a former bank teller, now married to Bheki, a prosperous businessman who is "bursting his balls" to provide for his family. Although Zaza is characterized as a "trophy wife" because of her decision to marry a rich man for material reasons, she also runs a fashion boutique and an orphanage named eT-hembeni. Bheki is always busy with his business ventures and has no time to satisfy Zaza's sexual needs. As a result, she engages in an extra-marital affair with Bongani Gumede, a businessman who generously finances her orphanage. Princess is a lawyer by profession and an independent young woman who prides herself as an "equal opportunity lover" because of her liberal social/sexual life. She has had several relationships with different men but now she is in love with Leo, a Zimbabwean painter who has literally turned her love life upside down. She fell in love with Leo at first sight and eventually asked him to move in with her—against her own rules.

Jele's story revolves around the marital-love relationships and experiences of the four protagonists. The novel opens with Nandi and Thomas' wedding preparations which are momentarily disrupted by Thomas' "disappearance". Thomas has a son named Lunga with his ex-girlfriend, Pinky, a situation which complicates his new relationship with Nandi. Nandi believes that Pinky is taking advantage of Lunga to lure Thomas back. Thomas, on the other hand, is torn between his fatherly duties to his son and his equally important responsibilities to Nandi, his fiancée. While Nandi is portrayed as a woman who views success in terms of marriage and "perfect" male

companionship, Pinky is depicted as a conniving, selfish woman who has become a stumbling block to Nandi's happiness. Owing to their rivalry over Thomas, Nandi and Pinky have become arch enemies. Pinky's behaviour—for example—attending funerals and other functions in Thomas' family, suggests that she is attempting to lure Thomas back into her life. Both Nandi and Pinky conceive personal happiness in terms of male companionship in a marriage set-up. While Nandi wants Thomas' full attention in view of the imminent wedding, Pinky takes every opportunity to steal his attention by claiming that Lunga is ill. While the tension between Thomas, Nandi and Pinky affirms the womanist view that men and women need each other, it also shows that harmony of the sexes is not possible when individuals are consumed by selfish needs. Nandi's dream of an ideal relationship with Thomas is impossible because of Lunga who permanently ties Thomas to his previous relationship. As a father, Thomas confesses that he becomes "edgy" each time there is a matter that involves Lunga. As a result, he is rarely home and sometimes Nandi has to crawl into bed and sleep alone. In Nandi's eyes, Pinky is thus a "pest" and "a lunatic girlfriend" (17) who disrupts her potential happiness. Although Africana womanism stresses genuine sisterhood among African women, it appears that sisterhood only applies to women who belong to the same social class, and are willing to forego their personal interests for the happiness of another.

The experiences of the four women suggest that a stable relationship is the dream of every woman while marriage (to a compatible partner) is the ultimate fulfilment. This is not to say that women are appendages of men *per se*, but to say that women need men as much as men need women. Nandi is brought up in a Zulu culture that values marriage and expects women to be married at a particular age. This explains why she demands Thomas' attention and celebrates her upcoming wedding as a major milestone in her life. Her friends and relatives believe that she has made it. The wedding is a reward for her perseverance, which obviously is seen as an important virtue for a woman. All "important women" in her life are there "to witness her success" (9). Part of Nandi's achievement is that she has found a man who is willing to give her a new identity. She cannot wait to be identified as "Mrs Thomas Phiri" (9). While Nandi's behaviour could be read as evidence of internalized patriarchal values, the fact that she is educated and financially stable complicates matters. Kaiwada womanists such as Karenga and Tembo (42) argue that a fundamental concept in Kawaida is that humans are persons-in-community not isolated individuals. Therefore, Kaiwada womanism conceives Black women as women-in-family and women-in-community. Nandi celebrates marriage because in her culture and social community, a married woman commands respect.

Although Jele highlights the difficulties that women encounter in an attempt to satisfy cultural expectations, she does not advocate dismantling the marriage institution. Nandi's battle with a wrong-sized wedding dress which requires a group of

women to help her fit into it suggests that the marriage institution, as it exists, needs to be adjusted in order to cater for the needs of women. Marriage is designed for women and not women for marriage. Therefore, the current scenario where Nandi has to monitor her diet (that is deny herself bodily needs) in order to fit into her wedding dress needs to change. Dieting speaks to a process of suppressing individual subjectivity in order to conform to patriarchal standards, which implies that marriage, in its current design, is like a tight dress that is repressive and suffocating to women. Nandi has to literally “suck her tummy into her wedding dress” (10) while her friends “yank and squeeze and tuck and nip with no success” (11). Nandi and friends do not think of discarding or replacing the dress with a new one. Rather they suggest that a seamstress should be sought to adjust it to Nandi’s size. This resonates with Chikwenje Ogunyemi’s (69) view that “the ultimate difference between the feminist and the womanist is what each sees of patriarchy and what each thinks can be changed”. In view of this, *Happiness* can be read as a womanist text which does not only focus on liberating women as individuals but also reforming patriarchal institutions to cater for the needs of women.

In defining what they call “Kaiwada womanism”, Tiamoyo Karenga and Chimbuko Tembo (42) argue that “African womanhood is open-textured, for we realize that as our experience and knowledge expand, we can and must change it without discarding its essential elements”. The “essential elements” alluded to here are perhaps the underlying principles that guide African women’s decisions and choices. Tumi does not divorce Tshepo for his unfaithful behaviour; instead she demands an apology and orders him to do the right thing by paying “damage” to his girlfriend’s family. Similarly, Princess opts to rehabilitate Leo, her drug addicted boyfriend, instead of sending him to prison. Quoting Alison Perry, Ogunyemi, further argues that a womanist is “a woman who is committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female” (72). This is evident in the way Nandi treats her ex-boyfriend, Chris Phakathi, when he returns from London. Chris dumped Nandi on the verge of their wedding and left her with huge bills to pay. However, upon his return, all Nandi wants is an apology that comes from the bottom of his heart. The focus is on forgiveness and reconciliation rather than militant confrontation of the sexes. In deciding to reach a compromise with their male counterparts, the four sisters affirm the womanist view that men and women complement each other. Patricia Hill Collins argues that womanism, as a philosophy, “supplies a way for black women to address gender oppression without attacking black men” (1). Similarly, Karenga and Tembo (35), define woman as “a bright presence”, “a soulful being” with “a mission on earth”—her mission is to bring harmony and reconciliation in society. As a result, the needs and aspirations of women are aligned to those of the community. “As women we are persons in community, not isolated individuals and our freedom and dignity are inseparable from that of our community and our families”

(Karenga and Tembo 42). Daphne Ntiri (166) also intimates that within the Africana womanist circle, men are not excluded from women's issues. On the contrary, they are invited as partners in problem solving and social change. Womanism's stance on relations between men and women probably explains the protagonists' prioritization of family and heterosexual relationships. Zaza, for example, eventually decides to end her extra-marital affair with Bongani because she recognises that her marriage and family are more important than her individual happiness. Like Ogunyemi's African womanist, Zaza "recognizes that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate [cultural and economic] considerations into her philosophy" (64). While Hudson-Weems' Africana womanism prioritises racial issues which are relevant to the American context, African womanism puts economic and cultural considerations ahead of sexual issues.

Although the four sisters are financially independent they believe that their individual happiness is intertwined with the happiness of their male counterparts. Nandi becomes restless when Thomas briefly disappears on her during the wedding preparations. When he eventually reappears, she literally throws herself into his arms. The reason for her excitement is that Thomas' reappearance has saved her from public shame (15). What we see through Nandi is that education and financial independence do not necessarily make men irrelevant in women's lives. Nandi still subscribes to particular cultural values in spite of her level of education. A womanist, as conceptualised by Karenga and Tembo (40) is culturally grounded, which means "to be rooted in the knowledge and practice of the culture of one's people, to extract lessons from it and to use it in emancipatory, transformative and enriching ways". Cultural grounding is important for womanists because "it is culture that gives us identity, purpose and direction" (Karenga and Tembo 41). Nandi's views in relation to marriage are grounded in Zulu culture. This is evident in her rather "superstitious" belief that Thomas' disappearance and his seeing the wedding dress before the wedding are all indicators of a wedding that is doomed to fail. One should note that womanism does not celebrate everything in culture including oppressive practices. Rather, it gives women the freedom to choose "the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world" (Karenga and Tembo 35)

The title of the novel, *Happiness is a four-letter word*, can be interpreted as an allusion to the four sisters who find happiness in sisterhood. In other words, women can overcome challenges and find happiness if they unite and work together as sisters. However, the events in the text also suggest that sisterhood alone, without male companionship, cannot guarantee happiness. Happiness is love—a four-letter word—but this love is two-dimensional. On one hand, women have to love each other as sisters but on the other, they need male companionship. Nandi seeks happiness through marriage to a man she loves. Tumi believes that a child will complete her womanhood. Princess ignores her own rules because she has found Leo, a man after

her own heart. Before Leo, Princess was an individualist with no obligations in life.

However, when she meets Leo, she feels fulfilled. The fact that the four sisters continue to be restless in spite of their comfortable lives implies that happiness is an internal rather than an external force. Zaza leaves her “three-million-rand house in Bryanston” to visit Bongani in his “dilapidated flat in Sunnyside” (18). The fact that Zaza has to “close her eyes” to experience “bliss” (18) with Bongani shows that the bliss that she seeks is inside her. Although she is unfaithful to her husband, Zaza still prioritizes her family and marriage. Each time she sleeps at Bongani’s flat in Sunnyside, she has to rush back home early in the morning to make “toast and rice krispies” (19) for her children.

Through Zaza, Jele portrays woman not only as wife and mother but also as a human being with feelings that need to be satisfied. Oftentimes, when a woman gets married, it is assumed that motherhood takes away desire for sex and replaces it with love for children. Zaza’s experience shows that motherhood is not something natural to every woman but something that a woman performs. In fact, Zaza has mastered the art of performing both motherhood and wifedom. When she goes to the airport to welcome Bheki upon his return from Tanzania, she wears “a sexy strapless dress” which she knows would make him go “berserk” (67). She also performs the giggles and endearments that she makes in response to his comments.

In an interview with Susan Arndt (717), Ogunyemi emphasises the need for men and women to work together to bring about change in African societies. Men and women need each other. Princess needs Leo because there is no other man who makes her happy the way Leo does. Leo also needs Princess because she provides and cares for him. When Leo becomes a drug addict and starts stealing from Princess, the latter supports him and pays for his rehabilitation. The point is that the quest for freedom from patriarchal oppression needs not be translated into fighting against men because, as womanists argue, African men and women share the same destiny. When her friends advise her to report Leo to the police, Princess defends him saying that “Leo is not a common criminal” and that “he does not belong in jail” (209). Although one can blame Princess for allowing herself to be used by Leo, her behaviour resonates with the womanist view that it is possible for “a woman to love a man totally; just for himself and not for the fact that he was the father of her offspring or the provider of her personal comforts” (Osammor in Alkali *et al.* 249). Thus, for all his drug addiction and criminal tendencies, Princess keeps and protects Leo. The same can be said of Bheki and Zaza who eventually realize that their relationship is not working and that they need to do things differently. Bheki acknowledges that he has been neglecting Zaza by prioritizing business while Zaza also acknowledges (to herself) that she has been doing wrong by cheating on her husband. It is at this point (when both sexes acknowledge the wrong things they do) that they can begin to work together to bring change.

On the other hand, Tumi, in spite of her material success which is evident in her relocation from the disorderliness of the township to the peace and quiet of the suburbs (29), seeks fulfilment, not in herself, but in another human being—a child. Her world is shattered when she realizes that Tshepo has already fathered a child with Nomkhosi. Tumi believes that her inability to give Tshepo a child makes her less of a woman than Nomkhosi. She blames herself for being a failed woman as much as she blames Nomkhosi for being loose and Tshepo for “spreading his seed to every willing cow” (113). What is evident throughout *Happiness* is that women sympathize with each other on matters that do not involve rivalry over a man. Nandi cannot sympathize with Pinky’s position as a single mother; rather she blames her for being an opportunist who wants to take advantage of Lunga to weave her way back into Thomas’ life. Although Pinky has a son with Thomas, Nandi does not see the reason why Pinky should continue attending funerals in Thomas’s family.

Jeje’s *Happiness* has demonstrated that women in different cultural contexts have different needs. It has also shown that educated and financially independent women may choose to deal with difficult relationships instead of living as single women. In discounting the family-centredness of womanism, Tendai Mangena (11) argues that “insisting on a family centered approach means that women writers have to be blind and silent about issues such as rape and incest, and such blindness entails colluding with patriarchy on women oppression”. Although Mangena has a point in highlighting the dangers of idolising family, womanism does not necessarily promote blindness and silence in the face of such issues. Rather, it proposes an approach that includes both men and women in finding solutions to these problems rather than one that focuses on the victim while ostracising the victimiser. Since womanism does not see men and women as fighting different battles, financial independence for women, as we see in *Happiness*, is used to mend rather than destroy relations between men and women. Although the four women provide support to each other, they also realize that they cannot do without men. Thus instead of seeking to satisfy each other sexually as Celie and Shug Avery do in Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple*, they seek sexual satisfaction from their male counterparts. Jeje thus appears to advocate sisterhood for moral and emotional support rather than for sexual satisfaction. Each time a friend is in a difficult situation, the other sisters visit and help her to recover. When Tumi discovers that Tshepo has impregnated Nomkhosi, Nandi takes her into her house and provides her with emotional support until she is ready to go back to her house. Similarly, Zaza takes Princess in when she is abandoned by Leo soon after discovering that she is pregnant with his child.

The bottom line is that womanism sees divorce or single motherhood as a last resort. The first priority is to fight for the relationship/marriage to work. When Tshepo cheats on his wife, Tumi does not take the radical route of throwing him out for good. Her friends and family also advise her not to push him away. Simi-

larly, Nandi decides to fight against Pinky in order to keep Thomas. As far as the four friends are concerned, a man is worth fighting for. Nandi vows to “play dirty too” (48) when she realizes that Pinky is using Lunga in order to lure Thomas back. Princess goes to the extent of using her money to keep Leo in spite of his addiction problem. Similarly, Bongani’s wife, Lebo, threatens Zaza to bring her husband back home because “the children are confused about the absence of their father” (224). Although some women such as Miriam Mabena and Lebo remain in abusive marriages for financial reasons, others, such as Tumi and Princess, make conscious decisions to forgive their unfaithful men and move on. Lebo confesses that at her age it will not be easy to find another man, “which man would want a tired thirty-something-year-old divorcee with two children when they can have a baggageless and gorgeous twenty-two year-old? It’s tough out there” (225). Lebo’s statement underscores the view that married women ought to unite, not against cheating men, but against women who cheat with their men. Similarly, Tumi eventually reconciles with Tshepo after a short period of separation claiming thus: “I have realized that my husband is a big part of who I am and I am not ready to lose him” (282). To a certain extent, women, as represented in *Happiness*, understand that men, like women, are imperfect beings who deserve to be given a second chance. The experiences of the protagonist bear testimony to the fact men and women need each other. Therefore, instead of fighting each other, they need to work together towards a common destiny.

Marriage as depicted in *Happiness* is a necessary institution that probably needs reform rather than dissolution. Probably, this explains why it is difficult for married women in *Happiness* to seek divorce. They have to think about the children and what their lives would be like outside marriage. Zaza’s maid, Thembi, is an example. She is stuck with a hopeless husband because the children love their father. To make matters worse, her husband, who is useless to her (66) is planning to marry a second wife. Zaza’s reason for remaining in her marriage is that it is her ticket out of poverty. She married Bheki to escape her frustrating job as a bank teller and get money for her sister’s studies. These are issues that usually apply to African women. Womanism is thus “informed by African survival technologies evolved over many centuries by Africans themselves” (Muhwati *et al.* 1). Similarly, Monica Coleman (9) speaks about the need to focus on the ethics of survival among African women which sometimes informs the decisions and choices they make. In marrying Bheki, Zaza chooses money over love. She finds love in her illicit affair with Bongani while fulfilling her marital obligations to Bheki. It is worth-noting that Zaza knows how to separate her needs from her wants. Although she enjoys Bongani’s company, she knows that her relationship with him is merely flirtatious—her life is with Bheki, her provider.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the choices and decisions that women make in relation to marriage, family and motherhood are largely determined by the cultural context in which they live. While it is generally assumed that economically independent women do not necessarily need to conform to certain cultural/patriarchal practices that are often perceived as oppressive, the four protagonists in *Happiness* opt to keep their men and protect their marriages in spite of the challenges they face. Instead of fighting against their male counterparts or opting out of marriage, the four sisters seek and/or attain personal fulfilment and happiness through male companionship, marriage and motherhood. My conclusion is that Jele's text can be read as affirming the womanist view that African men and women complement each other and the freedom and happiness of one is dependent on the freedom and happiness of the other. Freedom for African professional women does not necessarily entail discarding institutions such as marriage and practices such as child-bearing.

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Martina Vitackova
Martina Vitackova is attached to the
Department of Afrikaans, University
of Pretoria, South Africa.
Email: m.vitackova@gmail.com

Representation of racial and sexual 'others' in Afrikaans popular romantic fiction by Sophia Kapp

Representation of racial and sexual 'others' in Afrikaans popular romantic fiction by Sophia Kapp

This article provides a feminist critique of representation, analysing the way sexual and racial others are represented in the work of the Afrikaans popular romantic fiction writer Sophia Kapp. Comparing her first three novels to the latest one, the article points to a development in her writing and tracks the changes it has undergone over the course of the almost ten years of Kapp's writing career. Starting off with exclusively white and heterosexual characters in her first novels, her latest novel includes a number of black and homosexual secondary characters. However, while these characters appear to be equal to the white hero and heroine, an analysis of their representation shows that they are rendered in such a way that they support the white heterosexual marriage as the unquestionable standard, and it becomes clear that the inclusion of sexual and racial others appears for the most part to be in the function of "surrogate and enabler" for the white heterosexual marriage ideal. **Keywords:** popular romantic fiction, Afrikaans, Sophia Kapp, 'the other', feminist critique of representation

While popular romantic fiction generally reifies and endorses white heterosexual relationships and marriage, we can see a growing tendency in Kapp's writing to include secondary characters of other races and sexual orientations. This seems to be compliant with Cawelti's (5) argument that popular fiction not only strengthens society values but also can support social change. While some critics might claim that that Sophia Kapp's latest book—*Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* ("Survival guide for a difficult diva", 2016)—can be described as feminist writing, this paper argues that the work belongs to the category of texts with only a surface commitment to feminism (see e.g. Salzwedel). As early as 1985, Rosalind Coward points out the difference between texts with a surface commitment to feminism and texts with a deeper commitment. To make out which text belongs to which category, one has to examine how representation works in a text. According to Coward, "even novels which have a surface commitment to feminism should be interrogated as to by what representation of sexuality, of maleness and femaleness, they achieve their version of reality" (Coward 228). This feminist critique of representation is exactly what this article hopes to achieve (see Meijer 1996). In order to do this, I will undertake an analysis of the text, as Coward suggests, oriented specifically on the way racial and sexual 'others' are represented.

Sophia Kapp entered the Afrikaans literary scene in 2007 with the novel *Die Erflating* ("The Inheritance"). Her debut was awarded the ATKV-Woordveertjieprys literary prize for romantic fiction in 2008. The ATKV (Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging), the Afrikaans Language and Culture Association is an organisation that promotes Afrikaans language and culture. She was again awarded the prize in 2012 for *Huis van die wind* ("House of the Wind") and *Driehoek* ("Triangle") in 2014. The writer has published eight other books since her debut and has established herself as one of the most popular authors of popular romantic fiction in Afrikaans. Kapp's outstanding position within popular romantic fiction in Afrikaans is among others evidenced by the fact that her trilogy *Die Malansusters* ("The Malan Sisters") was reprinted in 2013, which indicates the enormous popularity of the trilogy, especially when we consider the vast number of popular romance fiction titles being published every month worldwide, in South Africa and also in Afrikaans. Since Kapp's novels have not been translated into English, all the quotations in the text are my own translations.

Even though she seems to have discovered a formula for a successful popular romantic novel, Kapp's writing style has not stagnated. Major development can be observed when we take a closer look at her writing, among others with respect to the depiction of 'other' characters in her novels. To illustrate the development her writing has undergone in the almost ten years of her writing career, I will briefly analyse her first three novels—the aforementioned *Die Malansusters* trilogy. Then I concentrate on Kapp's latest book, *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva*, which is in my opinion the most problematic, since it partially abandons the traditional formula of popular romantic fiction and shows clear signs of what Rosalind Coward calls "surface commitment to feminism".

Die Malansusters trilogy

The plot of the trilogy *Die Malansusters* revolves around the three sisters Adri, JC and Idalette, who are brought back together after their father's death, hence the title of the first book in the series, *Die Erflating* ("The Inheritance"). Each book in the trilogy concentrates on one sister—*Die Erflating* on the oldest, Adri, *'n Nuwe lente* ("A New Spring") on the middle sister, JC, and *Waar die hart is* ("Where the Heart is") on the youngest sister, Idalette.

The first book of the trilogy, *Die Erflating* (2007), has no significant characters of colour whatsoever, even though the three novels are situated in or near Cape Town, which is one of the most diverse parts of South Africa. The only character we could describe as 'other', in the sense that she differs from the general heteronormativity of the other characters, is the heroine's friend Adele. Adele is described by the heroine as follows: "Adele is and always has been an outspoken feminist, and her fierce passion for women's rights landed her in trouble many times already during her university studies" (*Erflating* 82). Adri describes Adele's activities as a bit too militant for her taste

(*Erflating* 82) and adds that even though she never had a problem with supporting Adele's life mission, she does not carry the same hate and anger for men in her as Adele does (*Erflating* 84). Adele's distrust in the male gender is further explained by her complicated childhood and negligent father. Adele, the feminist, thus hates men, and the author seems to imply that hatred of men is a general characteristic of feminists. This clearly disqualifies Adele from the heterosexual romantic plot, and no other options are mentioned. The feminist explains herself to Adri: "This is my vocation, Adri. This is what I need to do to make some sense out of my life. Nothing less would work for me. But you... you are different. [...] You need to love in order to have a truly fulfilling life." (*Erflating* 191)

Adele is depicted as an anomaly to the heteronormative paradigm, damaged by her childhood, and therefore unable to fit into the available discursive social roles. She hates men, and therefore cannot need, or crave, love. To fill the gap, she immerses herself in her business activities and the fight for women's rights—a cause understood but regarded as exaggerated by the heroine.

Adele is also the only character, including the supporting characters, who is not included in the "monogamous pair-bonding" at the end of the third book of the trilogy, *Waar die hart is* (see Roach 6). In the epilogue, all three sisters are together for Christmas in the house Idalette has inherited from their father. All three of them are married, Adri has a child, JC is highly pregnant, and after the guests leave, Idalette tells her husband Charl that she is expecting too. The secondary characters of the trilogy are also present at this grand finale, all of them happily coupled now, including the employees working at Idalette's guesthouse, who I will mention further on.

The second book of the trilogy, *'n Nuwe lente* (2008), is a bit closer to the South African social reality, since it includes a number of people of colour. That might, however, simply be the consequence of the main part of the novel taking place in a small fishing village on the coast of the Cape Peninsula with its mainly coloured population. If we look at the way the "local" characters are depicted we mostly see racial and classist stereotypes. The poor coloured community is rendered in a very stereotypical way, typical for formulaic literature, emphasizing promiscuity (Tashie's mother has multiple children with different men), alcohol abuse and violence (Tashie's father beats the children, and prefers his eldest son David, who is also violent towards his younger siblings) (*Lente* 113), and general lack of education.

Quite central to the plot is JC's interaction with a group of local (coloured) boys. She meets them for the first time in a shop where they're ogling a soccer ball that they cannot afford to buy. JC's heart sinks at the realization that in contrast with all the expensive developments and wealthy tourists vacationing at the seaside, a real soccer ball would probably be the highlight of the summer for the local boys (*Lente* 77). In the end JC buys the ball and makes an agreement with the boys that they will play together and whoever makes the first goal can keep the ball. During the

second match JC meets six-year-old Natasha, a stepsister of one of the boys. Natasha, or Tashie as she wants to be called (*Lente* 89), becomes friends with JC and plays the role of her local informant.

The archetypal bad guy is the aforementioned local teenager David who physically attacks JC when she tries to defend the younger children (*Lente* 116). He is responsible for a series of break-ins in the area, and as we find out towards the end of the novel, he has been sexually abusing his half-sister Tashie and finally kills her (*Lente* 211, 259). It is interesting that the only character that interacts with JC out of the white-coloured/rich-poor hierarchy has to get killed in the process.

In the third book of the trilogy, *Waar die hart is* (2008), we also find a number of secondary characters of colour or other ethnicities. Here, again, they are very stereotypically depicted. There is, for example, the Russian antique merchant Sergei Ivanoff—described by Charl as “one of the greatest crooks in the city” (*Hart* 142). He is said to have made a fortune out of exploiting his clients, showing up at widows or other inheritors, offering to sell furniture they don’t want for them, buying stuff over from them for nothing and selling valuable antique pieces for a lot of money. Sergei, as observed by Idalette, is “Short, bald-headed, with a broad white grin and shiny pitch-black eyes with greed dancing in them like dollar signs”, and his behaviour is described as “sleazy friendliness” (*Hart* 125).

There are two quite important supporting characters in this novel—the two employees of Idalette’s guesthouse—who can both without any doubt be described as ‘other’. Firstly, there is Chaukie, a deaf black woman who will start working as a housekeeper in Idalette’s guesthouse. When Chaukie comes to ask for a job, with her son doing the talking, Idalette sees that they are both hungry and remarks that Desmond’s shoulders feel hard and bony under her hands (*Hart* 191). Idalette also mentions Chaukie’s “ringless fingers”, even though she has a son (*Hart* 189). Later, we will find out that she became pregnant at the age of sixteen by a white attorney who seduced her and then left when she told him that she was pregnant (*Hart* 235). Desmond, her son, is bullied at school for his mother being a “white man’s whore” and him a bastard and half-caste (*Hart* 232).

Then there is Bostik Bezuidenhout, who will become a cook in Idalette’s guesthouse. Bostik is “a giant with arms as large as a Christmas ham and a chest as big as a water tank”, his head is shaven and he has a tattoo on his arm (*Hart* 207). He learned how to cook in prison, where he landed after he murdered his best friend for raping his seven-year-old-daughter (*Hart* 209). Idalette comments on Bostik and his employment at her guesthouse: “He was, just like Chaukie, a redundant person who didn’t fit in anywhere, but who got a special place in her house” (*Hart* 212). Here Idalette expresses a very patronising, and perhaps neo-colonial, attitude towards these two people. They are represented as clearly beneath her, and in need of being saved by her. It is Idalette, the privileged white madam, who makes it possible for

them to belong. Chaukie and Bostik end up as a couple in the end, being part of the monogamous pair-bonding grand finale mentioned previously (Hart 298). They, however, do not get married—as if marriage were an exclusive institution reserved for the privileged ones only.

The previous analysis provided a concise overview of where Sophia Kapp started off with representation of racial and sexual others in her first three novels. There is very little space for diversity, and when racial others do occur, they do not overstep the boundaries of the formulaic character depiction. It can be argued that stereotypes are a part of the popular literary formula, but such stereotypical shortcuts may have harmful consequences when it comes to the depiction of 'others'. It seems that all characters are by default heterosexual and heteronormative, with the feminist Adele who has a vocation filling the void in her life as the only exception to the rule. When there are racial others, they are of lower social class, and lower social status, and/or their behaviour, actions or past disqualify them somehow for the white heterosexual romance plot. Also, they are often victims of their social situation, e.g. Tashie who is sexually abused by her half-brother, or Chaukie who was seduced by an older white man and became pregnant at the age of sixteen.

Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva

In sharp contrast to her trilogy, in Kapp's latest novel, *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva*, the racial and sexual others are presented as equals to the heroine, and even become her friends during the narration. As should be clear from the analysis above, Kapp's previous writing fitted nicely into the discursive limitations of the genre of popular romantic fiction. In contrast, her most recent novel seems to be trying to break out of this category. Compared to the previously discussed works, this novel seems much more progressive and inclusive. However, a closer analysis reveals this inclusion to be more 'wishful thinking' than actual social engagement and/or criticism of an existing practice. The following analysis is an attempt to present this novel as a text with only a "surface commitment to feminism" and an example of a white woman writing white (Coward 228; West 28).

Firstly, I would like to contextualize the novel. *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* has many features of a popular romantic fiction novel, but at the same time it seems to be reaching out and transgressing the formula. Compliant to the formula of popular romantic fiction, the heroine Simoné meets the hero Barnard early in the narrative—on page 43—and they eventually end up together—on page 458 out of 476. This can of course only happen after they have overcome a number of obstacles. We could also label the novel as chick-lit, since it very much focuses on the development of the main female character. There are helping characters along the way who make possible her development and self-discovery, as well as the eventual relationship between the heroine and the hero, including the flamboyant gay friends, currently

a very popular token within the chick-lit genre. There are also other typical chick-lit plot elements like shopping trips (447–55), binge eating (347–8), and even yoga (e.g. 86, 133, 160). But *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* also differs from the formula of both popular romantic fiction and chick-lit. One of the examples is the way the story is narrated, combining three different narrative perspectives. While it is very much a standard narrative strategy to use a third-person narrative in popular romantic fiction, this particular novel combines a third-person narrative in present sense, diary entries from Simoné's past in first person, and passages from the "diva guide" that are added after each chapter.

There are aspects of the novel that might even appear as feminist, or at least empowering and supportive of the women's movement. One of these aspects is the motto of the novel—a quote from Clarissa Pinkola Estés' seminal work *Women who Run with the Wolves* (1992). The quote speaks about situations where women are cornered by the circumstances of their lives and therefore forced to act and take the situation into their own hands.

Simoné, the heroine, leaves her (already second) husband because he treats her and her son from her first marriage badly. She says: "No marriage is worth my self-respect" (71). She is also repeatedly critical of patriarchy and traditional gender role distribution throughout the narrative. Her character is put into contrast with her older sister Rina, who is described as "a conventional, compliant housewife" (53)—a gendered performance the character of Simoné seems to challenge throughout the novel.

However, if for example we look at the man she gets at the end, we see a typical popular romantic fiction alpha male hero—he is tall, has broad shoulders, lean hips, heavenly blue eyes, firm buttocks; one of the characters labels him as "The Most Eligible Bachelor in the District" (43, 232). And he is also very rich; he is the owner of a software company developing computer games, which, as Simoné herself mentions, comes with a pile of money and a certain social status (193). It is worth mentioning that the heroine only gives in to her interest in Barnard after she finds out about his line of work, in her words that he is everything but a male bimbo (193). Disregarding her criticism of the traditional gender role distribution and gendered performative acts, Simoné's behaviour and actions ultimately comply neatly with these.

Furthermore, the final union of Simoné and Barnard is an affirmation of the white heterosexual marriage, even though it would be the third wedding for our heroine. At the end of the novel Simoné daydreams about the day when they will fill the old stone church with flowers and ask pastor Albert to marry them (470). Even though she mentions other options too, e.g. signing the papers at the magistrate's court or just continuing living together without getting married, the church union is still presented as the ultimate goal and a culmination of the white heterosexual romantic enterprise.

What also makes this book stand out from other novels in the genre is the aforementioned inclusion of racial and sexual others in the narrative. This is something that has not been the case in her previous work, and also is not that much the case in the genre of popular romantic fiction in general, unless, of course, we are speaking of gay romance. The same can be said for so-called multicultural romance which is, like gay and lesbian romance, regarded as a (sub)genre of its own and therefore falls under different criteria (see e.g. Ramsdell).

In this novel, in contrast with Kapp's previous works, the racial and sexual others are included in the privileged monogamous pair-bonding. At the end of the novel, there is a New Year's party where

[t]he adults and children are together next to the dance floor: Rina and Carel, Ariëlla and Harry, Mrs. Cholmondley and Lionel, Janke and Jabu, Adeleen and Frederik, who finally made Rina's year by putting a ring on her daughter's finger, SW and Belle, Sugar and Spice, Jeanette and Itumeleng, Julie and some attractive hunk she picked up at the co-op in Bethlehem. (468)

Sexual others

There are two homosexual couples included in the plot of *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva*—a gay couple owning the local bakery, referred to as “honorary girls” (88) by other characters, and a local doctor, Jeanette, and her black partner Itumeleng, who is also a nurse at Jeanette's office. Furthermore, Simoné's son has a gay roommate who also becomes his best friend. There is a certain sensibility for the sexual others in the novel, as evidenced for example by this comment by Jeanette, reacting to Simoné's complaint that she feels alienated. Jeanette looks straight into Simoné's eyes, and says: “Alienated? You're telling ME that you feel alienated? Honey, I'm an English lesbian with a black partner on the Free State countryside. I could hardly be more alienated, even if I tried. It's a struggle, every day. Every day I see the shock on someone's face when they realize who and what I am [...]” (91).

But if we take a closer look at the way the sexually other characters, despite this seeming sensibility, are constructed and depicted, we encounter mainly a stereotypical imaginary reality than ‘actual people’. While one should not be surprised by the presence of stereotypes in formulaic literature, since it is one of the characterizations of the genre, these stereotypes become problematic when they turn into so-called othering strategies and denigrating depictions (see e.g. Cawelti 5–36). While the lesbians in *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* are described as masculine and lacking femininity, the gay characters are depicted as overly feminine and lacking any masculine traits. Jeanette is described as short and sturdy with very short hair, wearing cargo pants and workers' boots (83). The tortoise shell frames of her glasses further emphasize her lack of fashionability and femininity (83). Jeanette is also depicted as sexually aggressive, even towards the heroine. When Jeanette invites Simoné to

join her and her friends at the local brewery, Simoné is uncertain how to react and asks whether Jeanette is asking her out. Jeanette replies: "Relax, honey, it's a drink with friends, not a date. You're lovely but you're not my type. It's quite clear: straight to the very marrow of your bones. It's a pity, but well, I won't hold it against you" (87). Interestingly, the fact that Jeanette is in a relationship is not mentioned as an obstacle. Seemingly the only reason why Jeanette is not making sexual advances on Simoné is her straightness.

Similarly, Sugar and Spice, the gay couple whose real names are not even mentioned in the novel, is depicted in a very stereotypical way. The fact that they remain nameless can certainly be seen as a depersonification of these two characters, an often used "othering strategy" when representing 'others' (Meijer 12–3). Sugar and Spice earn their money by baking cakes, they are demasculinized by the term "honorary girls", and Spice has a high-pitched voice (88, 255). Furthermore, both of them are depicted as irresponsible and engaging in risky activities, for example in contrast to Simoné who orders a coffee before she drives home, they drink before they drive (230).

This irresponsible behaviour is evidenced for example by the scene when Simoné, who just heard of the finalization of her divorce, is drugged by Spice with his "home-made anti-anxiety blend" tea (254). Jeanette gets angry with him because Simoné is "high as a freaking kite." Spice defends himself by saying, "How was I supposed to know the girl is a novice? She comes from Gauteng, I thought they have all built up a tolerance over there." When he argues that he takes the same substance and does not have such a strong reaction, Jeanette cuts him short: "Because you became an addict ten years ago already." Other parts where Spice speaks are as caricatural and stereotypical. When Simoné first meets him and his partner, he reacts to the news of her taking anti-depressants as follows: "Oh fuckity. What happened? Was it a man? No, don't even bother, it's just a damned man who can put that look in such a beautiful woman's eyes" (88). In her essay on representation of black characters in white American writing, Toni Morrison coins the term "Africanist idiom" to describe a representative strategy when the racial others, if given a voice, express themselves in a way contrasting to the civilized white self, in order "to establish difference" (Morrison 52). Building further on this notion, we could call the parts of the narrative where Spice is speaking the 'gay idiom', since it seems to be serving a similar purpose.

It seems that homosexuals, the sexual others, can only be included in the plot when monogamously pair-bonded, and therefore not threatening of the normative heterosexuality of the romance narrative. They are represented in a way that puts them clearly out of the discursive limits of their gender, and places their gendered performances within the opposite gender. Furthermore, as is the case with especially Sugar and Spice, they are represented as perverted (e.g. Spice's drug use), caricatures and stereotypes, as illustrated previously. Lionel, the gay roommate of Simoné's son, is sexually abused by one of his teachers, and therefore also damaged (329).

The ultimate 'other' of the story is Itumeleng—Jeanette's partner. It seems that the author created her, and then did not really know what to do with the character. Itumeleng is almost invisible in the narrative; the only times she speaks are in the function of a nurse at Jeanette's practice. Itumeleng Ramapoko, ironically one of the only supporting characters who are introduced by their full name which creates a distance from the main character and implicitly also the reader, is immediately explicitly named black (81). Just after that, Simoné expresses her amazement at the fact that Itumeleng speaks Afrikaans without any accent (81). Such amazement, indeed, re-affirms the stereotypical thinking that a black person cannot speak good Afrikaans. Also the fact that Itumeleng works for Jeanette re-duplicates the "conservative" model of black people working for white people but also depicts Jeanette as "the man" in the relationship. Itumeleng is Jeanette's girlfriend, but oddly enough does not take part in the group's activities. She does not practice yoga with the others, does not go on the weekly outings to the local brewery, or at least her presence is never explicitly mentioned and she never speaks, which is in sharp contrast to especially Jeanette and Spice who do most of the talking (88, 230, 373, 423). No one in the group seems to find Itumeleng's absence strange or worth mentioning. That again strengthens the image of the relationship of Jeanette and Itumeleng as hierarchical, and of Itumeleng as Jeanette's helper but not equal. Itumeleng is also excluded from the "shopping trip" to Pretoria, that "after this trip will not be the place where two of [Simoné's] marriages were shipwrecked, but a place where she and her girlfriends go to spoil themselves and where they buy extravagant underwear with frills, where they laugh and drink wine" and so on (452–3). Itumeleng therefore is not a part of this "diverse group of women" (453) as Simoné describes them, she is not one of the (girl)friends. Taking into account that Itumeleng only ever speaks in her function of a nurse at Jeanette's practice, we can conclude that the author fails to give her a voice in the narrative. She is, exactly as Spivak has put it, a subaltern who cannot speak.

Even though there are homosexual characters included in the plot, they seem to be depicted in clear opposition to the white heterosexual hero and heroine. Jeanette's lack of femininity is presented in contrast to Simoné's femininity, sense of fashion and homeliness, and the feminine and manual profession of Sugar and Spice contrasts with Barnard's masculine job as the owner of an IT company. The homosexual relationships appear to be the means used to create the image of the white heterosexual self. Both the hierarchical "employer-employee" relationship of Jeanette and Itumeleng and the caricatured relationship of Sugar and Spice are in opposition to the seemingly equalitarian heteronormative relationship of Barnard and Simoné.

Racial others

There are a number of other supporting characters of colour in the novel. Apart from Itumeleng, who has been discussed already, there is also Jabu, SW's classmate

and friend. Jabu's parents are both "Very Important Politicians in the provincial parliament in Bloemfontein" and Simoné describes him as the product of a yuppie upbringing (179). His parents are presented as taking greater care of their careers than of their son, mainly providing their son with sufficient money (274, 292). Such remarks imply that Simoné is a better parent than they are.

Jabu is in the centre of a conflict that takes place during a beach vacation Simoné takes with her son and his friends. In a shop Jabu is approached by an Afrikaner couple, described by Simoné as "overweight, overcritical, privileged, biased, loud, arrogant, self-righteous" (293). The man addresses Jabu as "bushman" and when Jabu asks whether he is speaking to him, the man reacts that he should only be addressed as Sir, or Boss (294). He also comments on the fact that a black boy is mixing with white children and questions whether he is able to pay for everything he has in his trolley. Then Simoné intervenes, demanding an excuse for Jabu.

The character of Simoné represents an interesting mixture of prejudices and open-mindedness when it comes to interaction with people of colour. When two black men knock at her back door, her first reaction is fright (109). But soon she reasons that an attacker would probably not knock, and opens the door for them. When she realizes it is a man who used to work for her father, she greets him with a traditional handshake (109). The men are looking for a job, and later Simoné finds out that they have not eaten for a while, since they have no more food and Job's wife keeps the flour for the small children (111). Simoné mentions Job's radiant three-tooth-smile (109), playing with a racial stereotype, and states that the hierarchy in the new South Africa clearly does not mean a thing to him and that he will continue addressing white people as "Madam" and "Boss" (113). In both these interactions Simoné is personally against the old hierarchy and has an understanding for black South Africans. At the same time, she is the one who walks away from/comes out of these interactions as a hero.

Another scene illustrating this mixture of paternalism and understanding in the character of Simoné takes place in a supermarket where she sees a young black woman who is not able to pay for the expensive breakfast cereal her child hysterically demands. Simoné wants to walk up to her and give her a hug but she cannot, since, according to her "[t]here is a gap created by language and culture and social conventions that we cannot bridge, even though we essentially are sisters" (441).

As is the case of many other white texts, in Kapp's work the images of black people are "overdetermined and loaded with extra meanings" (Meijer 118). And while one can and should not object to the presence of stereotypes in formulaic literature in general, it becomes worrisome when this stereotypical imaginary reality, especially as it concerns racial others, reflects the complex relationship of the Occident to the Orient, "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (Said 5). This is exactly the case in the discussed texts by Kapp.

Conclusion

Representations of sexual and racial others *as* sexual and racial others, as I have illustrated, support and strengthen the position of the white heterosexual middle-class subjects as the unquestionable standard. I argue that Sophia Kapp in her work reiterates the Hegelian economy in which the subject recognizes itself in 'the other', in order to create distance from the other and reaffirm their own identity and superiority. The inclusion of sexual and racial others appears for the most part to be in the function of "surrogate and enabler" (Morrison 51) for the white heterosexual marriage ideal. These characters and their relationships are the actual means through which the idealized version of the white heterosexual marriage is constructed (Meijer 141).

Robin Lynne, an author of popular romantic fiction herself and a contributor to the romantic fiction website *Dear Author*, argues that romance novels "are as feminist, or anti-feminist, as anything else in our society: namely, that it depends on the novel, but most of the novels we're talking about are produced within a society that is heteronormative and patriarchal (and most privilege whiteness as well)" (qtd in Luther).

And this is exactly the point of departure that the work of Sophia Kapp fails to leave behind. Rather than a pro-feminist statement, I would suggest that Kapp's *Oorlewingsgids vir 'n bedonnerde diva* is a product of a culture of post-feminism. The heroine clearly profits from what the three waves of feminism have accomplished (so far)—Simoné has a job, she leaves her husband, has her own independent social life, and so forth. But at the same time, as the analysis above shows, the book is also a very clear expression of conservative values that are deeply and firmly anchored in patriarchy, such as the importance of the white heterosexual marriage, the exclusive representation of femininity, women's subjectivity and women's sexuality.

Mary West (3) writes in her study *White women Writing White* about "the largely invisible ways in which white writing by women is uncomfortably both consciously in support of, and unconsciously at odds with, multicultural celebrations of rainbow nationhood". This article has endeavoured to highlight the ways in which this takes place within selected texts by Sophia Kapp.

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Doreen Rumbidzai Tivenga

Doreen Rumbidzai Tivenga is associated with the Department of English at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
Email: drtivenga@gmail.com

Contemporary Zimbabwean popular music in the context of adversities

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Contemporary Zimbabwean popular and urban genres of music namely, urban grooves and its variant Zimdancehall emerged and continue to exist at a time when the country is grappling with socio-economic and political adversities. The music has become part and parcel of crucial artistic forms and artistic dissent. Ordinary Zimbabweans bear the brunt of the economic hardship, and some musicians play a significant role in detailing their experiences, survival strategies as well as influencing their patterns of entertainment and daily cultural practices. This article which is informed by popular culture theorists such as Karin Barber and John Fiske focuses on Winky D's album *Gafa Life Kickstape* (2015). His songs "Disappear", "Copyrights" and "Survivor" are examined with reference to their creative potential and their referencing of the survival strategies of ordinary Zimbabweans. In addition, the paper explores his music as a source of power in fostering a response that resonates with urban youth cultural activism. It is found that Winky D's music seeks to empower the Zimbabweans to make "all the crosses to disappear," to transcend their adversities and take control of their destinies in a country where the ruling elite are failing to improve the nation's socio-economic conditions. **Keywords:** ghetto youth, popular music, popular resistance, Winky D, Zimbabwe urban grooves music

Introduction

Winky D whose real name is Wallace Chirumiko, is a renowned contemporary Zimbabwe urban grooves musician who is also one of the pioneers of Zimdancehall music. The Zimbabwe urban grooves music is an urban contemporary genre that fuses digitally local and global rhythms and beats and is popular among the urban youth. Predominantly Afro diasporic genres such as Jamaican dancehall and the Euro-American soul, rhythm and blues (R&B) and rap are appropriated by the young artists who add a local flavour by singing in Shona and Ndebele about the real life experiences of the contemporary Zimbabwean people (Bere; Chari; Vhiriri, Vhiriri and Chapwanya; Manase; Mate; Kellerer). The birth of the genre corresponds with the institution of new media laws by the government of Zimbabwe through the then Minister of Information and Publicity, Jonathan Moyo. Moyo instituted the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) in 2001 which legislated a 75% local content which was further pushed to 100% content on Zimbabwean radio and TV (Ndlela; Bere; Chikowero; Chari; Manase; Viriri, Viriri and Chapwanya; Manase; Mate; Willems). It is this development that gave birth to young musicians such as Winky D.

However, since the inception of the urban grooves genre to the present, notable changes have been realised in the development of the genre and in the interviews that I conducted with urban grooves musicians, promoters and producers, one musician, M1, interviewed on 4 July 2016, revealed thus:

What then happened to urban grooves of late is, because there has been more participants in the industry, people are beginning to lobby to specify the genres. [...] Urban grooves has been split into proper genres, specific genres because people feel that they need to define themselves, as well as the fact that the 100% local content era brought in a lot of players into the market, so there is now need to really specify what a person is. (M1, Interview)

Another interviewee, a producer (P1) pointed out in an interview on 28 June 2016 that “[F]rom that community [of urban grooves artists] people grow and some grew and found their identity, some found their identity as R&B artists, for example Trevor Dongo; Sniper Storm, Winky D and Soul Jah Love are now dancehall artists and the likes of Stunner and Tehn Diamond are now hip-hop artists.” (P1, Interview)

It is this growth and development that has seen the Zimdancehall genre dominating the Zimbabwe urban grooves and urban contemporary music scene with Winky D being one of the most popular Zimdancehall musicians. What is particular about Zimdancehall is that it is anchored on the Jamaican reggae and /or dancehall beats, music tradition and sensitivities. Lipsitz (34) associates reggae with political struggles and movements opposed to different forms of postcolonial oppression. Reggae is closely identified with Jamaica, yet its power as a form of protest has spread much more widely and has been reworked to address specific local concerns elsewhere (De Block and Buckingham 178). Winky D’s music exhibits such characteristics and sensibilities as he immerses himself in the struggles of the ordinary Zimbabweans and identifies with them. He says his inspiration is the Jamaican reggae dancehall icon Beenie Man and comments thus, about his songs and his role as a musician: “every day I record a song because every day I see things. I am a social commentator. The things I see, I put into song” (Showbiz Reporter). Thus, considering all this and the daily life experiences of ordinary Zimbabweans who have been pauperised by the socio-economic and political crisis in contemporary Zimbabwe, Winky D’s music has become part of significant Zimbabwean artistic forms and influences entertainment and daily cultural practices of ordinary Zimbabweans, especially the youth from high-density residential townships popularly known as ghettos in Zimdancehall music.

This paper analyses three songs on Winky D’s *Gafa Life Kickstape* (2015) album. The songs “Copyrights”, “Survivor” and “Disappear” are purposively sampled for analysis as they typically detail the contemporary socio-economic and political experiences faced by Zimbabweans. Therefore, the songs are examined in relation to the contemporary socio-economic and political experiences of ordinary Zimbabweans.

weans especially the ghetto youth and the role that Winky D plays as an artist. The analysis is informed by popular culture theories for an in-depth understanding of the popularity of Winky D songs and people's reaction and discernment of their day to day experiences.

Representations of contemporary Zimbabwean adversities

Since the year 2000 to the present, Zimbabwe has been grappling with a severe economic crisis that has seen the closures of a number of industries, hence a huge decline in employment opportunities. This has pushed a greater number of people into both regional and international migrant spaces in search of employment opportunities and a burgeoning of the informal sector that has been sustaining many livelihoods in the country (Chagonda; Njaya). The songs "Copyrights" and "Survivor" by Winky D are both responses to this impasse and the impact thereof. "Copyrights" is a satiric commentary of the economic failures of the state that have pauperised ordinary Zimbabweans especially the youth living in the ghetto. Winky D introduces the song by indicating that the situation in the ghetto has gone out of hand ("*paghetto zvinhu hazvina kumira mushe*") to the extent that tenants are unable to pay rent on time and spend some days dodging the landlord: "*landlord ndamutiza nhasi date ndi5*" ("I have dodged the landlord today is the 5th"). The song also shows how the informal sector has thrived and references the famous informal carpentry in Glenview, a high density residential township in the capital, Harare. Informal carpentry has thrived as many people including business people, due to the exorbitant prices in departmental stores prefer to buy where the prices are affordable and negotiable (on informal carpentry, see Moyo). The song "Survivor" expresses lack of employment opportunities for ghetto youth. These youth are often stereotyped and associated with idling at street corners and bridges and illicit behaviours such as smoking *mbanje* (marijuana). Winky D corrects such stereotypes as he sings (here, and elsewhere the translations are mine):

Vakationa takalazer pacorner

Vanoti hatina zvatinogona

Kumaghetto youth mikana mishoma

Hakuna ghetto youth risina zvarinogona

When they see us relaxed at street corners
They say we are incompetent
ghetto youth lack opportunities
There is no ghetto youth who is untalented.

The above lyrics show how Winky D attempts to correct some of the stereotypes associated with youth who loiter on street corners and suggests that the state of the

economy has deprived them of opportunities to use their talents to sustain themselves, hence their activities are often regarded with suspicion. Therefore, the songs “Copyrights” and “Survivor” are both representations of socio-economic hardships experienced by ordinary Zimbabweans especially the ghetto youth.

In addition to informal carpentry, the Zimbabwean economic impasse and growth of the informal sector has seen the proliferation of street vending in the cities and towns in the country as well as in high density residential townships. Vendors sell anything including vegetables, confectionaries, pirated CDs and DVDs, new and secondhand clothing, pesticides, cosmetics and a variety of other goods. The lyrical persona in “Copyrights” attempts to sell his wares in Charter Street, a street in the Central Business District in the Capital Harare while in “Survivor,” the persona’s parents managed to raise his school fees through vending. However, people’s livelihoods are threatened by government ‘vendorphobia’ as street vendors are often involved in running battles with the police ordering them to vacate the street and even confiscating their wares, a purported attempt by the state to bring back sanity into the city streets. This attitude of the police is captured vividly in the dilemma faced by the unemployed lyrical persona in “Copyrights”:

Ndati ndizame chiconductor
Porisi ririkurova nemboma apa
Ndironge musika panacharter
Dhimoni rekanzuru rabva rabata

I try being a conductor
The police is whipping with baton sticks
I try selling my wares in Charter Street
The City Council gets possessed by its demon.

The above lyrics express the dilemma faced by the lyrical persona by first alluding to how the police apprehend commuter omnibus operators who are often accused of carrying passengers from undesignated sites often referred to as *pamushika mushika* in street lingo. Therefore, the persona has tried being a commuter omnibus conductor as well as street vending but both his efforts are thwarted by the ‘repressive state apparatuses’.

The attempt to clear the city streets of vendors saw the historical June 2015 directive by the government for vendors to vacate the streets for designated sites initially giving them the 8th of June 2015 as the deadline but later extended it to 26 June. The directive was met with resistance and protests from the vendors who vowed that they would not leave the streets and argued that the designated sites were controlled by space barons who were siphoning money from vendors daily. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) Member of Parliament for Bulawayo East Thabitha

Khumalo scoffed at this directive arguing that the government should give people jobs and protect them instead of constantly victimising vendors (see Kunambura for the vendor's protests). To date, violent victimisations, beatings, arbitrary arrests and abductions of vendors especially the leaders in the National Vendors Union of Zimbabwe (NAVUZ) have become the order of day (see Human Rights Watch; Correspondent).

Such arrests are alluded to in "Survivor" by the two lyrical personae who are archetypal characters representing the plight of the informal traders in Zimbabwe as they share their experiences in the lyrics "*Biggy kuCentral Police ndavata*" ("Biggy I have slept at the central police") and "*ini ndabatwa ndakandwa mukati asi tariro handife ndakarasa*," explaining how he was caught by the police and locked in prison cells. Thus, the song "Survivor" is influenced by the real life experiences and persistent struggles ordinary Zimbabweans encounter as they try to come up with alternative livelihoods.

Another historical threat on the livelihoods of the ordinary people is exposed in "Copyrights" in the lyrics "*vanongoti higher pavonodira votifire*" (they higher us when they like and fire us when they like). This is an allusion to the historical and shocking ruling by the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe on job terminations. The Supreme Court on the 17th of July 2015 ruled that companies can terminate workers' contracts at any time without giving them packages provided they are given three months' notice basing on the common law position where employers were said to have the right to give notice and terminate employment in as much as workers can do the same. This was viewed as a cheaper way of firing workers as firms did not have to give any explanation, conduct disciplinary hearing or follow the expensive retrenchment routes. This saw many companies who were struggling to pay their workers capitalising on the Supreme Court ruling and up to six thousand people lost their jobs (Felex Share Harare Bureau). This ran contrary to the promises of the creation of 2.2 million jobs within five years made by President Robert Mugabe when he launched his party's manifesto in July 2013, prior to the 31st July 2013 harmonised elections (see *Financial Gazette* of 11 July 2013). Thus the government of Zimbabwe's failure to solve the country's economic woes has witnessed the ordinary citizens bearing the brunt of these economic failures as they are often victimised and their attempts to eke out a living are criminalised. Hence, for Winky D, this is an indication that the sole right that the people have is the right to poverty; he playfully suggests that poverty has become the ordinary citizens' 'copyright' and thus expresses his social criticism to the existing bleak social, economic and political conditions in the country.

Winky D as the voice of the voiceless: resistance and hope

After the passing of Chenjerai Hove, the renowned Zimbabwean poet and novelist, Trevor Grundy described Hove as the "voice of the voiceless" taking his cue from

Flora Veit-Wild who describes the African writer as the conscience of the powerless ordinary people who suffers together with them and has a duty to give them a voice and hope. In the history of Zimbabwean music, musicians such as Thomas Mapfumo have also been hailed as the conscience of the people who position themselves within their struggles and voice their concerns. Thomas Mapfumo is well known in association with the chimurenga music, a type of music that was associated with the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe's war of independence, was a tool and act of resistance (Bere; Chikowero) or "songs that won the liberation struggle" (Pongweni). However, chimurenga music continued to influence postcolonial Zimbabwe with Mapfumo again being an icon and composing songs that voiced the people's disillusionment with the postcolonial leadership. Similarly, Winky D is a significant social and cultural icon who voices the real life struggles of the ordinary Zimbabweans, especially the youth who hail from the high density residential townships and mourns together with them yet at the same time shows their resilience, empowers and gives them hope as epitomised in his songs "Copyrights", "Survivor" and "Disappear".

Winky D presents himself as the 'voice of the voiceless' people in contemporary Zimbabwe by positioning himself within the people's struggles and identifying with them. This is demonstrated in the manner in which he presents the societal experiences in a communal or collective voice throughout the songs "Copyrights" and "Survivor". The use of the first person plural pronoun 'we', as represented by the Shona prefix *ti-* as in "*tisu tine macopyrights enhamo*" ("we have poverty copyrights") in the song "Copyrights" and "*tine nharo*" ("we are defiant") in the song "Survivor", shows how Winky D identifies himself with the ordinary people. Moreover, it is apparent in the song "Copyrights" that, the artist who qualifies as the 'voice of the ghetto people' must be one who identifies with their plight, hence the lyrical persona in the song proclaims that "*takuda ghetto voice*" ("we now want a ghetto voice"). Olson and Shobe (1001) note that, part of the success of rappers lie in their ability to prove to their audience that they have personally experienced the subject matter of their music. Similarly, most urban grooves artists have first-hand experiences of the ghetto life that they sing about as they have their roots in these ghettos, commonly known as high density residential townships in Zimbabwe, thus making it easier for their audiences to identify with them and their messages. In the song "Survivor" Winky D and Shinsoman (Tinashe Romeo Antony) who is featured in the song clearly declare themselves as the 'voice of the voiceless' by comparing themselves to the late South African anti-apartheid activist, Steve Biko in the lyrics "*Takumiririra vanhu kunge Steve Biko*" ("We are now representing people like Steve Biko.") Thus, Lipsitz's (36) comments on how hip-hop "blends music and life into an integrated totality, uniting performers, dancers and listeners in a collaborative endeavour" is also true about Winky D's music. It is through his perfect choice of the communal "we," and his ability to give a first-hand account of

the ghetto experience that Winky D positions himself as 'the voice of the voiceless'.

Winky D also identifies with the plight of the ghetto people through how he empathises with the subjects of his songs, "Survivor" and "Copyrights", as typified in the lyrics "*misodzi yochuruka arikudzingwa mavendor...*" ("my tears flow as the vendors are being evicted..."). However, Winky D does not wallow in the tears but demonstrates a defiant spirit by calling on the people to be masters of their destinies. Through intertextual reference to Tocky Vibes's (real name Obey Makamure) song "*Toti-toti*" ("Tip-toe") (2015) which hails prayer and fasting as the remedy to life's adversities, the lyrical persona in "Copyrights" protests:

Toda kupukunyuka nhamo, Tocky vibes
Handichada zviya zvekuti unondiunzira bhaibheri
wobva wanditi nditsanye forty nights

We want to escape from poverty, Tocky Vibes
I want you to stop bringing me the bible
and telling me to fast for forty nights.

The lyrical persona believes that the people possess the power to map and change their own destinies instead of waiting for a divine being to do that for them. This alludes to how most Zimbabweans' lives are dominated by charismatic churches' offering of religion as an escape route from poverty, noted in the popularity of controversial religious leaders such as Prophet Walter Magaya and Emmanuel Makandiwa. The title of the album itself *Gafa Life Kickstep* spells out the people's power. Winky D calls himself a *Gafa*, with his fans being *Gafas*, and explains the meaning of the term as follows: "a *Gafa* is someone who is always controlling the situation, someone who is always in control" (see Mtonzi). Thus, there is an element of control in the term and a desire for societal empowerment and agency. The lyrical personae in "Survivor" even declare that the people in the ghetto will never run out of plans for survival (*paghetto hatishayiwe plan*). Thus, no matter how much the people suffer, they will come out as 'survivors' of the adversities that they face as declared through the title of the song "Survivor."

Winky D's praising of informal carpenters and vendors subverts the government rule that has declared street vending illegal and this subversion resonates with the vendors' actual defiance of the government directive that they vacate the streets. Therefore, postcolonial cultural expressions are situated within the experiences of people rather than the master narrative of the nation state (Lipsitz 32). This echoes Fiske's (2) observation that popular culture artefacts are often appropriated to make social meanings that are in the interests of the people and resistant to dominant ideologies. The hard core lyrics, husky voices, fast beat, high tempo, fast paced and hard hitting rhymes, rhythm and sonics in "Copyrights" and "Survivor" resonate with the resistance and refusal to be defeated by societal hardships.

The song “Disappear” which is a party song as expressed in the introductory part, “when we say party / we want all the crosses to disappear / when we say party we are party” became the most popular of the songs on Winky D’s *Gafa Life Kickstape* album both locally and internationally. The song won both the Zimbabwe Music Award (ZIMA) and the Zimdancehall award for 2016 and reached number one on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Extra Destination Africa top five in February 2016 (“Winky D”). “Disappear” became an entertainment anthem for the young and old alike. The central phrase, “*maproblem ose Disappear*” (“all problems disappear”) became a catchy phrase as people circulated a variety of skits on social media platforms whilst other artists, such as Tariro Negitare and a group called Us 2 made their own renditions of “Disappear” (Entertainment writer). Therefore, the song and the refrain “*maproblem ose disappear*” became popular culture texts which circulated rapidly and underwent many phases of innovations and elaborations whilst they were in vogue (Barber 3). Barber (1) also observes that popular arts in Africa are penetrated by and penetrate political, economic as well as religious institutions. Consequently, as the song circulated on the social media, the phrase “*maproblem ose Disappear*” was deployed to comment on the political and economic situation in the country and express the people’s concerns and hopes for ‘problem free lives.’ In addition, the song made inroads into the religious practices of the Zimbabwean people as the social media also circulated a Catholic version of the song by an unidentified group as well as several Independent African Apostolic Church versions. However, “Disappear” also sparked controversy as it was alleged that the United Family International Church (UFIC) instructed its members not to listen to it labelling it as “satanic”, allegations that Winky D himself scoffed (see Mugugunyeki). This shows the impact that “Disappear” made as a popular musical text, as a party and hopeful song released around the festive season “when most people enjoyed themselves after a long and hard year saying to themselves (ma)problems of 2015 should disappear in 2016” (see Ndlovu).

As ‘the voice of the voiceless’, Winky D attempts to give the people solutions to their problems and cheer them up by giving them hope. Hence, “Disappear” is a cheerful song that also conveys hope in that it is conveyed through the correlation between the carefree lyrical content, light-hearted rhymes and dance form. The trope of merry making is anchored on the use of the chorus “Happy happy” and choice of other happy words such as the Shona “*kafariro kacho*” (“the way I am happy”), the slang form “sparky” (“happiness”) and the adaptive “*purezha*” (“pleasure”); while the happy dance form is reflected in the Shona lyrics “*Maoko mudenga, maoko mudenga*” echoing the “put your hands in the air” lyrics popular in many party and dance songs. The song also mentions popular entertainment practices, such as drinking alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, with the persona singing that if one takes a sip of any of these, one’s problems will disappear. He also adds the aspect of spending

money in the pursuit of pleasure as expressed in the slang expression “*kudya mula*” (“to spend money”). One may critique this solution to life’s problems as escapist as it offers just temporary relief from the problems.

However, Winky D goes beyond just encouraging people to party and be happy. There is some form of empowerment in “Disappear” as the song insinuates resistance and the need for people to reclaim the happiness that they have been robbed of. This is demonstrated through Winky D’s borrowing of the ancient and magical refrain, “*abracadabra*” that he infuses in the introductory part, the middle and ending of his song. The term is understood to be an incantation by magician which has the power to heal and is understood to mean ‘let the thing be destroyed or disappear’ and it is evident that the title of the song itself is borrowed from this ancient term (Thanatos). Ironically, the song draws on the magical to suggest that the ordinary people themselves are the magicians who have the power and solution to their problems. This evokes the anti-apartheid slogan “*amandla awethu*” (“power to the people”) which is still actively used to date to express people’s grievances in post-apartheid South Africa (Wenzel). Furthermore, the lyrical persona in “Disappear” proclaims, “when we say party we want all the crosses to disappear,” and this can be viewed as a subversion of the biblical symbol of the cross which believers who are troubled have to carry diligently waiting for divine intervention. Thus, this biblical allusion is made here to emphasise that the people have the power to map their destinies and change their situation instead of waiting in the comfort of docility for an outside force or divine being to give them happiness. The idea of happiness is personified in the following lyrics:

*Handina kumbenge ndaziya
Kuti Happy unotondiziwa
Ndaiona uchifara nevamwe
ndoshushikana sei uchingondisiya
But nhasi wandipinza mugear
Tarisa zvoita Gafa riya
Ndava kuvhara mawindow
hakuna kwaunoenda magonhi ndakiya*

I never knew
That Happy you know me
I would see you experiencing joy with others
and get worried why you ignore me
But today you have geared me
Look at what that Gafa is now doing
I am now closing windows
and you are going nowhere I have locked the doors.

In the personification of happiness above, the notion ceases to be an abstract and remote concept when the lyrical persona claims it. It is treated as concrete, thus giving all those who are despairing the hope that happiness is attainable. Moreover, when the lyrical persona finds "Happiness," he declares that he will not let "him / her" loose. This signifies that people should never give in to those who want to deprive them of their happiness. Therefore, the significance of the songs "Survivor," "Copyrights" and "Disappear" lie in Winky D's ability to position himself as the "voice of the voiceless" in the ordinary people's struggles and to show their ability to resist and survive the adversities that they face, thus giving them hope.

Singing in the language of the people

Besides the powerful lyrical content of his songs, Winky D's prowess as a musician lies in the language that he uses. Just as he positions himself within the people's struggles through the issues that he sings about, he also identifies himself with them through the language that he uses, it is the people's language. The 'language of the people' here refers to the daily language used by the people Winky represents in his songs. I also show how Winky D uses figurative expressions and figures of speech that are accessible to his audiences. They are drawn from people's everyday experiences and concept that his audiences are familiar with even in cases where global concepts or popular figures make in-roads into his music. This is reminiscent of Barber's (43) observation that popular style encompasses vocabulary and language forms that are fresh, simple, unsophisticated, full of life and should be accessible to a wider range of people as well as appeal to the lowest denominator of comprehension. In addition, the language used typically represents the people's grievances, hopes and aspirations and is evocative of the resistance encompassed in the songs.

As pointed out earlier, Winky D's concerns lie with the ordinary people of Zimbabwe, especially the youth who hail from the ghetto or the poor high density residential townships. He even references these ghetto youth in the songs "Copyrights" and "Survivor". As a result, ghetto lingo dominates his songs as it is the language that is synonymous with youth culture and originates from the ghetto or the streets such that it is so popular in contemporary Zimbabwean urban musical genres. Some of these slang words include "*kugwazhi*" ("school") used in "Copyrights" and *Chimoko* in "Disappear," a word associated with girls especially female lovers as in "*chimoko changu*" ("my girlfriend"). It is apparent that the formation of slang words is anchored on the common activities and styles that are associated with youth as argued by Paveda. The slang word "*kuwachisa*" used in "Disappear" is often used in youth conversations to mean outdoing one's enemies, and in the song it is used in relation to how the lyrical persona says he has decided to conquer his problems ("*kuwachisa maproblem*"). "*Kugarisa mudish*" used in "Copyrights" is a common slang phrase used to mean to make someone surrender and the lyrical persona says "*han-*

dina anondigarisa mudish ("nobody will make me surrender"). The two, "*kuwachisa*" and "*kugarisa mudish*" are related as they are both centred on the idea of resistance, thus the formation of slang words in such instances is seen to resemble 'resistance vernaculars' (Potter) or 'antilanguages' (Veit-Wild) containing subversive elements appropriate in the representation of the people's struggles.

Winky D's music is also dominated by code switching. He constantly shifts from using English to Shona and slang, a phenomenon that is also common in most urban grooves songs. Again, this reflects how Winky D uses the language that is accessible to his youth audiences as well as identify with them as observed by Mugari. Code-switching is most common among Zimbabwean youth who are exposed to the English language as a medium of instruction at institutions of learning and mainly speak in their own first languages at home or during informal school situations. Similarly, employed youth use English as the official language at work. As a result, youth often practice code switching in informal conversations because of this exposure to two separate languages. Although Winky D's code switching mainly involves Shona, English and slang, there is influence from Ndebele which is the second majority vernacular language in Zimbabwe after Shona. The word "*chigulani*" used in "Disappear" is an adaptive word borrowed from the Ndebele "*isigulani*" used to refer to a sick person. The word is used in a simile to emphasise on the idea of intense happiness as the lyrical persona says "*ndoda kufara kusvika ndaadmitiwa pamubhedha kunge chigulani*" ("I want to enjoy myself till I get admitted in hospital like a sick person"). Another Ndebele word that the song uses is "*zikuphani*" which is slang for 'how are you?' The borrowing of these Ndebele words portrays how Winky D wants to reach out to a wider audience and since he is Shona, the implication here is that the struggle for better lives in Zimbabwe surpasses ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Therefore, Winky D, as the voice of the voiceless, speaks in the language that the people he represents use and thus identifies with them and their struggles.

In addition, the three songs analysed here use unsophisticated figurative expressions that are drawn from daily life experiences and activities that the audience is familiar with. In "Copyrights," Winky D alludes to intergenerational relationships in, "*madhara oda twechidiki achisiya yavo size*" ("old men are falling in love with young girls instead of their age mates"), an issue that is discussed in detail in Mate's analysis of urban grooves. "Copyrights" uses an unsophisticated metaphoric expression "*dzatinoti hanzvadzi kwavari ndomatoyis*" ("our sisters are toys to them") which everybody can understand to reflect the abusive nature of such sexual relationship. Moreover, though he is male, Winky D speaks for female youth who are economically disempowered and are often sexually exploited by older men for material gains. Another simple figurative expression is the simile "*usatsvage nhamo pandiri hauiwani semukwande wangu uri muwoolani*" where Winky D makes reference to his own dreadlocks which are always invisible and hidden in the woollen hats that he always puts on. Thus, he is

saying he has destroyed all his problems and none is visible just as his dreadlocks are invisible and such is a simple simile that anyone who knows this popular artist can comprehend. Reference is also made to global activities familiar to Winky D's audiences. The slang formation "*kugarisa mudish*" discussed earlier is used where the song makes a pun on the phrase satellite dish as follows: "*this time ndakasvinura handina anondigarisa mudish nekuti handisi satellite*" ("this time I am vigilant there is no one who will make me sit in the dish because I am not a satellite") referring to refusal to yield to defeat as discussed before. However, although the original "*kugarisa mudish*" ("sit in the dish") referenced a simple dish for holding water, Winky D comes up with his own pun on the phrase satellite dish borrowing from people's access to global media through satellite dishes, which has become a common activity in Zimbabwe. Similar reference to a global activity is in the simile "*ndodawo kalife kemudenga kunge Emirates*" ("I also want to live a high life like the Emirates") as expressed in the lyrical persona's wish for a high life in "Copyrights". The use of Emirates Airlines evokes travels to Dubai, a common destination for informal traders who go there to buy clothes and other goods to sell at the informal market. This is evidence that Winky D's language is also influenced by the common global activities that ordinary Zimbabweans engage in. Thus, his audiences find it easier to identify with his messages and understand them because of the way he uses language drawing on the common everyday practices that his audiences engage in and are familiar with.

Winky D's music is also satirical. The singer speaks on behalf of the ordinary and lampoons the failures of the leadership and their excesses, which are responsible for the society's impoverishment. One of the lyrical personae in "Survivor" presents a crude caricature of the City Council's excesses and 'vendophobia.' He draws on the imagery of demons where he presents the City Council as demon possessed and imagines the eviction of the helpless vendors from the city streets as demonic for the government has not come up with viable solutions to the lack of employment opportunities for the people. Thus, Winky D uses the imagery to show the ugliness of governance in a manner that is reminiscent of Mbembe's (103) presentation of the grotesque as one of the essential characteristics that identify postcolonial regimes of domination. "Copyrights" satirises the government's economic failures and lack of solutions yet it threatens the alternative sources of livelihoods the people have innovatively come up with mainly through informal trading. Thus, ordinary people are treated as if they have no right to own anything except their poverty; poverty has become their "copyright". In addition, people mock their impoverishment through a defiant spirit that they possess as shown in how they laugh off their problems: "*tisu tine macopyrights enhamo asi tinongoseka sengano*" ("we have poverty copyrights but we laugh as if it's not real"). This laughter is medicine for the cure of the pains of life (Bere 169), hence creation and sharing of comic skits on social media platforms has become a common activity for Zimbabweans both at 'home' and in the 'diaspora,'

who laugh off their problems and satirise leadership failures through humour. The appropriation of the term “copyright” in this instance also fits in with the common contemporary consumption of music and other popular cultural artefacts such as films as selling of pirated music and films has become widespread in Zimbabwe through the informal market. Many poor Zimbabweans make use of computer technologies to access such (pirated) artefacts at low prices. Therefore, satire is relevantly used by Winky D as part of the language that is centred on the needs and sensibilities of ordinary Zimbabweans.

Conclusion

The songs “Copyrights”, “Survivor” and “Disappear” by Winky D emerged in the context of contemporary adversities that Zimbabwean people grapple with. Through the songs, the artist details the experiences of the ordinary people especially the poor in the ghetto who have been plunged into the country’s economic woes. Focus is on the most recent experiences such as the 2015 Supreme Court ruling on job terminations as well as the ongoing victimisation of street vendors who attempt to eke a living through the slim opportunities they find in the country. In detailing such experiences, Winky D positions himself within the plight of these poor people and mourns together with them. However, he goes beyond just mourning as the music itself is a source of power that fosters a response resonating with a postcolonial urban youth cultural activism seeking to empower the ordinary Zimbabweans. Winky D uses ‘the language of the people’ which they can understand and identify with. Code-switching is mainly representatives of the day to day languages of the ghetto youth that form the greater part of Winky D’s audiences and are referenced in the songs “Copyrights” and “Survivor” whilst satire is appropriated to ridicule the government’s failures and excesses in dealing with the socio-economic crisis that has gripped the country. All this shows how Winky D and other young contemporary musicians who anchor their musical lyrics and styles on the contemporary experiences of the ordinary people are important cultural icons.

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Khekhethi Makhudu
Khekhethi Makhudu (PhD) is
attached to English Language
Studies, School of Languages and
Communication, University of
Limpopo, Sovenga, South Africa.
Email: khekhethi.makhudu@ul.ac.za

Sol T. Plaatje's paremiological quest: A common humanity in cultural diversity

Sol T. Plaatje's paremiological quest: A common humanity in cultural diversity

Having written and compiled, from memory, over 700 Setswana proverbs when he was resident in London during the second decade of 1900, Sol T. Plaatje exhibited unusual ethnographic knowledge and remarkable, creative translation skills in diaspora-like circumstances. While most literary researchers attest to those achievements, few have been the theories to account sufficiently for Plaatje's multilingual proverb renditions. The view propounded here is that Plaatje's paremiological enterprise was probably never only an exercise of his polyglot abilities. Rather his quest apparently was to assert the similarities and convergences between African and European people's cultural histories. Deep pride in his Setswana identity seems to have propelled a need to highlight the ethnographic bonds Northern and Southern nations share. For Plaatje, seeing overlaps and equivalences in the proverbs of European and the Batswana peoples, firstly validates orality as the bedrock of modern literary expression. Secondly, the relationship of the two appears to recapitulate the communicative connections of people, across time and space. Lastly, the point is made that Plaatje's search for unity in linguistic and cultural diversity, as exhibited in the *Diane tsa Setswana* collection (1916) and *A Sechuana Reader* stories (1924), provides instructive lessons which present-day South Africa would ill afford to ignore considering the social cohesion challenges the nation faces. **Keywords:** cultural identity, diversity, equivalence, orality, Setswana paremiology, social cohesion.

Introduction

Over the years, Sol T. Plaatje's better known publications like *Native Life in South Africa* and the epic novel *Mhudi* have been regularly researched, critiqued and reviewed by largely English-speaking British and South African scholars such as John Comaroff, Brian Willan, Tim Couzens and Stephen Gray.¹ On the other hand, literary investigation of Plaatje's Setswana works and Shakespeare translations like *Diphosphoso* (*Comedy of Errors*) and *Dintshontsho tsa bo-Julius Kesara* (*Julius Caesar*) has been rather scanty. Indeed, critical or scholarly inquiry into two of Plaatje's multilingual publications, namely, *Diane tsa Sechuana le Maele a Sekgooa a a Dumalanang Naco* (*Sechuana² Proverbs with Literal Translations and their European Equivalents*), and *A Sechuana Reader*³ (further: *Diane* and *Reader*, respectively), could be taken as almost non-existent. Several literary critics, ethnographic researchers and historians (Chrisman 148; Comaroff, *Mafikeng Diary* 7–10; Couzens and Willan 3; Doke, "Diketa-pele" v; Giliomee and Mbenga 107–12; Rall 214–25; Willan 124–6) confirm that Plaatje wrote, particularly *Diane* and *Reader*, from memory while he was in London around 1915.

The observation foreshadows one of the main concerns in this article: that the latter predominantly Setswana texts are products of recollection under conditions that can be termed 'diaspora-like' (Brah 445).⁴ The recreated oral forms like traditional stories and proverbs.

The first text *Diane*, is a compilation of 723 Setswana proverbs with equivalents in European languages like Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian and Latin. In the preface, Plaatje points out that writing the book "in England alone, without any native speaker's advice or input" was an arduous task (Plaatje, *Diane* x). By this, he presumably was alluding to the kind of challenges commonly associated with translating memorized "oral forms into graphic and written material" (Ong 12–24). In a sense, Plaatje might have been urging for the native speaker's authentication of the recollected Setswana proverbs, which idea contrasts directly with the already established and "published European proverb equivalents" that he cites.⁵ Nevertheless, it seems that the transformation of oral expression into printed form while daunting, was an endeavour Plaatje strove to complete. As to why he sought to achieve that, is the other major issue in this discussion.

The second text *Reader*, a collaboration with Daniel Jones, introduces the first Setswana phonetic orthography meant to assist in reading Setswana-Serolong and to promote teaching young Batswana and English people appropriate pronunciation (Jones and Plaatje v–xiv).⁶ The pedagogic goals are seemingly enhanced by extensive interlacing of every fable and story with at least one Setswana proverb. Thus, the *Reader* text reaches fruition through regular insertion of a proverb, towards the story's end, to derive some 'didactic message' or to present a moral instruction, as Mpe (22–43) asserts. On another level, according to Couzens (*Mhudi* 183–5) and Gray ("Sources" 12–4), Plaatje deploys the proverb in texts like *Mhudi* to underline, not only his familiarity with Setswana cultural resonances in "folk tales", but also to "elaborate" on the ethnographic tradition of oral forms like myth, fable, legends, riddles and the proverb itself. My theoretical view is, therefore, that Plaatje's device in writing novels, folk tales and stories interwoven with proverbs seeks to attain specific and articulated ends, be they literary, linguistic, pedagogic, didactic and/or socio-political. Indeed, at the heart of Plaatje's enterprise there appears to repose the quest for what he terms: the authentic linguistic roots and identity of a Motswana or "*bonontlho joa medi ea Secoana [...] sa Mocoana*" (Plaatje, *Diane* 6–7) realized through understanding one's own cultural identity encompassed in the paremiology heritage.

Theoretical approaches and analytical methods

Specifically regarding *Diane*, the compiler-author's intentions could be interpreted as graver than what he plainly states as: to show "equivalence" between Setswana and European language proverbs.⁷ In this article, the almost intuitive or automatic

question arises about Plaatje's aim: What lies behind or is the real purpose of showing the equivalence? The answer would be that Plaatje sought to draw out the similarities between various cultures and languages. He highlights the linguistic commonalities in proverbs in order to signal the similarities and the equality of nations. Plaatje's mission in *Reader* and *Diane* is to hold up paremiological study as a pathway, first into one's own cultural identity; second, as an avenue towards comprehension of other cultures to attain social harmony and cohesion among divergent cultures and people. Considering the context of writing *Reader* and *Diane*, it should not be far-fetched to contend that the multilingual texts resemble the "socio-political commentary" in other Plaatje publications (Couzens, *Mhudi* 182). Indeed, three of those, namely, *Native Life*, *Mhudi* and *Reader* are seen to employ the "paremiological" and "narrative style", in order to address the land question and racial contestations in the South Africa of the time (Mieder, *Proverbs* 2–4; Obiechina 203–7). As such, literary and sociolinguistic readings are adopted, since they underlie the content, structure and innate form of the texts being analysed here. The practice, commonly associated with the oral traditions of diverse nations, of using proverbs to, for example, give advice, instruction and share wisdom (Mieder, *Behold* 4–8), and/or to verbally transmit myths, folk tales, stories, and riddles (Posa and Makgopa 1–2), seems to lend itself to sociolinguistic and ethnographic investigation, as propounded by researchers like Hymes and Fairclough.

The tools of literary analysis, pragmatics and discourse analysis are utilized herein to uncover the layers of semantic overlapping, as well as, to explore ethno-linguistic patterns occurring especially in various *Diane* proverbs and *Reader* stories. To accomplish that, the word "equivalence", while containing notions related to the conventional translation processes (Baker 4–9), is defined as linguistic parity, broad similarity and equality in cultural practices and ethnographic outlooks. The actual process of comparing and contrasting Setswana and European proverbs is conceived, in the manner that Plaatje suggests (*Diane* 4–6), as leading ideally to some sort of "convergence" and/or "social cohesion" within a society in conflict.

The other analytic angle relates to instances of Plaatje using proper names and place names in publications like *The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje* or *Mafikeng Diary* and *Mhudi*. The necessity for this derives from the themes in *Reader* and *Diane*, and the context that presumably contributed to their production. According to Comaroff (12) and Willan (14), the *Diary* is the first and only one diary about the Anglo-Boer War, published by an African. The predominantly English text, replete with words, phrases, epithets, place and personal names of languages as divergent as Dutch, French, Koranna, IsiZulu and Setswana, is relevant for two reasons. Firstly, Plaatje's employ of different languages raises questions about his purpose for doing so. The unconcealed reason of demonstrating his multilingual skills and polyglot abilities, has a semblance of superficiality; hence the argument is presented that

sizeable socio-political implications lie parallel with Plaatje's onomastic venture for the analytic arguments pursued here. Secondly, the multilingualism of *Diary*, can rightly be taken as an indirect product of, not diasporic, but martial conditions. Suffice it, therefore, to assert that Plaatje's diverse expressions probably reflect the confusing battles of the war and bring out the idea that it was no clash of merely two cultures: English and Boer. In fact, various nations engaged in the 'bloody [...] frightening contest', as Comaroff (14–6) points out. This strongly implies the reign of a multilingual atmosphere during the war. What Plaatje diarized is most probably a metaphoric recreation of some Babel-like disharmony among various contestants and people. On the other hand, the epic novel *Mhudi*, while ostensibly articulating the dislocation issues brought about by Mzilikazi's rampant *impi* or army attacks on Afrikaner, Batswana and Koranna people, also seems to explore the complexities of human interaction in conflict circumstances (Chrisman 124; Couzens, *Mhudi* 188; Willan 305). These views underpin the key issue interrogated here, namely, how Plaatje proposes that human relationships should be handled within a colonial and racially hostile environment.

Proverbs and cultural identity

The beginnings of an answer seem to lie in first establishing Plaatje's ultimate purpose in compiling, translating and writing stories interwoven with proverbs in *Reader* and *Diane*. His paremiological quest would probably have been set in motion by a desire to assert the Batswana cultural identity within an unfriendly, Eurocentric milieu (Couzens, *Mhudi* 183; Plaatje, *Diane* ix, 1). Through this, Plaatje would perhaps have wanted to uphold his people's humanity or *botho* and *ubuntu*, pride of place, as explained by Chaka (64–5), prove their rootedness in Setswana language, folkways, customs or mores, and consequently for them to claim equality in the inimical colonial space. Self-identity having been asserted, rendered Plaatje and his people open to accessing and understanding the cultural identities of other nations. Thus, he became a non-parochial ethnographer who expounds similarities of Setswana to the diverse cultures of nations, while extolling the wisdom, virtues and values in European proverbs. This latter self-assertion and cultural validation is attested for by *Diane's* engagement with of literary adages, aphorisms, maxims and folklorist, European sayings that Plaatje contends overlap with that of his own people's language and culture: *Becoana [...] [ba] bua puo e e tsamayang mmogo le teme tsa merafe [...] ebile o nale maele a a dumalanang le maele a Sekgowa* (Plaatje, *Diane* 8).

The three Setswana proverbs in the paragraphs below, should serve to illustrate as well as confirm Plaatje's deep familiarity with the Batswana ethnolinguistic identity. In addition, the examples appear to symbolise the centrality of autochthonous folkways, associated practices, mores and beliefs commonly accepted as the bedrock and shapers of a people's philosophical being and wisdom (Obiechina

122; Possa and Makgopa 2; Wanjohi 22–45). The particular community's ethos and philosophical reflections are first verbally signalled through songs, dance, riddles and proverbs (Mieder, *Proverbs* xi–xii). Those forms then become transformed through translation into 'physical artefacts,' and literary art pieces such as printed books (van Haute 26–7). The forms, thereafter, come to represent the unique cultural identity of those same people and/or community like the Batswana people or a European nation.

[123] *Etlare ke tlare "ke dipitse" ke bone mebala ya cone. (Re tla re re ke dipitse re di bone ka mebala.)*⁸ (Only by their colours will you know that they are zebras. / One's true identity can be revealed by one's cultural habits/apparel.)

[304] *Loare go bona sesha lo se eka-eka lo latlhe segogolo. (When you are attracted by the new, you are enticed to discard the old. / Young people are admonished not to neglect their own cultural traditions in pursuit of the flashy and modern.)*

[340] *Makoloanyane lo tla nna lo mpheta fela, lo ba lo mphitlela ke ntse fa. (Young initiates will keep walking past an old person, but they will return to find the old still seated. / Youth who persist ignoring old ways and will lose out since the old traditions remain steadfast, unshaken and unchanged.)*

The three *Diane* proverbs highlight the points made earlier about an assertion of one's cultural identity and pride of place, but more especially [123]. They also go some way in the signalling a person's status vis-à-vis other members in the community, particularly [304]. While the last two are mildly censorious of youth's impetuosity or negligence of traditions [340], all three illustrate Plaatje's belief in upholding one's cultural identity and valuing one's true being by maintaining national pride. In doing that, one stands a better chance of gaining respect, understanding and appreciation of the foreign and/or different cultures (Plaatje, *Diane* 6–8). It therefore appears that Plaatje's quest begins as a journey towards understanding the self, then follows self-assertion which continues as cultural introspection and ends with an unravelling or unfolding of the initially antithetical European system. Plaatje further expands this view by quoting Archbishop Crisp's assertion that, while the Setswana cultural identity is essentially rural and pastoral: *Mocoana ko madisho*, it relates crucially to a pastoral life resembling that of ancient, Biblical nations like the Jews (Plaatje, *Diane* 6–7, 11–3; Peters and Tabane 21–4). Again, the statements strongly suggest Plaatje's quest to reveal and expose the similarities or bonds shared by the Batswana people and other nations. The former's life of herding and hunting: *bogolo joa diane tsa Secoana bo thaegile mo madishong le ko lecomong*, is asserted as part of a southern African identity ultimately residing in Setswana proverbs and yet bearing strong resemblances to and/or similarity with the pastoral life, cultural practices and proverbs of the English, northern Europeans and the Jews: *moagi oa ... Enyelane; ... ko Kgoeng; maele a Sekgoota ...; dico tsa Ba-Juta ...* (Plaatje, *Diane* 6–8 and 11–3).

Pastoral life, orality and printed texts

The foregoing *Diane* quotations associate Plaatje's cultural roots and innate identity tightly with a pastoral lifestyle in which a non-literate and an orally-driven outlook has ascendancy. Exploration of the implications of this could probably bring us to a deeper understanding of Plaatje's paremiological quest. To begin with, the statement about a life of herding and hunting or *madishong le ko lecomong*, is connected to the rustic world of wild animals and brutish beasts. Hence, Plaatje remarks that many stories, fables and proverbs make regular reference to and are based on creatures of the wild like, buffalo (*nare*); springbok (*tshepe*); sable (*kukama*); eland (*phofu*) and other game (*Diane* x). For Plaatje therefore, the *diane* and *maele* forms essentially occupy, within a fluid and unitary cultural field, the same folklorist space as an overarching verbal and oral tradition that resides in every culture and language. The proverbs and idiomatic expressions are imbedded, not in "typographic, chirographic, literate and/or written mediums" (Ong 36–45), but rather in and through oral, verbalized, spoken forms of expression. The articulation of that orality is often encouraged, learned and nurtured in the home and community, as where Plaatje states that Setswana is, like other languages, learnt from birth when suckling at one's mother's breast: *oa ba a se anyile mo letseleng ja mosadi* (Plaatje, *Diane* 7). In *Reader*, he adds that he was taught Setswana by his mother and his aunts: *ke etleedicoe ke thuto tsa ga mme le bo rakgadi* (Jones and Plaatje 4–8). Indeed, like other children or young ones, Plaatje was brought up, developed and fed by his mother's breast milk, his grandmother's attention, his aunt's care and words spoken in the closeness and intimacy of family as the natural unit in a human community (Couzens and Willan 3–4).

Implicitly, the knowledge of both flora and fauna is transmitted to younger generations through verbal and oral means which in turn require the ability to recollect and retell. "Orality" can, therefore, be seen to involve far broader capacities than speaking because, in both Ong's (10–4) and Brown's (197) estimation, the sharing of knowledge naturally demands "creative memory" skills within the recalling and retelling process. In other words, familiarity with one's cultural expressions is based on an intimate understanding and expert reproduction of forms like, myths, fables, stories and proverbs that are usually taught and learnt orally. This point once again brings into discussion Plaatje's enterprise and purpose to recall and weave several proverbs into the *Reader* fables and stories. While the matter could evoke the assumption that Plaatje produced *Reader* largely for artistic and literary ends, each story's structural organization is sufficient evidence of his moral or didactic purposes. For instance, every one of *Reader* fables and stories concludes with the expression of a warning, admonition and/or advice to animal protagonists like, the hartebeest or *khama/kgama*; ratel or *magogo/magogwe*; scaly anteater or *kgaga*. In the first story about a hunting man after wild game then chasing after a hartebeest, the admonition given is: "Be careful that you not mourn for both the hartebeest and the hide", or rather, *O se lelele kgama*

le mogogoro. The implication of the proverb is that one should never neglect what is one's direct concern in pursuance of something else, lest one should lose both. The next fable in *Reader* is about young shepherds taking honeycomb from a molehill whereon a ratel or honey badger had placed it. The animal returns from the beehive several times and notices that the piles of honeycombs do not increase. As such, the proverb issues a warning about having suspicions about one's earnings like the ratel was about the piled-up honeycombs: *Magogo o belaela lomepa/lomepe* [332].

Underlying the discussion above, is the argument that oral expression and/or orality is an important communication mode and the bedrock of literary works, as is asserted by Rosenberg (82) and Ong (32–38). The notion of communicative ability as verbal-spoken action, in the way expounded by Ong (20–28), infuses a language with vitality and immediacy rarely captured in print or hard copy. Indeed, at the heart of such communication systems repose dynamic, epithetic expressions like riddles, aphorisms and proverbs or *diane* and *maele/mafoko* or idioms.⁹ As various scholars indicate, the latter forms are dynamic, and get universally created and delivered through oral performances of folktales incorporating metaphoric, narrative songs, riddles and proverbs (Brown 41–52, Possa and Makgopa 9, Obiechina 215). Plaatje's passion for language or *manyama a puo*, and deep pride in his cultural roots or *bononthlo joa medi ea Secoana*, is thus detectable in the verbal dexterity that he ascribes to the Motswana herder or *modisa oa Mocoana* of his day. Secondly, at the level of communicating the *diane* and *maele* graphically, Plaatje exhibits unusual ethnographic and semantic comprehension of the "truth", "wisdom" and "considerable authority" embodied in idioms and proverbs (Mieder, *Behold* 6–9). In other words, *Diane* could be erroneously seen as a culmination of his preservation of his native Setswana's oral and poetic expression in written form. Since he makes that very point in the *Diane* preface, one could argue that the orally conceived proverbs were literally and figuratively being transformed from their verbal essence into "printed text", in the manner that Rosenberg (77–82) argues. The written or codified proverbs would, in turn, become comparable to "texts" serving purposes similar to proverbs in the five European languages equivalents, that is, Dutch, English, French, German and Latin. It is to such language contexts that Plaatje sought convergences and overlaps between Setswana proverbs and the cultural maxims of different European nations. By comparing and contrasting maxims in diverse languages to the adages of the Batswana, Plaatje's paremiological *Diane* constructs the basis for intercultural understanding and exhibits or configures translated oral material as transformed literary texts. Thus, the overall translation exercise consisted in a radical change of audio-aural communication into silent graphic images that were probably a stern test of his literary and polyglot abilities. The latter perspective is crucial for a close scrutiny of Plaatje's motives for pursuing the *Diane* paremiological work and for a larger comprehension of his reasons for stitching narrative proverbs into the *Reader* fables.

Where proverbs are concerned, Plaatje quite directly points out that even though the Batswana people might appear crude, rustic and backward owing also to their heavy dependence on “cow dung”, Setswana is equally capable and is definitely “civilized” enough in the exquisite employment of metaphoric sayings and aphorisms similar to those of European nations. He expresses those sentiments as follows:

Se se gkgamatsang bogolo ke go bona morafe o o tshelang ka boloko joa kgomo jaka Becoana o o bua puo e e tsamaeang mmogo le teme tsa merafe e e tlhabologileng, ebile o nale maele a a dumalanang le maele a Sekgooa. (Plaatje, Diane 7–8)

(Translation?)

The statements should not be interpreted as plaintive cries or a mere hankering for Europe’s acceptance. The similarities cannot be construed as mere imitation of northern hemisphere expression. In actuality, Plaatje appeals rather to far larger “spiritual connection” among southern climes people and the nations of the North. The stance, not widely popular in his day, is abundantly evident in the statement Plaatje makes in the introductory passages of *Diane*. The introduction, called “*Mafoko a Pele*”, starts off with the following metaphoric explanation that resembles a story verbally delivered and that incorporates an extended proverb:

Fa o tlogela dilo tsa lenaga tse di bonoang ka matlho, jaanong u tla go tlhahuna maitlhommo le megopolo e e sa bonoeng, u tla choga mecoedi ea puo ea Sechoana e phaphalala, jaka seane se se reng ‘Tlhale di fedile morutsheng. (Plaatje, Diane 8)

(Putting aside worldly things visible only to the eye, one will perceive the non-material enterprise, and appreciates the great insights considered through, Setswana as its fountains pour forth even in sayings and proverb: “The string on the bobbin is spent/has expired.”)

Plaatje’s elevated tone underlines the momentous import and gravity attaching the proverb, as well as, the philosophies interlaced with the subtle nuances of Setswana terms. Seemingly, Kunene’s analysis of ‘meaning’ (iv–vi) attained by “transcending” the limitations of familiar words and concepts, has useful application in Plaatje’s paremiology (Kunene iv–vi). This implies that accepting the “reality” of “non-words” encountered in forms like proverbs, creates unrestricted access to African philosophies imbedded within such oral communication systems, as Bandia (76) would have it. Thus, proverbs like “*Tlhale*”, in both Kunene’s and Plaatje’s estimation, carry innate, non-word components which can probably be appreciated more at a non-material, higher and spiritual level.

Pastoral knowledge and onomastic similarities

As already indicated, Plaatje informs us of his upbringing in a rural, pastoral environment where he had to mind and herd the family’s sheep, goats and probably a

few cattle. There, nurtured and influenced by parents, extended family members and the larger community of his Batswana age mates, he gains the herder's mastery and knowledge *kico ya modisana* of his native language, its mores and folkways (Plaatje, *Diane* 6–8). While such knowledge and abilities acquired him the expertise that stood him in good stead as a court interpreter, journalist and translator *tirong ea kgatisho le ea botoloko*, that hardly rendered him parochial, insular and isolated from European languages and culture. In fact, it imbued him with the desire to uncover similarities and convergences between southern African and northern European ways. Several literary scholars and critics, such as Mazisi Kunene, Tim Couzens and Mbulelo Mzamane together with Stephen Gray and Brian Willan found it remarkable that Plaatje reproduced as many Setswana proverbs from memory, unaided or single-handedly, in exile and under diaspora-like conditions. However, no great mystery hinders consideration of Plaatje's own explanation about the large store of Setswana expressions, words, phrases, names and making up the proverb collection in *Diane* and in the stories of *Reader*. His delving into onomastics by citing Setswana toponyms with European map-name equivalents for South African place names like, Mafikeng, Thaba Nchu, Thabachoeu, Kolobeng, and Rochefort, Monte Negro, Wittenberg and Zwijndracht, respectively (Plaatje, *Diane* 9), underlines Plaatje's search for connections and similarities among nations of the world. As if that were not enough, Plaatje searches to find resemblances between the lifestyles of the Batswana and Jewish people that he refers to as the fruits of his labour: *maungo a tlhotlhomisho eaka* (Plaatje, *Diane* xii). His description of the discovery of the likenesses and similarities of even personal names, is carried across in the paragraph below. The words communicating pleasant surprise, wonderment and delight at the cultural resemblances among divergent people or *merafe-rafe* beyond time and space, is brought out this way:

(Is the following the original or a translation, if the latter please insert the original here)

The similarity between all pastoral nations is such that some passages in the history of the Jews read uncommonly like a description of the Bechuana during the nineteenth century [...] In the Psalms the similarity is so emphasized that it seems difficult at times to persuade oneself that the writer was not a Mochuana, e.g. Psalm 144:11–14. (Plaatje *Diane* 10–1)

Elsewhere, Plaatje gives examples of patronyms or personal and family names that Batswana people have in common with the Hebrews, Greeks, Romans (Latin names) and other European appellations for men and women (Plaatje, *Diane* 9–11). A few examples of such names will clarify the point: Agnes, Amanda, Bosman, Boulanger, Chloe, Cordelia, Dieudonné, Grace, Pasteur and Phillipa. The Setswana equivalents for each of the latter are: *Bori, Ratanang, Mosaroa, Kapei, Majang, Pelonyana, Thusho'a Modimo, Choaro, Modise* and *Mmadipitse*, respectively. Thus, in dabbling in the field

of onomastics, Plaatje demonstrates a willingness to search, identify and thereby, establish the connections human beings have with one another, not just between the English names, *Senyese mane* and Setswana ones, but also among the Danish, Greek, Portuguese and Spanish people, as he indicates (Plaatje, *Diane* xii). In the domains of lineage, family or kinship names and what he calls “patronyms” lies the implicit truth any people’s cultural identity and lifestyle resembling those of other nations. Also, the names themselves reflect much of a community’s innate being in their references to where they live or geographic location, the environment on which they depend, how they live and behave, what they do for a living, who they are and what their cherished beliefs and values appear to be. It is clear, therefore, that for Plaatje, the topographic and onomastic epithets of a community, people or nation get encapsulated in proverbs as shortened forms of large elements of their geo-physical identity, historical and cultural narrative. By translating and identifying Setswana proverbs together with their European equivalents, he underlines his quest for mutual understanding or the present-day South African conception of *botho* and/or *ubuntu*, or regard and respect among southern and northern nations (Chaka 72–80). It further demonstrates that the belief that the quest can culminate in acceptance of humanity’s similarity and common bonds, even within the diversity of languages and cultures.

Translative equivalence, diversity and culture-bound themes

In this part of the discussion, the notion of ethnolinguistic similarity in an international sense, is extended to merge with “equivalence” in a seemingly narrow sense Plaatje uses it in the longish Setswana title for *Diane*, that is, in the phrase: *dumalanang naco*. Literally, the latter words carry the simple meaning of equivalence, similarity but, more specifically “agreement” or “agree with”. As such, the European proverbs he juxtaposes with Setswana ones are semantically in agreement with one another, probably in the wisdom and philosophical outlooks that the proverb pairs appear to convey. The understanding of the concept of equivalence in this context therefore, should not be taken as categorical exactness or mirror-image likeness, since the Setswana and European proverb examples in each case, originate in their own, unique cultural and linguistic environments. These implicit differences seem to indicate Plaatje’s awareness of the classical translative axiom that no two languages have one-to-one meaning equivalent words (Baker 45–8). In this context, therefore, the word equivalence apparently amounts to the approximate semantic meaning that the two proverbs share. How this explanation relates to whether each proverb is an effective and acceptable translation of the original Setswana one is potentially complex and controversial and will not add to understanding Plaatje’s purposes. To begin with, Plaatje’s quest in writing in such culturally diverse languages Setswana proverb equivalents raises the matter of his own translation abilities in this arduous

undertaking. The totals given in the next few sentences illustrate the size of Plaatje translation task: 732 Setswana proverbs paralleled by about 692 English literal translations. The actual proverb numbers in various European languages can be broken down as follows: Dutch (10), English (534), French (46), German (35), Italian (5), Latin (52) and Spanish (1) (Makhudu 102–4). In addition to this, Plaatje provides English transliterations for Danish, Spanish and Portuguese proverbs. The fact that, in the volume, Plaatje did not give European equivalents for approximately 37 Setswana proverbs and idioms implicitly conjures up questions about the challenges he faced in translating “culture-specific and/or culture-bound concepts” in both Setswana and the eight European languages, as Sebotsa (105) defines those. The discussion, as such, arrives at notions like: equivalence, functional equivalence, disparity in semantic range and cultural knowledge, as authors like Ricard (56) applies them in the literary translation domain. However, the theoretical minefield could detract from focus on what proverbs represent semantically in *Diane* as a paremiological product. Research conducted on Plaatje’s Shakespeare translations: *Comedy of Errors*, *Julius Caesar*, and excerpts from *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, broadly established Plaatje as an able translator (Couzens, “Introduction” 12–14; Couzens, *Mhudi* 160–2; Doke, *Dintshontsho tsa bo-Juliusse Kesara* vi–vii; Willan 210–1, 308). To accomplish the accurate inter-translation feat of the *Diane* multi-ethnic proverbs would certainly have required understanding European languages and utilizing fluent, transcultural skills. Combined with that, would be translation techniques to mimic and/or match culturally bound meanings across the different languages. The following proverbs in various languages should serve to illustrate the linguistic diversity of that probably would have demanded Plaatje’s more than basic or superficial comprehension of culture-bound themes and accurate translation ability of metaphoric concepts that are universally common in proverbs, according to Mieder (*Behold* 4–8).

On sleep as the imitator of death:

Setswana: [56] *Boroko ngoana 'ra losho.*

English: [56] Sleep, the antechamber of the grave.

Latin: [56] *Somnus est imago mortis.*

On unity and friendship:

Setswana: [55] *Boraro ke bobedi, bobedi ke jone bongoe fela.*

English: [55] One man’s company is no company.

Setswana: [150] *Ga ke thata ke ke le nosi, ke thata ka ba bangoe.*

English: [150] Show me the man who would go to heaven alone, and I will show you one who will never be admitted.

On kinship, family ties and relations:

Setswana: [29] *Bana ba tadi ba itsioe ka mereto.*

English: [29] Like mother like child.

Latin: [29] *Qualis avis, talis cantus; qualis vir, talis oratio.*

Setswana: [50] *Bongoe fela ke bobedi, bojosi losho.*

English: [50] Two heads are better than one, or why do folks marry?

On illness and doctors:

Setswana: [63] *Botlhoko bo bonako go tsena, bo bonya bo coa.*

English: Agues come on horseback and go away on foot.

French: *Tout mal arrive avec des ailes, et s'en retourne en boitant.*

Setswana: [109] *Eare ngaka e retelecoe go alafe ngakana.*

English: When a clever doctor fails, try one less clever (literally).

French: [109] *C'est une petite pluie qui mouille.*

On kingship, subjects, wealth and poverty:

Setswana: [133] *Foko ja kgosi lo ageloa mosako.*

English: [133] The king can do no wrong.

Setswana: [260] *Kgosi ke kgosi ka morafe.*

English: [260] The wealth of kings is in the affections of their subjects.

Setswana: [271] *Khumo le lehuma di lala mmogo.*

English: [271] A fat kitchen is next door to poverty.

German: [271] *Aus derselben Ackerkrume wächts das Unkraut wie die Blume.*

Afrikaans: *Ryk gesaai, bankrot ge-oes.*¹⁰ Great inheritance given, easily bankrupt (literally); Huge fortune and riches lead to poverty (figuratively).

On humanness/humanity and humility:

Setswana: [122] *E senang meno e lomeloa ke mogolo oa eone.*

English: [122] Helping lame dogs over the stiles.

French: [122] *Il faut attendre le boiteux.*

Setswana: [235] *Ke motho ka ba bangoe.*¹¹

English: [235] Through other people, I am a human being (literally).

Setswana: [279] *Lecogo le tlhapiso je lengoe.*

English: [279] One hand washeth the other and both the face.

Setswana: [430] *Mongoe ga ipolele, o boleloa ke ba bangoe.*

English: [430] Brave actions never want a trumpet.

German: [430] *Eigenlob stinkt, Freundeslob hinkt.*

For Plaatje to have produced at least one European language equivalent for each of approximately 90% of Setswana proverbs, is a noteworthy achievement. In its wake questions arose about Plaatje's ability to speak and write not only French, German and/or Latin but even English, which from all accounts, was widely used in

late 19th century, British-ruled South Africa (Lestrade, "European Influences" 108–10; Schapera, "Western Civilization" 235; Willan 320). However, Plaatje partially answers the queries by citing sources he had "profitably consulted" for what he names the "continental language equivalents" of the proverbs (Plaatje, *Diane* xi–xii). Probably the last word on the matter is that of researchers who aver that Plaatje had learnt to speak and write Dutch, French and German from his teachers, the Westphals, at Pniel missionary station, near Boshoff in the Free State Province (Chrisman 128; Rall 154–66; Couzens, "Introduction" 3–12). It is as such, safe to assert that, with the exception of Arabic, Danish, Portuguese and Spanish, Plaatje could acquit himself well orally and in written translation, through several African and European languages. It is therefore reasonable to argue that Plaatje would never have produced any of the Dutch, English, French and German proverbs in *Diane* if he could make no semantic sense of them.

Diversity not division

That linguistic and cultural cosmopolitanism is displayed fully not only in *Diane* but in *Mhudi* and *Native Life in South Africa*. The latter is replete with rather longish quotations, paragraphs and song verses that underline Plaatje's socio-political polemic about land dispossession, injustice and human rights (Couzens and Willan 4–6). Thus, both texts contain sufficient evidence of his tendency to communicate across ethnic, racial and cultural barriers in order to forge greater understanding, self-respect and mutual regard among human beings all over the world. Those inclinations are directly expressed in the *Diane* introduction and preface on place names and personal names (Plaatje, *Reader* 8–11). The similarities and parallels he perceives occurring between Setswana and European proverbs seemingly extend beyond personal and place names, cultural identity and native folklore. Since human beings all over the planet express their being and identity through ethnolinguistic oral forms like songs, stories and proverbs (Lestrade, "Traditional Literature" 295), for Plaatje the resemblances in northern and southern hemisphere languages and nations manifest larger and spiritual affinities. His search for correspondences expressed through the *Reader* stories and *Diane* proverbs were most likely meant to recover and re-assert the spiritual bonds humans share. The denial and undermining of that connection had been precipitated, among others, by colonial imperialism and racially reprehensible laws like the 1913 South African Land Act.

Conclusion

It therefore appears to be evident that Plaatje's ultimate mission in compiling and producing *Diane* and *Reader* was to increase comprehension of the rich diversity inherent in ethnolinguistic expressions like the proverbs of the European north and African south. In that way, he hoped for that sensitivity around the unity of the human

species would be enhanced and appreciated more than before. Hypothetically then, that would help prevent the rampant injustices and abuses of imperial, colonial rule and the accompanying racism of his time. To assert, therefore, that Plaatje's vision has application to modern problems of widespread religious intolerance, racial violence, xenophobic hatred and rabid social dislocation would not be far off the mark. In a sense, Plaatje's quest was no mere exercise of his literary and polyglot inclinations. Rather he called, not for diversity that causes division, nor contrast taken to signify conflict, but a new and common humanity. In present-day South Africa, more than ever before, Plaatje's undertaking bears massive socio-economic significance largely because the society cries out for remedies to racism and apartheid ills. His vision of social cohesion that does not countenance indignity and disrespect, unfair discrimination, artificial divisions, homophobia and the inequalities of poverty, is central to his socially conscious writing. Indeed, from the *Comedy of Errors*, *Julius Caesar*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Othello* translations to *Native Life* and *Mhudi's* employ of proverbs, the things antithetical to humanism and *ubuntu/botho* are implicitly condemned (see Ricard 57–59; Chaka 72–80). As such, Plaatje's stance should be viewed as expressing an appreciative understanding of the culture and folklore of others manifested through their songs, stories, riddles and proverbs. That appreciation seems bound to creating a more compassionate and humane society. The rediscovery, across diverse cultures, of the deep wisdoms and spiritual truths inhering proverbs is most probably Plaatje's chosen pathway towards peaceful co-existence among the planet's inhabitants. Thus, the *Reader* and *Diane* author was convinced that understanding the philosophical and spiritual values imbedded in the semantic spaces of stories and narrative proverbs, could have efficacious and humane effects on a society in conflict.

Notes

1. The mentioned scholars have over the last 85 years cooperated with several other academics, ethnographers and writers like J. T. Brown (1926), Guy Butler, John Comaroff, C. M. Doke (1940), G. P. Lestrade (1967), Richard Rive and Malvern Smith to research and publish articles and books on Plaatje. The joint efforts with many of these academics yielded a special issue entitled "Plaatje Centenary Issue" of *English in Africa* (vol 3, no 2, September 1976).
2. In Plaatje's time, the name for the Setswana language was spelt in two different ways: *Sechuana* and *Secoana* (Lestrade, "European Influences" 109). In the original *Diane* title, Plaatje employs the spelling version preferred mainly by English missionaries, *Sechuana*. The second version *Secoana*, seems to resemble the spelling introduced to the Basotho people by French missionaries. It looks to have gained currency when Setswana newspapers began to be published in the early 1850s (Couzens, "Mhudi" 168; Peters and Tabane 12–18). *Setswana* is the modern spelling for the variety used mainly in central and western parts of Southern Africa.
3. In the *Reader* text, the Setswana variety known as 'Serolong' forms a significant part of Plaatje's idiolect. It was employed to teach Setswana grammar and pronunciation to the English people that Plaatje met, around 1914–6 in London, through Prof Daniel Jones and other university lecturers.
4. The conditions can also be described as "diasporic", to use Brah's term (445), largely because Plaatje himself bemoans the fact that he wrote and published *Diane* on his own and without any feedback, criticism or input from Setswana native speakers. Since Plaatje and his fellow South African Native National Congress (SANNC) leaders were in London to negotiate the rights of black South Africans within the British imperial set up of the day, those trying socio-political conditions and pressures,

could be seen as diaspora-like. As SANNC delegates they were to make a case to the British government for the repeal or rescinding of the South African Natives Land Act of 1913. This law had just been promulgated to deprive Africans the right to acquire land outside of that which they were already occupying (Mzamane 198–9). Plaatje was SANNC's first General Secretary and became one of the senior members of the five-man deputation tasked with convincing the English Imperial Office to intervene in the South African land question. This political organization established in 1912 to champion the rights of black South Africans, was in 1923 renamed the African National Congress or ANC (Giliomee and Mbenga 208–10; Willan 124–9, 303).

5. There is no dispute over Plaatje's recollection and writing of the 723 Setswana proverbs and that this is largely because he confirms it in the *Diane* preface. Rather what has often been in dispute is his ability to speak Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian and Latin, i.e. the northern European languages in which he provides proverb equivalents for the Setswana ones. In the preface, Plaatje indicates and lists several sources that he "searched" for European proverb equivalents and which he "profitably consulted" to write the collection (Plaatje, *Diane* xi). Extant research referenced by Willan, Couzens and Mbulelo V. Mzamane informs us that Plaatje could speak, at the most, nine languages including Koranna, Setswana, isiXhosa, Dutch, English, French and German.
6. The Setswana variant spoken predominantly in the Northwest Province around rural villages and towns like Lichtenburg, Coligny, Ventersdorp, Sannieshof, Vryburg, Mafikeng, Wolmaranstad, Schweizer-Reinecke, and the central country areas of Kimberley, Bloemfontein and Thaba Nchu, is known as Serolong, where 'Setswana' is the general name for the language. One key difference between general Setswana and Serolong is illustrated in variations in articulating the [f] versus the [h] sound, where the place name 'Mafikeng' /mafikeng/ is pronounced as /mahikeng/, in Serolong. See: note 3 above.
7. As shown throughout this article, evidence of Plaatje's intentions exists in most prefaces and introductions to his works. Even though accompanied by a disclaimer about purpose, the *Diane* text is different in that it is not a continuous, thematically cohesive unit like the *Mhudi* novel, the *Diphosho* drama or the *Native Life* treatise. Each Setswana and European proverb stands on its own and is listed without explanation about social, communicative applicability and/or guidance on its actual use. At another level though, and in the manner that Obiechina (203) expounds the concept, most proverbs in African languages can be treated as stand-alone oral forms that tell a story and/or have "narrative" configuration. Examples of the phenomenon abound in the *Diane* text.
8. In modern Setswana, as is also the case in English, the distinction between proverbs (*diane*) and idioms (*maele/mafoko*), is often difficult to make or is unclear. In *Diane*, the differences are quite inexact and fairly blurred (see Makhudu 58–60).
9. Numbers in square brackets are those Plaatje uses to list the original Setswana proverbs in the 1916 *Diane* publication. The European proverb equivalents are also enclosed in square brackets.
10. The Sepedi equivalent of this proverb is the metaphorically rich one given by Rakoma (212): *Motho ke mo mohwanosi ga se mosikanosi*. Roughly translated it means: "No human being should be alone, though he/she can die alone"; or "No man is an island"; etc. The Setswana proverb [50] is closest to the Sepedi one given here.
11. This Afrikaans proverb from Kritzinger and Sabbagha (230) can be interpreted both literally and figuratively, as the glosses between brackets indicate. Plaatje's proverbs *Khumo ea pena*; *Khumo kgolo ea rama*; *Khumo le lehuma di lala mmogo* [269; 270; 271] respectively, have close equivalents that he cites in Latin and Italian: *Fortuna magna, magna domino est servitas*, and *Assai basta, e troppo quasta*, respectively.

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Hein Willemse

Hein Willemse is 'n professor in Afrikaanse Letterkunde aan die Universiteit van Pretoria en die eerste bekleër van die Leerstoel Zuid-Afrika: talen, literaturren, kultuur en maatschappij aan die Universiteit Gent, België.
E-pos: hein.willemse@up.ac.za

Huldeblyk

R. E. van der Ross (1921–2017)



Sedert sy jeug het Richard Ernest van der Ross (1921–2017) 'n belangrike rol in die breë Kaapse gemeenskap gespeel. Hy het hom onderskei as 'n anti-apartheidsaktivis, 'n opvoedkundige, 'n geskiedskrywer en openbare intellektueel, 'n vakbondmens, 'n gemeenskapsbouer, 'n maatskappydirekteur en in sy eie woorde: 'n politieke pragmatist. Daar is dikwels gesê dat Van der Ross 'n liberalis was, in die sin dat hy 'n ruimheid van gees en opvatting geopenbaar

het wat die vryheid van die individu, gelykheid en die veelvoudigheid van idees vooropgestel het.

Die klassieke liberalis staan krities teenoor regerings en verwag dat hindernisse soos armoede, sosiale beperkings en diskriminasie wat individuele regte aan bande lê, uit die weg geruim moet word. Opeenvolgende koloniale en Suid-Afrikaanse regerings het die ontplooiing van volle menswaardigheid op verskillende maniere en praktyke teengewerk. Waar segregasie op grond van "ras" en klas voor 1948 deur tradisie en konvensie gereël is, het die na-1948-regerings etnisiteit in apartheidswetgewing gaan verdinglik.

So het die onvaste etniese begrip "Kleurling" byvoorbeeld wetlike beslag gekry. Die moontlikheid van die bereiking van individualiteit soos verwoord deur liberale denkers is oneindig bemoeilik. In teenstelling met liberale denke wat etnisiteit, ras- en stamidentiteite ondergeskik aan individualiteit stel, het die Afrikanernasionaliste eersgenoemde kategorieë as die grondslae van hul wêreldbeskouing na die breë Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing deurgevoer. Van der Ross moes vroeg in sy loopbaan, ten spyte van sy intellektuele voorkeur, met 'n onomstootlike feit rekening hou: die breë benoeming "Suid-Afrikaner" wat as 'n sinoniem vir individualisme funksioneer, was eenvoudig nie prakties haalbaar nie. Dit maak nie saak hoe jy jouself definieer nie, in die staat, in wetgewing en elders is jy deur die prisma van rasidentiteit beskou.

Van der Ross, die kleinseun van twee ongeletterde plaasarbeiders, was een van die min mense van gekleurde afkoms wat in die eerste helfte van die 20ste eeu voltyds aan die Universiteit van Kaapstad kon studeer. In 1952 word hy ook die eerste

gekleurde persoon om 'n doktorsgraad aan 'n Suid-Afrikaanse universiteit te behaal. Dit is merkwaardig dat hy in sy familie die tweede universiteitsgeskoolde persoon was. Sy pa, David van der Ross, was een van die eerste bruin mense om 'n graad te behaal aan die Universiteit van Kaapstad, en dus ook in Suid-Afrika. Die twee feite is insigsself belangrik omdat universiteitsopvoeding vir gekleurde mense in die eerste vyf dekades van die 20ste eeu nie net moeilik bekombaar was nie, maar ook burokratiese belemmering is. Waar 'n persoon wel tersiêre onderrig ontvang het, getuig dit van 'n ongewone deursettingsvermoë en 'n drang tot selfopheffing.

Die gedagte aan selfopheffing deur onderrig en opvoeding, hang nou saam met die nawerking van 19de eeuse Kaapse liberalisme waar die koloniale owerhede politieke gelykheid aan alle "beskaafdes" en 'n klein elite belowe het. Die belofte is nooit gestand gedoen nie en met die verwydering van bruin mense van die gemeenskaplike kiesersrol is dit die nekslag toegedien, aanvanklik in 1951 en finaal in 1956. Die wetgewing en die regering se manipulasie van die parlement was vir die gemeenskap 'n toonbeeld van verraad. Dit is geen verrassing dat Van der Ross juis in hierdie tyd in protesaksies prominent as politieke aktivis op die voorgrond getree het nie.

In die bedompige wêreldjie van die Kaapse bruin elite was die slagordes opgestel tussen die radikale vleuel van die Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA), die Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) en hul "Tien Puntplan" enersyds, en die Teachers' Educational and Professional Association (TEPA), die Coloured People's National Union (CPNU) en later die South African Coloured People Organisation (SACPO), 'n assosiaat van die (African National) Congress-beweging en hul "Vryheidshandsves", andersyds. Die TLSA en sy bondgenote het in die openbaar 'n militante houding ingeneem, politieke boikotaksies (teen onder meer die destydse Departement van Kleurlingsake) georganiseer en mense wat nie hulle standpunte gedeel nie, uitgekryt as "meelopers van apartheid" (*collaborators* en *quislings*). Hulle rigsgnoer was "nie-rassigheid" (miskien korrekter: antirassigheid), gerugsteun deur die 4de Internasionaal en die denke van die Marxistiese teoretikus, Leon Trotski. Op sy beurt het Van der Ross hulle *rejectionists* genoem (*In Our Own Skins* 119).

Vir hulle was Van der Ross en kie "Kleurling-nasionaliste" wat "Kleurling-eiesoortigheid" en "Kleurlingskap" (*Colouredism*) wou bevorder en dus na Verwoerd se pype sou dans. Van der Ross het dié karakterisering verwerp. Sy regverdiging vir sy benadering tot gemeenskapsleierskap was eenvoudig: Sy gemeenskap was op die rand uitgestoot en hulle het kleuridentifikasie sonder stigma in hul organisasies en sportliggame gebruik. "Ek is 'n Kleurling", het hy uitdagend vir die *rejectionists* gesê, ook in later jare teenoor sy UWK-studente wat dié term totaal verwerp het. TEPA, waarvan hy 'n stigterslid was, het hulle beywer vir samewerking, gesprekvoering en skakeling. In die praktyk het dit dikwels petisies aan die owerhede of pleidoorie ter verbetering van hul lede se werksomstandighede en salarisse behels. Dié gematigde

politieke benadering het hom ook toegelaat om as 'n onderwysbeplanner in die Departement van Kleurlingsake te werk en later by die afsonderlike politieke bedeling van die Verteenwoordigende Kleurlingraad (VKR) betrokke te raak. Hy en andere het die Arbeidersparty opgerig wat aan die verkiesings van die VKR onder die vaandel van "'n stem vir die Arbeiders is 'n stem teen apartheid" deelgeneem het. Vir die duur van die VKR se bestaan, het die party 'n soort stok-in-die-wiel-politiek bedryf.

Pragmatiese besluitneming, die bevordering van die lewensomstandighede van "sy mense" eerder as retoriese militantheid het Van der Ross, volgens sy eie getuienis, aangespreek. Hy was die oprigter-redakteur van die Kaapse koerant, *The Cape Herald*, betrokke by die bou van huise as projekte van die Build a Better Society (BABS) organisasie, 'n lid van die Erika Theron-kommissie, maar dit is veral in die onderwys—van voorskool tot die universiteitswese en elke fase tussen-in—dat hy sy stempel afgedruk het.

Dit is geen geheim dat die staatsuniversiteite, waaronder die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland (UWK), opgerig was om geskoolde arbeid te voorsien binne die raamwerk van die apartheidsbeleid nie. Van der Ross se aanstelling as rektor van die UWK in 1975 het onder kontroversiële omstandighede plaasgevind en later het van die konserwatiewe (wit) personeel selfs aktief sy posisie probeer ondermyn. Vandag is dit duidelik dat sy termyn 'n deurslaggewende rol gespeel het in die vestiging van 'n etiek van onafhanklike denke, vryheid van spraak en onbelemmerde toegang tot universiteitsstudie van mense uit werkersklasgemeenskappe. Vir hom was die UWK, 'n "Universiteit van die Werkersklas". Met die frase het hy doelbewus aangedui dat hy nie 'n universiteitsbedeling geskoei op grond van ras en kleur ondersteun nie. Vir die grondleggers van apartheidsonderwys moes dié gedagte teen hulle verwagtinge ingegaan het, maar Van der Ross het reeds as lid van die Theron-kommissie 'n kernbeginsel van apartheid, naamlik dat die Wes-Kaap 'n Kleurlingvoorkeurgebied is, teengestaan.

Ek het Van der Ross as studente-leier en later as dosent en kollega leer ken. Hy het onder die uiterste provokasie altyd kalm en beredeneerd oorgekom, selfs wanneer sy lewe in wesenlike gevaar was. Dikwels het hy onverskrokke, man-alleen, tussen die onlustepolisie en betogende studente gestaan. Per geleentheid het hy die vernedering van 'n bestokery met eiers tydens 'n oproerige studentevergadering stoïsyne verduur. Sy verdraagsaamheid was in teenstelling met die hardhandigheid waarmee rektore elders (en ook voorheen op die UWK) opstande onderdruk en dikwels vererger het. Ek onthou hoe hy met kalme oorreding die ontbaning van 'n studenteraad of die hantering van verskeie boikotte en opstote van verskillende aard hanteer het. Dit moes nie maklik gewees het nie, en 'n mens van mindere al-looi, sou vroeg reeds geknak het.

Eendag was ek deel van 'n afvaardiging wat hom oor een of ander saak moes gaan spreek het. Ons was vasbeslote om ons standpunt so ferm moontlik te stel. Sy eerste woorde aan ons in sy kantoor was, "Gentlemen... its been a very long day. Let's have

a sundowner, before we start. What will you have? Port? Scotch, ...?" Na 'n rondte drankies het 'n ongekende gemoedelikheid oor ons samesprekings neergedaal. Ons is twee uur later daar weg met minder as wat ons geëis het, en met 'n begrip vir sy situasie en die beskikbare opsies. Ons het toe ook deeglik agtergekom waarom hy die bynaam "Tricky Dicky" gekry het.

Van der Ross was altyd bereid tot gesprek. Selfs al het 'n mens polities grondig met hom verskil en selfs al het van sy politieke keuses vreemd en selfs verdag voorgekom, kon hy beredeneerd sy keuses in gesprek uiteensit en sy gespreksgenote dwing om dieselfde te doen. Ek het oor die jare besondere waardering vir sy oopheid van gees en sy skerp humorsin gekry. Hy het polities en sosiaal 'n middelgrond bestryk wat waarskynlik nader is aan die algemene beleving en verwagtinge van die meerderheid mense met sy agtergrond—'n waarneming wat nóg van die ekstreem-linkse nóg die ekstreem-regse elemente in die Kaapse politiek gesê kan word.

In die dertig jaar sedert sy aftrede as rektor het hy onder meer gedien as 'n lid van die Demokratiese Party in die Wes-Kaapse Wetgewer en as Suid-Afrikaanse ambassadeur in Spanje. Tussendeur sy bedrywighede het hy ook tyd gemaak om 'n hele aantal boeke die lig te laat sien. Vroeër het hy opvoedkundige handleidings gepubliseer en later gekonsentreer op sy primêre belangstelling: die sosiale geskiedenis en politiek van diegene geklassifiseer as Kleurling: "For the past sixty years and more (met sy dood sou dit byna sewentig jaar wees), I have observed, studied and written about the Coloured people of South Africa. Rightly or wrongly, wisely or misguidedly, accurately or otherwise. I have aired my opinions about the people of whom I am part" (*A Blow to the Hoop* 178). Onder sy talle publikasies tel *Myths and Attitudes—An Inside Look at the Coloured People* (1979), *The Rise and the Decline of Apartheid* (1986), *Up from Slavery—Slaves at the Cape* (2005), *Buy my Flowers! The Story of Strawberry Lane, Constantia* (2007), *The Black Countess: A Biography* (2008), *A Blow to the Hoop—The Story of My Life and Times* (2010) en *In Our Own Skins. A Political History of the Coloured People* (2015).

Van der Ross was 'n man met weloortuigde menings wat onteenseglik 'n ryk nalatenskap agterlaat. Hy het talle organisasies gestig, gelei en was op feitlik elke maatskaplike terrein in sy gemeenskap en die breë samelewing betrokke. As 'n individu sou hy in enige nie-diskriminerende gemeenskap uitgestyg het. Hy was 'n demokrat te midde van 'n politieke warspul wat naastes teenoor mekaar opgestel het. Dick van der Ross was in alle opsigte 'n besondere en 'n groot Suid-Afrikaner.

Geraadpleegde bronne

Van der Ross, Dick. *A Blow to the Hoop—The Story of My Life and Times*. Ampersand, 2010.

Van der Ross, Richard. *In Our Own Skins. A Political History of the Coloured People*. Jonathan Ball, 2015.

Gent, België
Desember 2017

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Resensieredakteur

Prof Andries Visagie
Departement Afrikaans en Nederlands
Universiteit van Stellenbosch
Matieland X1
Stellenbosch 7602
agvisagie@sun.ac.za

Review editor

Prof Andries Visagie
Department Afrikaans and Dutch
Stellenbosch University
Matieland X1
Stellenbosch 7602
agvisagie@sun.ac.za

Borg / Sponsor: Marie Luttig Testamentêre Trust

Neil Cochrane

Neil Cochrane is verbonde aan die Departement Afrikaans en Algemene Literatuurwetenskap, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika in Pretoria. E-pos: cochrn1@unisa.ac.za

RESENSIE-ARTIKEL / REVIEW ARTICLE

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray en 'n peiling van die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray and an assessment of book reviewing practice in Afrikaans

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray

Ruan Fourie. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2017.

75 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4853-0747-1.

The young Afrikaans poet, Ruan Fourie, published his debut volume of poetry, *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*, (An open letter to Dorian Gray) in 2017. Fourie's debut received predominantly negative reviews from Afrikaans critics. A review by Afrikaans critic, Tom Gouws, was particularly destructive and transgressed acceptable professional standards. This example of destructive criticism is scrutinized in relation to similar transgressions in Afrikaans book reviews. In addition, a comparable Irish case study and theoretical viewpoints by C. J. van Rees and Susanne Janssen are considered to provide a nuanced perspective on current practices in Afrikaans literary criticism. The article also focuses on the responses of Bernard Odendaal and Lina Spies to Fourie's poetry to provide a critical and independent opinion on aspects such as publishing decisions, mentorship, manuscript development and editorial mentorship. The last part of the article consists of a substantiated evaluation of *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*. It is concluded that despite evidence of creative talent, there are too many shortcomings due to questionable editorial mentorship and impetuous publishing decisions.

Keywords: literary criticism, Afrikaans poetry, book reviewing, Ruan Fourie, literary mentorship.

Die jong digter, Ruan Fourie, se debuutbundel, *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*, is taamlik lou en selfs swak ontvang deur die meeste kritici. Resensies van Marius Crous op *Versindaba* en Nini Bennett op *LitNet* beklemtoon min of meer dieselfde gebreke, alhoewel Crous minder negatief is as Bennett. Joan Hambidge oordeel meer positief en verwys na die "baie talent" wat aanwesig is.

Die bundel het ongelukkig ook tot die snedigste "kritiek" in 'n lang tyd gelei. Die resensie van Tom Gouws ("Digter nie teen homself beskerm") wat op 10 Julie 2017 in *Volksblad* verskyn, is 'n laagtepunt in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf. Gelukkig het 'n handjievol literatore soos Bernard Odendaal, Hambidge en Daniël Hugo sterk beswaar aangeteken, maar die skade is gedoen. Die probleem lê nie by die besware wat Gouws identifiseer nie, maar by die onsmaklike en onoortuigende wyse waarop hy sy "argumente" aanbied.

Dit is onaanvaarbaar dat hy hom tot die skatologiese (“Dis suiwer kak.”) moes wend om sy misnoë uit te spreek. Dit is veral die patroniserende toon van die ouer akademikus wat my neurone tot in hul kern irriteer. Dit is lafhartig dat hy woorde in die mond van die ontslape professor A. P. Grové lê. Verder is dit aanmatigend om namens “alle literatuurdosente” (7) te praat. **Behoede my en die Afrikaanse letterkunde** as dosente so ’n meerderwaardige houding teenoor hul minderes koester.

Dit is jammer dat Gouws se “tyd en geduld ontbreek” (7) om ’n indringender resensie te skryf, want dit is immers die belangrikste taak van die resensent: om bundels en digters met respek te behandel. Dit beteken dat jy moeite doen en erns maak met die bundel op jou lessenaar. Dit beteken nie ’n lysie van ongemotiveerde gebreke of vae frases soos “veel, veel meer” (7) nie. Beide dui gewoon op laksheid.

Die eendimensionele aard van Gouws se resensie is ’n verdere knelpunt. Dit is iets wat gereeld sy kop uitsteek in Afrikaanse resensies. Ek twyfel of enige boek ooit só goed of só sleg kan wees om ’n algehele lofprysing of vervloeking te regverdig. Al wat skrywers en digters verwag is ’n intelligente oordeel, selfs al is dit negatief. Daniel Mendelsohn som dit goed op in sy artikel “A critic’s manifesto” (2015) wat in *The New Yorker* verskyn: “The intelligent negative review, indeed, does its own kind of honor to artists: serious artists, in my experience, want only to be reviewed intelligently, rather than showed with vacuous raves — not least, because serious artists learn from serious reviews.”

Ek wil nie in die strik beland om resensies te resenseer nie, want hierdie vakature is reeds deur Crito gevul. Elke week plaas die resensie-resensent, Crito, op sy/haar *LitNet*-blog getrou sy/haar indrukke oor die jongste resensies wat oor Afrikaanse boeke verskyn. Daar is min sprake dat Crito ooit die boeke lees wat geresenseer word, aangesien die fokus eerder op subjektiewe uitsprake oor die gehalte van resensies val. Derhalwe bied hy/sy nie werklik vir die potensiële leser enige aanvullende perspektief op nuwe Afrikaanse publikasies nie.

Dit laat vrae ontstaan oor die doel van Crito se saai onderneming, want wie stel regtig belang of ’n resensie aan Crito se norme voldoen? Dit is elkeen se goeie reg om te blog of nie te blog nie en geen voorskrifte bestaan waaroor mense mag blog nie. Dit kan strek van Bengaalse tiere tot pottebakkerie, maar kriptiese bloginskrywings van ’n selfaangestelde resensiewaghond dra min tot vitale boekgesprekke by.

Literêre smeerveldtogte, persoonlike aanvalle en wraakgedagtes dra nog minder tot die bevordering van die letterkunde by. Die Gouws-resensie oor die Fourie-bundel is allermens die eerste voorbeeld van sarkasme en nydigheid in die Afrikaanse letterkunde. Dit het al dikwels gebeur dat Afrikaanse boekresensente die pers gebruik om persoonlike gevegte te loods. ’n Skreiende voorbeeld is die saak Du Plessis versus Hambidge wat uit 1991 dateer. In Phil du Plessis se resensie oor Hambidge se bundel, *Die verlore simbool* (1991), raak hy die volgende kwyt: “Tensy Joan Hambidge haar literator(?)trise-skap en haar neurotiese woede beter kan integreer, gaan haar poësie

nog lank ly. So ook die leser, wat maklik wil weghol soos van 'n kwylende, dol teef." (6)

Du Plessis se resensie is voorafgegaan deur 'n uitspraak van Hambidge in die vermaakbylae, *Kalender*, 'n maand of wat vantevore waarin sy Du Plessis beskryf as 'n "minor-minor-minor-poet". Dit is uit dié gegewens duidelik wat hier gebeur—'n moddergooiery in die pers.

Hambidge het in die 1990's 'n weeklikse rubriek, *Op my literêre sofa*, vir *Beeld* behartig. Haar rubriek is veral gekenmerk deur polemiese uitsprake oor literêre sake en gedurende haar redelike lang sitting op haar sofa het sy 'n hele paar publikasies tot literêre rampgebiede verklaar. Dit het dan gelei tot vermanende lesersbriewe van die verontregte skrywers en hul vriende met opskrifte soos "Joan moet ophou met haar private vetes" (Toerien 3) en "Joan hou haar nie aan reëls van welvoeglikheid" (Scheepers 8).

'n Onderskeid is nodig tussen histeriese reaksies op billike kritiek en wettige besware teen onbilike kritiek. Soms is skrywers se velle te dun of kritici se wraaksugtige ego's te groot. **Hierbenewens bestaan daar beslis iets soos blatante misinterpretasie.** 'n Goeie voorbeeld is Ampie Coetzee se resensie van Johann de Lange se bundel *Die algebra van nood* (2009) wat op 20 April 2008 in *Die Burger* verskyn. In dié resensie tipeer Coetzee die bundel as "onnoemenswaardig" (11) en wys foutiewelik op De Lange se "verkragting /ontkragting" (11) van Van Wyk Louw. Dit is duidelik dat Coetzee nie besef het dat Van Wyk Louw as een van De Lange se belangrikste literêre vaders figureer nie.

'n Ander geval is Tom Gouws se misinterpretasie van die voorblad van Henning Pieterse se kortverhaalbundel, *Omdat ons alles is* (1998). In sy resensie wat op 19 Oktober 1998 in *Beeld* verskyn, verwys hy verkeerdelik na die voorbladillustrasie as "'n pragtige Middeleeuagtige houtsnewerk van 'n Sebastiaan-figuur... (6). Dit is twak, want op die voorblad word die twaalfde kaart van die Tarot, die gehangde man, uitgebeeld soos Pieterse (14), Hambidge (14) en Roodt (10) in hul reaksies op die Gouws-resensie aantoon.

Probleme in die resensiebedryf is nie uniek aan die Afrikaanse letterkunde nie. In 2015 ontstaan 'n herrie in die Ierse resensiebedryf ná Eileen Battersby se snedige resensie van Paul Murray se roman, *The Mark and the Void*. Na aanleiding hiervan besluit die joernalis, Martin Doyle om 'n verskeidenheid rolspelers oor die volgende kwessies te nader: die eerlikheid van Ierse boekresensente oor die werk van Ierse skrywers binne 'n klein literêre landskap en die hantering van negatiewe kritiek. Die verskillende response verskyn op 16 Julie 2015 in *The Irish Times* in 'n artikel getiteld "Reviewing Irish books: the good, the bad and the ugly truth."

Daar is 'n aantal redes waarom ek na hierdie artikel verwys. Eerstens vertoon die Ierse en Afrikaanse sisteme 'n aantal ooreenkomste. Beide sisteme is relatief klein en 'n beperkte aantal rolspelers is by resensering betrokke. Dit veroorsaak dat skrywers en resensente mekaar persoonlik ken wat terselfdertyd 'n hoë premie op

integriteit plaas. Daar is Ierse kritici soos John Boyne wat uiters pessimisties is oor dié stand van sake:

The truth is, and I know this from experience, you can't even criticise another Irish writer's work any more without being accused of professional jealousy. It's utterly ridiculous, particularly when we live in an era where mediocrity is so celebrated. In my view, books by Irish writers should be reviewed by complete outsiders who have neither axes to grind nor friendships to maintain.

Crous bied in sy bydrae **“'n Skalpel vir die vernislaag oor die *découpage*”** 'n uitstekende perspektief op die soortgelyke dilemma van resensentekeuses in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf. Anders as Boyne is Crous krities oor die voorstel dat kennisse nie mekaar se werk moet resenseer nie: “As ons hierdie maatstaf toepas, mag niemand meer resensies skryf nie, want daar bestaan nie iets soos 'n smettelose, objektiewe tabula rasa as dit kom by die resensiebedryf in Afrikaans nie.” (7)

Die tweede rede waarom die artikel van Doyle van belang is, het te make met die reikwydte van die response wat betrek word. Die debakel oor Tom Gouws se resensie van Ruan Fourie se debuut bied 'n goeie vertrekpunt om op soortgelyke wyse uit eie geledere te besin oor kwessies soos integriteit, billikheid en gepaste response op negatiewe kritiek. Dit is alleenlik sinvol indien alle rolspelers (boekeredakteurs, skrywers, uitgewers en resensente) op 'n gekonsolideerde forum tot die gesprek toetree. 'n Paar lesersbriewe hier en daar bied nie voldoende impetus aan dié belangrike debat nie.

Die Gouws-resensie van Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel is 'n bewys dat onvanpaste literêre kaperjolle steeds in die Afrikaanse literêre wêreld aanwesig is. Vir sommige mense beskik haatlike resensies seker oor vermaaklikheidswaarde of dalk is dit 'n manier om tanende lesersgetalle van koerante te verhoog. Dit is ewe grappig as bekende aartsvyande mekaar se werk resenseer. Hoe dit hoegenaamd gebeur, gaan my verstand te bowe. Weet die boekeredakteur dan nie van beter nie? Hierdie punt is ook deur H. P. van Coller geopper in 'n lesersbrief (“Gouws oordeel oor Hambidge hoort nie”) wat op 4 Januarie 2017 in *Volksblad* verskyn.

Dit bly jammer as Afrikaanse boekresensies nie aan basiese voorwaardes soos gebalanseerdheid, nugterheid en professionaliteit voldoen nie. Dit is veral betreurenswaardig as Afrikaanse boekeblaaië begin lyk soos *The Jerry Springer Show*. Basta met die “rioolslootkritiek” (6) soos ene Perfidious Albion dit so mooi in *Volksblad* stel.

In die literêre bedryf gaan dit nie net om waardebepalings oor literêre werke en skrywers nie. Volgens Van Rees (284) staan boekresensente en kritici konstant in 'n mededingende verhouding tot mekaar en ding hul mee om 'n gesaghebbende posisie in 'n literêre gemeenskap. Van Rees (284) verduidelik die tweeledige rol van die kritikus as volg: “a critic not only produces belief in the properties and quality he has assigned to the cultural products he is concerned with; at the same time he

aims at producing belief in his own value, that is his status as connoisseur, his ability to assess the properties and quality he deems peculiar to a work."

Indien mens die Gouws-resensie aan bogenoemde twee voorwaardes meet, is dit duidelik dat dit ver te kort skiet. Eerstens oortuig Gouws se resensie nie die leser van die eienskappe en kwaliteit van Fourie se debuutbundel nie, omdat hy nie moeite doen om die bundel behoorlik te bespreek nie. Sy resensie bestaan uit 'n irrelevante buitetekstuele anekdote, ongemotiveerde waardeoordele en 'n uiters oppervlakkige aanduiding van gebreke.

Tweedens bevestig Gouws met sy blatante sarkasme allermins sy waarde, status en vermoë as 'n poësiekenner. Die uiteindelijke gevolg is dat medekritici, die digter en poësielesers min waarde aan sy oordeel heg. Gouws se vreemde benadering tot die Fourie-bundel, onderskei hom van ander kritici en ontlok kontroversie, maar dit hou ook 'n wesenlike gevaar vir sy reputasie in en verminder die waarde van sy beoordeling. Die belangrikste rede hiervoor is dat sy beoordeling (en die wyse hoe hy dit formuleer) grootliks verskil van medekritici (Crous, Bennett en Hambidge) se meer gebalanseerde en beskaafde waardeoordele. Dié meganisme word goed deur Janssen (295) opgesom:

Besides, reviewers take into account their colleagues' statements. In the final analysis these constitute the sole test for a reviewer's own statements, the only way he may be proved right or wrong. A critic's recognition as a connoisseur depends to a great extent on the similarity or comparability of his choices and statements to those made by his colleagues. In repeatedly taking a dissenting view, a critic risks his status of literary expert.

Die Gouws-resensie dien as 'n soort voorbeeld van onaanvaarbare praktyk. Hopelik sal boekeredakteurs en resensente hul bes probeer om 'n **herhaling van die onsmaklike** voorval te voorkom. In dié verband kan hulle 'n paar riglyne in gedagte hou. As 'n boek die resensent om welke rede ook al irriteer, kan hy of sy eerder die boek aan die boekeredakteur terugstuur. Dieselfde riglyn geld as die resensent nie die tyd of energie het om 'n behoorlike resensie te lewer nie. Resensente is veronderstel om etiese standaarde te handhaaf wat onder meer beteken dat hulle botsende belange verklaar. Verder het boekeredakteurs 'n verantwoordelikheid om sover moontlik te verhoed dat swak, wraaksugtige en beledigende resensies verskyn.

Onlangs het Kerneels Breytenbach 'n bruikbare en insiggewende bydrae op *Lit-Net* gepubliseer getiteld "Hoe om 'n boekresensie te skryf". Ek gaan akkoord met sy raad, maar dink tog dat boekeredakteurs kennis moet dra van die belangrikste vetes en vyande in die literêre wêreld. Sodanige kennis sal almal verleentheid spaar, maar Breytenbach het gelyk dat boekeredakteurs ook nie alwetend is nie: "Boekeredakteurs kan onmoontlik op hoogte wees van alle heersende vetes in die skrywerswêreld. Resensente moet liefs belange verklaar wanneer hulle genader word. As die boeke-

redakteur dan nog vir hulle kans sien, rus daar op hulle die verpligting om daardie belange nie te bevorder nie.”

Ek sluit hierdie komponent van my resensie-artikel af met wyse raad van Uys Krige. Dit is uit ’n brief wat Krige in 1934 uit Spanje aan sy broer, Bokkie, skryf. In die brief bied Krige met verwysing na Roy Campbell ’n goeie perspektief op die invloed van onbillike kritiek op die digter:

Soos Roy sê, **daar is niks wat die ware digter meer op prys stel nie as net opreg, intelligente, opbouende kritiek, hoe streng en onverbiddelik dit ook mag wees!** Maar as die minderwaardigheid van die kritikus sonneklar uit elke sin en frase van hom spreek, en hy boonop nog kwaadwillig en met opset die werk waaraan jou liefde en opoffering, al die gawes wat jy mag hê van hart en verstand met geloof en hoop en volharding maande- en jare lank gewy het, verkeerd en verdraaid voorstel—wanneer, sê ek, hy met ’n paar haastige strepies van die pen dogmaties en nadruklik jou alle talent of begaafdheid weier en ontsê—dan, meen ek, is dit hoogtyd om van jou ledekant op te staan en met een hou, meedoënloos, daardie swaap-kop te verbrysel... (343)

In die volgende deel van hierdie bydrae verskuif die fokus na mentorskap en die rol van uitgewers. In my betoog gebruik ek Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel as aanknopingspunt. In die slotgedeelte van dié resensie-artikel kom my beoordeling van ’n *ope brief aan Dorian Gray* ter sprake.

In sy repliek op die Gouws-resensie “Moes ek digter só teen homself beskerm?” (13) probeer Odendaal ’n korrekatief bied op die oneerbiedige resensie van Gouws. Dit is goed dat hy gereageer het, maar ongelukkig verval sy respons grootliks in *the professor doth protest too much*-retoriek. Dit gaan te veel om selfverontskuldiging en irrelevante verskonings wat hy namens Fourie aanbied. Ek weet steeds nie wat die diefstal van Fourie se rekenaar met die uiteindelijke kwaliteit van die gepubliseerde bundel te doen het nie. Die Afrikaanse poësieleser betaal baie geld om boeke aan te skaf en resensente spandeer baie tyd om publikasies vir lesers in perspektief te plaas. Lesers en resensente stel werklik nie belang in die tragedies agter die skerms nie, hulle is slegs geïnteresseerd in die finale produk op die winkelrak.

Miskien moet studente tydens formele en informele kreatiewe skryfprogramme beter mentorskap ontvang oor die afronding van bundelmanuskripte. ’n Manuskrip wat ingedien word vir die doeleindes van ’n formele kwalifikasie in Kreatiewe Skryfkuns is nie noodwendig gelykstaande aan ’n voorlegging aan ’n uitgewer nie. Dit is twee verskillende kontekste waarin verskillende maatstawwe geld. Weldeurdagte dade en denke is op almal van toepassing wat oorweeg om ’n bundelmanuskrip aan ’n uitgewer voor te lê of jy nou Kreatiewe Skryfkuns formeel bestudeer of nie.

Dit is opvallend hoe dikwels debuutbundels kort ná **die voltooiing van akademiese programme** in Kreatiewe Skryfkuns verskyn. Sommige van hierdie bundels is uitstekend en vernuwend (die debute van Loftus Marais, Bibi Slippers, Hennie

Nortjé en Fourie Botha is goeie voorbeelde), terwyl ander minder indrukwekkend is. Ek is oortuig dat die swakkeres beter sou wees indien groter geduld en indringender skaafwerk aan die dag gelê is. Dit is uiteraard tot mentors, graadprogramme en universiteite se voordeel indien afgestudeerde studente so gou moontlik hul digbundels publiseer en veral as hierdie debuutbundels pryse wen, maar haastige honde verbrand soms hul monde.

Spies het gelyk as sy in 'n koerantartikel van 2 Oktober 2017 maan teen Afrikaanse digbundels wat op "die lopende band" (9) verskyn en die "onbesonne publikasie van debuutbundels" (9). Sy is verder van mening dat Odendaal sy student "ferm, maar vriendelik" (9) op die gebreke in sy digkuns moes wys. Die implikasie is dat Odendaal as mentor medeverantwoordelik is vir die gebreke in Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel. Dit is gewoon nie 'n billike taksering nie. As dit geldig is, sal alle dosente wêreldwyd voor stok kom indien hulle afgestudeerde studente in die arbeidsmark misluk.

Ek stem saam met Spies dat mentors 'n groot aandeel het in die vorming van jong digters, maar dit is steeds die student se keuse of hy wil ag slaan op voorstelle en vermanings. Dit is en bly steeds Ruan Fourie se werk en nie Bernard Odendaal s'n nie. As die afgestudeerde of huidige student op eie houtjie sy onafgeronde verse aan 'n uitgewer voorlê, is dit ongetwyfeld nie die mentor se skuld nie. Ruan Fourie het self besluit om sy werk aan 'n uitgewer voor te lê wat dit toe gepubliseer het. Ek is oortuig dat Odendaal goeie mentorskap aan Fourie gebied het. Swak leermeesterskap deur Odendaal is nie die oorsaak van ooglopende gebreke in Fourie se debuutbundel nie, alhoewel oorhaastigheid en gebrekkige redaksionele mentorskap van uitgewerskant wel 'n rol speel. Dit is presies waarteen T. S. Eliot waarsku in sy toespraak voor die Society of Young Publishers in 1952. Hy identifiseer twee kernprobleme in die uitgewer-digterverhouding:

The first is to dissuade a poet from wanting to publish too soon: before he has *enough* good poems for a volume without putting in inferior poems. The other is to prevent a poet from wanting to publish too often. The saturation point of the market for poetry, for poetry even by a very well-known poet, is low. It does even a good poet harm to bring out his volumes in rapid succession.

In Erika Terblanche se profiel oor Wilma Stockenström op *LitNet* sluit sy sêgoed van Stockenström in. In een van haar uitsprake wat oorspronklik in 'n 1988-uitgawe van *Die Suid-Afrikaan* verskyn, bied Stockenström 'n meer satiriese perspektief op haastige publikasiebesluite: "Afrikaanse skrywers, dink ek, tref dit so gelukkig. Hier is baie uitgewers vir 'n klein taaltjie. Ons digters! Hemel, jy hoef net 'n gedig te poep, dan word hy uitgegee." Alhoewel beide Eliot en Stockenström se uitsprake lank gelede gemaak is, bly hulle menings relevant vir Afrikaanse digters vandag. Daar verskyn jaarliks 'n goeie oes Afrikaanse digbundels ten spyte van 'n klein leserspubliek en bedenklike winsgrense. Die kwaliteit van bundels bly wisselvallig en dikwels is 'n

groter aanbod van swakker verse aanwesig. Die rede hiervoor is waarskynlik oorhaastige publikasie.

Dit bly jammer dat Fourie oorhaastig was met die uitgee van sy bundel. My spyt gaan nie om 'n onderdrukking of ontkenning van sy talent nie, maar juis die teenoorgestelde. Ek is vas oortuig dat Fourie baie kon baat by terugvoering van kritieser lesers (nie net vriende, Instagram-ondersteuners en kollegas nie) en 'n intensiewer ontginning van beskikbare toetsterreine. Het hy ooit gedigte voorgelê vir NB-Uitgewers se *Nuwe stemme*-reeks? Sterk debutante soos Ilse van Staden, Bernard Odendaal, Ronelda Kamfer, Loftus Marais, Hennie Nortjé en Bibi Slippers het almal aanvanklik in *Nuwe stemme* gepubliseer. Die *Nuwe stemme*-reeks bied aan opkomende digters die geleentheid om waardevolle terugvoering te ontvang van samestellers, mededigters en die Afrikaanse poësieleser.

Behoorlike manuskriptontwikkeling van uitgewerskant, is 'n belangrike faktor in die uiteindelijke kwaliteit van debuutwerk. In dié opsig vervul die redakteur 'n sleutelrol in die verbetering van die manuskrip. Dit behels veel meer as tegniese versorging en idees oor hoe om die boek te bemark. Sinvolle manuskriptontwikkeling help die digter om ooglopende gebreke te oorkom. Ek sien min bewyse in Fourie se debuutbundel dat intensiewe mentorskap en manuskriptontwikkeling plaasgevind het.

'n ope brief aan *Dorian Gray* is weens verskeie redes 'n onbevredigende debuut, alhoewel dit duidelike tekens van potensiaal vertoon. In Fourie se geval is die vrugte nog nie heeltemal ryp nie.

Die tematiese beperktheid van die bundel is 'n **beduidende gebrek**. Die verwoording van die liefde is 'n bekende tema in die digkuns, maar dit is eentonig om 'n hele digbundel aan die wel en weë van 'n jeugdige liefdesgeskiedenis te wy. Boonop is die meeste liefdesgedigte so verstandelik en strak dat dit min ontroering by die leser veroorsaak. Die bundel bevat te veel intertekstuele speletjies en poëtiese truuks wat grootliks bydra tot die verlies van 'n eie stem.

Die intertekstuele spel met Oscar Wilde se roman, *The picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), voldoen nie aan die verwagtinge nie, aangesien die hedonisme, erotiek en sensualiteit van die oorspronklike teks nie deeglik genoeg neerslag vind nie. Die verplasing van die Victoriaanse era na die Potchefstroomse studente-lewe kom geforseerd en pretensieus voor. Die probleem lê nie by die digter se belesenheid nie, want dit is duidelik dat hy oor grondige literêre kennis beskik. Die tekortkoming is dat die talryke motto's, direkte aanhalings en optelfrases in 'n groot mate versiering is wat min bydra om diepgang aan die verse te verleen.

Die liefdesgedigte is dikwels niksseggend, omdat dit oorwegend bestaan uit 'n klomp futlose gedagtes wat lukraak neergepen word, sonder dat dit duidelik is wat die spreker eintlik wil sê. Wat beteken reëls soos: "die lewe is tydrowend / en het tyd vir niemand nie." (59) en "daar's dooie blare by my voete en lewendes aan die takke"? (47)

Verder bly die toon in die liefdesverse wroegend en sentimenteel. Die liefde neem kennelik nie vir hierdie spreker 'n duisend vorme aan nie. Dit dwarrel voort "soos die lied van 'n meisie / in haar liefde verlaat."

Die kere wanneer die spreker wel 'n bietjie sensueel verkeer, is dit in die trant van onoortuigende pretensie en oppervlakkigheid: "en spuit saans Coco Mademoiselle / op die kussing wat ek vashou— / sodat dit soos Chanel N°5 se flessie geur / tydloos moet word. / van hier kan ek jou olfaktories vlugtig / maar altyd herroep, *ma vie en rose.*" (56)

In 'n gedig soos "die man wat val" (46) tref die spreker verbande tussen 'n reël van Christina Koning uit 1992 en die 9/11-tragedie nege jaar later. Die spreker beskou die reël "It was September, / season of dying falls." as 'n soort voorspelling van die terreuraanval in New York waartydens 'n man na sy dood spring. Hy kom in die slotreël tot die gevolgtrekking dat talige konnotasies niks anders is as "... 'n soeke na die einddoel van niks." Hierdie is een van 'n aantal voorbeelde waar die gedig nie bo die vanselfsprekende uitstyg nie. Uiteraard is die spreker se geforseerde juks-taponering van uiteenlopende sake 'n niksseggende onderneming. Dit kom voor asof die spreker iets verhewe sê, maar in der waarheid sê hy niks betekenisvols nie.

Fourie se meer gekondenseerde verse is beter as die langer verhalende gedigte. 'n Goeie voorbeeld is "i. Temperaat" (47) uit die gedigreëks "ekwinoks" (47–8) wat met sterk beelde 'n oortuigende atmosfeer vir liefdestrategie skep:

'n kraai slaap, kou ongegrendel,
langs die volledige werke van Shakespeare
en ek treur terwyl rose in 'n pot
dood kook vir Turkish delight

Ongelukkig verloor die gedig sy trefkrag omdat dit deel vorm van 'n drieledige reeks waarin die spreker onverstaanbare verbande tussen sy liefdesbeleving en die 9/11-tragedie probeer lê. **Die drie gedigte (met verskillende datums onder die gedigtitels)** sluit op geen logiese wyse bymekaar aan nie. Waarom gedigte wat beter op hul eie sou staan in 'n reeks aanbied? Onsinnighede soos dié frustreer en irriteer lesers.

'n Ander voorbeeld van ondeurdagtheid is die onfunksionele plasing van gedigtitels onderaan gedigte. 'n Verdere stoornis is die flou herdigtings van bekende Ingrid Jonker-verse: "het ek gesoek na die grootpad / om daarlangs terug te vlug, / hier het dit my by Verlies se Halte gebring." (57)

In die gedig, "mens" (63), beïndruk Fourie wel met slim woordspel, bondigheid en funksionele leestekengebruik:

ek is mens
ek is mensgemaak
ek is mens, gemaak
om te verwoes.

'n Ander hoogtepunt is "rigor mortis" (66) aangesien die doodsbeelde en die liefdesverlies assosiatief skakel en die spreker die sentrale metafoor van begin tot einde deurvoer. Die insig waartoe die spreker in die slotstrofe kom, is eenvoudig dog treffend en die woordspel effektief:

met troebel oë
bewonder ek die ingesonke wange,
dink ek terug aan hoe hierdie wese

my meegevoer het
en hoe ek my wêreld laat krimp het
om plek te maak in my
vir die wêreld van 'n ander.

Ongelukkig word die gedig ontsier deur geykte beskrywings soos "troebel oë" en "ingesonke wange". Mooiskrywery is 'n slagat waarin Fourie dikwels trap. Dit is asof hy te hard probeer om "poëties" te klink en verhewe kunsteoretiese stellings te maak. Hy moet eerder van hierdie lastige donsvere ontslae raak en onbevange dig.

Daar is voorbeelde van sterk beelde, intelligente ontginning van intertekste en kreatiewe taalspel in die bundel, maar die meeste verse is onafgerond. Uiteindelik moet die vers in sy totaliteit as kunswerk slaag. 'n Mooi beeld hier of 'n vernuftige woordkeuse daar beteken nog lank nie 'n geslaagde gedig nie. Dit is immers die geheelindruk waarin die meeste kritici en lesers belangstel.

Dalk kan Fourie ook ag slaan op die bevrydende woorde van Nellie Forbush in *South Pacific*: "I'm gonna wash that man right outa my hair, and send him on his way." Goeie digters lees en het lief, maar hulle sprei ook hul vlerke om nuwe horisonne te ontdek.

Die verskyning van 'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray het weens verkeerde redes aandag getrek. Dit is 'n bundel wat soveel beter sou wees mits strenger selfkritiek en former redaksionele mentorskap toegepas is. Dié twee gebreke het Ruan Fourie verhinder om sy aantoonbare digtalent, literêre bevoegdheid en kreatiewe gawes oortuigend aan te wend. Hopelik sal Tom Gouws se onbenydenswaardige "kritiek" hom nie verhinder om sy digterskap te ontwikkel en 'n meer afgeronde tweede bundel uit te gee nie.

Die slotbeskouing oor die Gouws-resensie is gewoon die volgende: resensente en boekeredakteurs moet hulle distansieer van destruktiewe kritiek, want hulle speel 'n sleutelrol om integriteit en professionaliteit in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf te bevorder.

My beoordeling van Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel sluit aan en verskil van Crous, Bennett en Hambidge se beskouings. Dit is grootliks 'n bykomende betekenis wat ek toeken of produseer. In *Criticism and Truth* (1966) merk Roland Barthes die volgende op: "Criticism is not science. Science deals with meanings, criticism produces them." (79)

Ongeag die toekenning van verskillende en grootliks negatiewe betekenis aan 'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray is die digter en sy werk byna deur die bank met respek behandel. Ongelukkig is dié uitspraak nie op Gouws van toepassing nie.

Gelukkig bestaan daar ook selfstandige response van lesers. 'n Goeie voorbeeld is Gedigteleser van Kuilsrivier wat as volg op Fourie se bundel reageer:

En toe gaan haal ek Gouws se eie debuutbundel uit die rak, *Diaspora* (1990), blaai dit deur en wonder hoeveel lesers dit lees en byvoorbeeld 'n gedig soos "aarsspieël" waardeer. En toe lees ek weer Fourie se bundel deur en dink: Dalk het Gouws die gedigte byna net so vinnig deurgelees soos Grové die "stapeltjie gedigte".

Want ek dink Fourie se bundel moet gekoop en gelees word, veral deur jong mense, want hulle sal aanklank vind by gedigte soos "ekwinoks" (bl. 47–48), "Marina Joyce" (bl. 55), "que sera sera" (bl. 59), "mens" (bl. 63) en "typo" (bl. 70)—om 'n paar te noem. (11)

Dit is ingeligte en intelligente lesers soos dié wat resensente en boekeredakteurs in gedagte moet hou, want boekliefhebbers se opinies dra miskien die grootste gewig. Baie van hulle bespreek daagliks ywerig Afrikaanse boeke by leeskringe en boekfeeste dwarsoor die land.

Ten slotte wil ek 'n voorstel aan leeskringe maak: plaas 'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray op julle leeslyste, sodat lojale lesers ook aan die debat hieroor kan deelneem.

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Hein Willemse

Hein Willemse is 'n professor in Afrikaanse Letterkunde aan die Universiteit van Pretoria.
E-pos: hein.willemse@up.ac.za

Huldeblyk

Keorapetse Kgotsitsile (1938–2018)



Ek het Keorapetse Kgotsitsile die eerste keer ontmoet tydens die Culture & Resistance-konferensie in Gaborone, Botswana in Julie 1982. Ek onthou die kort, maer mannetjie goed. Hy was vir die duur van die konferensie, altyd op 'n drafstappie besig om met bondels papiere onder die arm kruis en dwars oor die rooibruin grond van die konferensierrein te loop, dikwels in die geselskap van genote soos Thami Mnyele en Mongane Serote of met 'n assistent in die nabyheid. Alhoewel die geleentheid aangebied is deur die Botswana Nasionale Museum en Kunsgalery was dit duidelik dat die African National Congress se MEDU Arts Ensemble 'n groot hand in die reëlings gehad het en Willie, soos hy allerweë bekend was, was aan die voorpunt.

Dit was die eerste keer dat ballinge en interne kunstenaars, "kultuurwerkers" soos hulle toendertyd genoem is, met mekaar in gesprek getree het. Die reëlingskomitee moes verskriklik besig gewees het, want die konferensiegangers het van reg oor Suid-Afrika en die buiteland gekom. Lede van alternatiewe, anti-apartheid kultuurorganisasies soos die Community Arts Project (CAP) uit Kaapstad, Siphon Sepamla se Federated Union of Black Artists (FUBA) en Colin "Jiggs" en Dolphine Smuts se Open School uit Johannesburg het meesal per bus opgedaag. Dit het voorgekom of Willie elkeen persoonlik geken en onophoudelik en geanimeerd met hulle gesels het. Toe hy op 'n stadium met ons groepie waaronder James Matthews uit die Kaap gepraat het, was dit duidelik dat sy opgewondenheid gespruit het uit sy vreugde om mense "van die huis" te sien.

Alhoewel hy oorkant die grens in Dithakong, naby Mahikeng, gebore is, was hy in 1982 reeds vir meer as twintig jaar 'n balling. In sy vroeë twintigs het hy betrokke geraak by publikasies van die ANC en die Kommunistiese Party van Suid-Afrika, plaaslik en ook later tydens sy ballingskap in Tanzanië. Sy vroeë gedigte dra tekens van die vernietigende uitwerking op die psige van die balling. In "Exile" uit *The Present is a Dangerous Place to Live* (1974) haal hy hierdie roerende aanhaling van Aimé Césaire aan: "My memory is surrounded by blood / My memory has its belt

of corpses” en in die gedig word ’n opstapeling van hunkering en ’n hede waarby geen aansluiting gevind word nie:

And the ocean, my brother knows, is not our friend
I wonder if our ancestors might also be
in exile in places I dare not call by name

of

We try to begin again
but our dance is more waste
than the menstrual flow of a barren harem waif

of

I stand among my silences
in search of a song to lean on
but our breath lacks the rapid rhythm of the river

In die winter van 1962 verwerf hy ’n beurs om aan Lincoln Universiteit, naby Oxford, Pennsylvanië in die VSA te gaan studeer, ’n histories swart instelling met alumni soos die Afrika-leiers, Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe en later Namibië se Hidipo Hamutenya en die legendariese Amerikaanse regsman en regter Thurgood Marshall, maar hy sou nie sy studie daar voltooi nie. Dié sou hy later aan die New School in New York voltooi, en ook in dié stad sy meestersgraad in Kreatiewe Kuns aan die Columbia Universiteit verwerf.

Dit is in die VSA dat een van die deurlopende temas van Kgotsitsile se poësie beslag kry, die verwysing na die swart Amerikaanse Civil Rights-beweging met sy prominente figure soos onder meer Malcolm X, Kwame Touré (Stokely Carmichael), Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) en Gwendolyn Brooks, asook die Pan-Afrikanistiese denkers en leiers soos Frantz Fanon, Patrice Lumumba en Césaire. Sy bekendheid en kulturele betrokkenheid by swart Amerikaanse literatuur en literêre figure het ek meer as een keer in New York, Chicago en Los Angeles ervaar waar hy met van die prominentste figure uit daardie tradisie skouers geskuur het.

Ek onthou die Culture & Resistance-konferensie veral vir die musiek, die jazz-vertonings van Abdullah Ibrahim, Johnny Dyani, Jonas Gwanga en Hugh Masekela wat op ’n Saterdagdaand byna oorskadu is deur ’n plaaslike trompetspeler, geklee in rooi, wat ’n oordonderende solo-uitvoering gelewer het. Net soos die bekendheid met die Afrika-diaspora blyk uit Kgotsitsile se werk, staan sy poësie ook in die teken van die terugkerende element van jazz, miskien die beste vergestalt in die treffende voorblad van die bundel *This Way I Salute You* (2004) waar ’n silhoeët van ’n saksofoonspeler afgeëts is teen ’n rokerige agtergrond. In “For Johnny Dyani” in hierdie bundel lui die eerste strofe:

When I swim in my music
a harmattan of colours
becomes an area of feeling
where a rainbow of feathers
peoples all space
dancing in my heart

Two Poems

Keorapetse Kgositsile

Hein,
Brother & Comrade
With much respect
& Love. Our victory
is Certain! Not that
it will be without pain.
Amandla!
Willie
1/19/87

Willie Kgositsile was allereers 'n digter met 'n uitgesproke politieke identiteit. Sy betrokkenheid by die ANC, die kultuurafdeling van sy organisasie en sy latere posisie as Nasionale Digter was alles tekenend dat hy sy rol as betrokke skrywer ernstig opgeneem het. Tydens sy ballingskap het hy in sy persoonlike omgang die geloof bly behou dat 'n beter tyd voorlê, dat sy ballingskap beëindig sal word en dat hy en sy mede-ballinge na 'n bevryde Suid-Afrika sal terugkeer. In 'n boodskap in een van sy publikasies skryf hy aan my: "Brother and Comrade, with much respect & love. Our victory is certain! Not that it will be without pain. Amandla!" Reeds in een van sy bekendste vroeë gedigte, "My name is Afrika", word die geloof uitgespreek dat die moment van verdrukking slegs tydelik is en verby sal gaan en 'n nuwe orde gevestig sal word:

Drums roll and peal a monumental song
To every birth its blood
All things come to pass
When they do
We are the gods of our day and us
Panthers with claws of fire
And songs of love for the newly born

Op 'n persoonlike vlak was Willie 'n innemende mens wat my beïndruk het met sy wye verwysingswêreld en sy onblusbare entoesiasme. Soms het daardie entoesiasme ook die oorhand gekry. Ek onthou dat hy op 'n keer gehoor het dat ek 'n konferensie in Chicago bywoon en terstond besluit het om my te kom besoek. Al het ek hom probeer oortuig dat my vlugflouheid besig was om die oorhand te kry en dat ek nie 'n goeie gasheer gaan wees nie, het hy nietemin diep in die nag opgedaag en byna drie uur lank gekuier, terwyl ek gehunker het om soos die jong kind wat hy saamgebring het, net te slaap.

Hy is verskeie kere bekroon met onder meer die Conrad Kent Rivers Gedenkpoësie-toekenning, die Gwendolyn Brooks Poësieprys, die Harlem Cultural Council poësieprys en die Herman Charles Bosman-prys. Hy sterf op 3 Januarie 2018, net meer as 'n maand voor sy 80ste verjaardag.

Willie, jy het in "Memorial" geskryf: "Though we know / Life is no long joy / Someone enters your life / And stays there." Vaarwel.

Kleinkrantz, Wildernis
7 Januarie 2018

Neil Cochrane

Neil Cochrane is verbonde aan die Departement Afrikaans en Algemene Literatuurwetenskap, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika in Pretoria. E-pos: cochrn1@unisa.ac.za

RESENSIE-ARTIKEL / REVIEW ARTICLE

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray en 'n peiling van die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray and an assessment of book reviewing practice in Afrikaans

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray

Ruan Fourie. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2017.

75 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4853-0747-1.

The young Afrikaans poet, Ruan Fourie, published his debut volume of poetry, *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*, (An open letter to Dorian Gray) in 2017. Fourie's debut received predominantly negative reviews from Afrikaans critics. A review by Afrikaans critic, Tom Gouws, was particularly destructive and transgressed acceptable professional standards. This example of destructive criticism is scrutinized in relation to similar transgressions in Afrikaans book reviews. In addition, a comparable Irish case study and theoretical viewpoints by C. J. van Rees and Susanne Janssen are considered to provide a nuanced perspective on current practices in Afrikaans literary criticism. The article also focuses on the responses of Bernard Odendaal and Lina Spies to Fourie's poetry to provide a critical and independent opinion on aspects such as publishing decisions, mentorship, manuscript development and editorial mentorship. The last part of the article consists of a substantiated evaluation of *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*. It is concluded that despite evidence of creative talent, there are too many shortcomings due to questionable editorial mentorship and impetuous publishing decisions.

Keywords: literary criticism, Afrikaans poetry, book reviewing, Ruan Fourie, literary mentorship.

Die jong digter, Ruan Fourie, se debuutbundel, *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*, is taamlik lou en selfs swak ontvang deur die meeste kritici. Resensies van Marius Crous op *Versindaba* en Nini Bennett op *LitNet* beklemtoon min of meer dieselfde gebreke, alhoewel Crous minder negatief is as Bennett. Joan Hambidge oordeel meer positief en verwys na die "baie talent" wat aanwesig is.

Die bundel het ongelukkig ook tot die snedigste "kritiek" in 'n lang tyd gelei. Die resensie van Tom Gouws ("Digter nie teen homself beskerm") wat op 10 Julie 2017 in *Volksblad* verskyn, is 'n laagtepunt in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf. Gelukkig het 'n handjievol literatore soos Bernard Odendaal, Hambidge en Daniël Hugo sterk beswaar aangeteken, maar die skade is gedoen. Die probleem lê nie by die besware wat Gouws identifiseer nie, maar by die onsmaklike en onoortuigende wyse waarop hy sy "argumente" aanbied.

Dit is onaanvaarbaar dat hy hom tot die skatologiese (“Dis suiwer kak.”) moes wend om sy misnoeë uit te spreek. Dit is veral die patroniserende toon van die ouer akademikus wat my neurone tot in hul kern irriteer. Dit is lafhartig dat hy woorde in die mond van die ontslape professor A. P. Grové lê. Verder is dit aanmatigend om namens “alle literatuurdosente” (7) te praat. Behoede my en die Afrikaanse letterkunde as dosente so ’n meerderwaardige houding teenoor hul minderes koester.

Dit is jammer dat Gouws se “tyd en geduld ontbreek” (7) om ’n indringender resensie te skryf, want dit is immers die belangrikste taak van die resensent: om bundels en digters met respek te behandel. Dit beteken dat jy moeite doen en erns maak met die bundel op jou lessenaar. Dit beteken nie ’n lysie van ongemotiveerde gebreke of vae frases soos “veel, veel meer” (7) nie. Beide dui gewoon op laksheid.

Die eendimensionele aard van Gouws se resensie is ’n verdere knelpunt. Dit is iets wat gereeld sy kop uitsteek in Afrikaanse resensies. Ek twyfel of enige boek ooit só goed of só sleg kan wees om ’n algehele lofprijsing of vervloeking te regverdig. Al wat skrywers en digters verwag is ’n intelligente oordeel, selfs al is dit negatief. Daniel Mendelsohn som dit goed op in sy artikel “A critic’s manifesto” (2015) wat in *The New Yorker* verskyn: “The intelligent negative review, indeed, does its own kind of honor to artists: serious artists, in my experience, want only to be reviewed intelligently, rather than showed with vacuous raves — not least, because serious artists learn from serious reviews.”

Ek wil nie in die strik beland om resensies te resenseer nie, want hierdie vakature is reeds deur Crito gevul. Elke week plaas die resensie-resensent, Crito, op sy/haar *LitNet*-blog getrou sy/haar indrukke oor die jongste resensies wat oor Afrikaanse boeke verskyn. Daar is min sprake dat Crito ooit die boeke lees wat geresenseer word, aangesien die fokus eerder op subjektiewe uitsprake oor die gehalte van resensies val. Derhalwe bied hy/sy nie werklik vir die potensiële leser enige aanvullende perspektief op nuwe Afrikaanse publikasies nie.

Dit laat vrae ontstaan oor die doel van Crito se saai onderneming, want wie stel regtig belang of ’n resensie aan Crito se norme voldoen? Dit is elkeen se goeie reg om te blog of nie te blog nie en geen voorskrifte bestaan waaroor mense mag blog nie. Dit kan strek van Bengaalse tiere tot pottebakkerie, maar kriptiese bloginskrywings van ’n selfaangestelde resensiewaghond dra min tot vitale boekgesprekke by.

Literêre smeerveldtogte, persoonlike aanvalle en wraakgedagtes dra nog minder tot die bevordering van die letterkunde by. Die Gouws-resensie oor die Fourie-bundel is allermins die eerste voorbeeld van sarkasme en nydigheid in die Afrikaanse letterkunde. Dit het al dikwels gebeur dat Afrikaanse boekresensente die pers gebruik om persoonlike gevegte te loods. ’n Skreiende voorbeeld is die saak Du Plessis versus Hambidge wat uit 1991 dateer. In Phil du Plessis se resensie oor Hambidge se bundel, *Die verlore simbool* (1991), raak hy die volgende kwyt: “Tensy Joan Hambidge haar literator(?)trise-skap en haar neurotiese woede beter kan integreer, gaan haar poësie

nog lank ly. So ook die leser, wat maklik wil weghol soos van 'n kwylende, dol teef." (6)

Du Plessis se resensie is voorafgegaan deur 'n uitspraak van Hambidge in die vermaakbylae, *Kalender*, 'n maand of wat vantevore waarin sy Du Plessis beskryf as 'n "minor-minor-minor-poet". Dit is uit dié gegewens duidelik wat hier gebeur—'n moddergooiery in die pers.

Hambidge het in die 1990's 'n weeklikse rubriek, *Op my literêre sofa*, vir *Beeld* behartig. Haar rubriek is veral gekenmerk deur polemiese uitsprake oor literêre sake en gedurende haar redelike lang sitting op haar sofa het sy 'n hele paar publikasies tot literêre rampgebiede verklaar. Dit het dan gelei tot vermanende lesersbriewe van die verontregte skrywers en hul vriende met opskrifte soos "Joan moet ophou met haar private vetes" (Toerien 3) en "Joan hou haar nie aan reëls van welvoeglikheid" (Scheepers 8).

'n Onderskeid is nodig tussen histeriese reaksies op billike kritiek en wettige besware teen onbillike kritiek. Soms is skrywers se velle te dun of kritici se wraaksugtige ego's te groot. **Hierbenewens bestaan daar beslis iets soos blatante misinterpretasie.** 'n Goeie voorbeeld is Ampie Coetzee se resensie van Johann de Lange se bundel *Die algebra van nood* (2009) wat op 20 April 2008 in *Die Burger* verskyn. In dié resensie tipeer Coetzee die bundel as "onnoemenswaardig" (11) en wys foutiewelik op De Lange se "verkragting /ontkragting" (11) van Van Wyk Louw. Dit is duidelik dat Coetzee nie besef het dat Van Wyk Louw as een van De Lange se belangrikste literêre vaders figureer nie.

'n Ander geval is Tom Gouws se misinterpretasie van die voorblad van Henning Pieterse se kortverhaalbundel, *Omdat ons alles is* (1998). In sy resensie wat op 19 Oktober 1998 in *Beeld* verskyn, verwys hy verkeerdelik na die voorbladillustrasie as "'n pragtige Middeleeuagtige houtsniewerk van 'n Sebastiaan-figuur.. (6). Dit is twak, want op die voorblad word die twaalfde kaart van die Tarot, die gehangde man, uitgebeeld soos Pieterse (14), Hambidge (14) en Roodt (10) in hul reaksies op die Gouws-resensie aantoon.

Probleme in die resensiebedryf is nie uniek aan die Afrikaanse letterkunde nie. In 2015 ontstaan 'n herrie in die Ierse resensiebedryf ná Eileen Battersby se snedige resensie van Paul Murray se roman, *The Mark and the Void*. Na aanleiding hiervan besluit die joernalis, Martin Doyle om 'n verskeidenheid rolspelers oor die volgende kwessies te nader: die eerlikheid van Ierse boekresensente oor die werk van Ierse skrywers binne 'n klein literêre landskap en die hantering van negatiewe kritiek. Die verskillende response verskyn op 16 Julie 2015 in *The Irish Times* in 'n artikel getiteld "Reviewing Irish books: the good, the bad and the ugly truth."

Daar is 'n aantal redes waarom ek na hierdie artikel verwys. Eerstens vertoon die Ierse en Afrikaanse sisteme 'n aantal ooreenkomste. Beide sisteme is relatief klein en 'n beperkte aantal rolspelers is by resensering betrokke. Dit veroorsaak dat skrywers en resensente mekaar persoonlik ken wat terselfdertyd 'n hoë premie op

integriteit plaas. Daar is Ierse kritici soos John Boyne wat uiters pessimisties is oor dié stand van sake:

The truth is, and I know this from experience, you can't even criticise another Irish writer's work any more without being accused of professional jealousy. It's utterly ridiculous, particularly when we live in an era where mediocrity is so celebrated. In my view, books by Irish writers should be reviewed by complete outsiders who have neither axes to grind nor friendships to maintain.

Crous bied in sy bydrae **“'n Skalpel vir die vernislaag oor die *découpage*”** 'n uitstekende perspektief op die soortgelyke dilemma van resesentkeuses in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf. Anders as Boyne is Crous krities oor die voorstel dat kennisse nie mekaar se werk moet resenseer nie: “As ons hierdie maatstaf toepas, mag niemand meer resensies skryf nie, want daar bestaan nie iets soos 'n smettelose, objektiewe tabula rasa as dit kom by die resensiebedryf in Afrikaans nie.” (7)

Die tweede rede waarom die artikel van Doyle van belang is, het te make met die reikwydte van die response wat betrek word. Die debakel oor Tom Gouws se resensie van Ruan Fourie se debuut bied 'n goeie vertrekpunt om op soortgelyke wyse uit eie geleedere te besin oor kwessies soos integriteit, billikheid en gepaste response op negatiewe kritiek. Dit is alleenlik sinvol indien alle rolspelers (boekeredakteurs, skrywers, uitgewers en resesente) op 'n gekonsolideerde forum tot die gesprek toetree. 'n Paar lesersbriewe hier en daar bied nie voldoende impetus aan dié belangrike debat nie.

Die Gouws-resensie van Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel is 'n bewys dat onvanpaste literêre kaperjolle steeds in die Afrikaanse literêre wêreld aanwesig is. Vir sommige mense beskik haatlike resensies seker oor vermaaklikheidswaarde of dalk is dit 'n manier om tanende lesersgetalle van koerante te verhoog. Dit is ewe grappig as bekende aartsvyande mekaar se werk resenseer. Hoe dit hoegenaamd gebeur, gaan my verstand te bowe. Weet die boekeredakteur dan nie van beter nie? Hierdie punt is ook deur H. P. van Coller geopper in 'n lesersbrief (“Gouws oordeel oor Hambidge hoort nie”) wat op 4 Januarie 2017 in *Volksblad* verskyn.

Dit bly jammer as Afrikaanse boekresensies nie aan basiese voorwaardes soos gebalanseerdheid, nugterheid en professionaliteit voldoen nie. Dit is veral betreurenswaardig as Afrikaanse boekeblaaië begin lyk soos *The Jerry Springer Show*. Basta met die “rioolslootkritiek” (6) soos ene Perfidious Albion dit so mooi in *Volksblad* stel.

In die literêre bedryf gaan dit nie net om waardebepalings oor literêre werke en skrywers nie. Volgens Van Rees (284) staan boekresesente en kritici konstant in 'n mededingende verhouding tot mekaar en ding hul mee om 'n gesaghebbende posisie in 'n literêre gemeenskap. Van Rees (284) verduidelik die tweeledige rol van die kritikus as volg: “a critic not only produces belief in the properties and quality he has assigned to the cultural products he is concerned with; at the same time he

aims at producing belief in his own value, that is his status as connoisseur, his ability to assess the properties and quality he deems peculiar to a work.”

Indien mens die Gouws-resensie aan bogenoemde twee voorwaardes meet, is dit duidelik dat dit ver te kort skiet. Eerstens oortuig Gouws se resensie nie die leser van die eienskappe en kwaliteit van Fourie se debuutbundel nie, omdat hy nie moeite doen om die bundel behoorlik te bespreek nie. Sy resensie bestaan uit ’n irrelevante buitetekstuele anekdote, ongemotiveerde waardeoordele en ’n uiters oppervlakkige aanduiding van gebreke.

Tweedens bevestig Gouws met sy blatante sarkasme allermens sy waarde, status en vermoë as ’n poësiekenner. Die uiteindelijke gevolg is dat medekritici, die digter en poësielesers min waarde aan sy oordeel heg. Gouws se vreemde benadering tot die Fourie-bundel, onderskei hom van ander kritici en ontlok kontroversie, maar dit hou ook ’n wesenlike gevaar vir sy reputasie in en verminder die waarde van sy beoordeling. Die belangrikste rede hiervoor is dat sy beoordeling (en die wyse hoe hy dit formuleer) grootliks verskil van medekritici (Crous, Bennett en Hambidge) se meer gebalanseerde en beskaafde waardeoordele. Dié meganisme word goed deur Janssen (295) opgesom:

Besides, reviewers take into account their colleagues’ statements. In the final analysis these constitute the sole test for a reviewer’s own statements, the only way he may be proved right or wrong. A critic’s recognition as a connoisseur depends to a great extent on the similarity or comparability of his choices and statements to those made by his colleagues. In repeatedly taking a dissenting view, a critic risks his status of literary expert.

Die Gouws-resensie dien as ’n soort voorbeeld van onaanvaarbare praktyk. Hopelik sal boekeredakteurs en resensente hul bes probeer om ’n **herhaling van die onsmaklike** voorval te voorkom. In dié verband kan hulle ’n paar riglyne in gedagte hou. As ’n boek die resensente om welke rede ook al irriteer, kan hy of sy eerder die boek aan die boekeredakteur terugstuur. Dieselfde riglyn geld as die resensente nie die tyd of energie het om ’n behoorlike resensie te lewer nie. Resensente is veronderstel om etiese standaarde te handhaaf wat onder meer beteken dat hulle botsende belange verklaar. Verder het boekeredakteurs ’n verantwoordelikheid om sover moontlik te verhoed dat swak, wraaksugtige en beledigende resensies verskyn.

Onlangs het Kerneels Breytenbach ’n bruikbare en insiggewende bydrae op *Lit-Net* gepubliseer getiteld “Hoe om ’n boekresensie te skryf”. Ek gaan akkoord met sy raad, maar dink tog dat boekeredakteurs kennis moet dra van die belangrikste vetes en vyande in die literêre wêreld. Sodanige kennis sal almal verleentheid spaar, maar Breytenbach het gelyk dat boekeredakteurs ook nie alwetend is nie: “Boekeredakteurs kan onmoontlik op hoogte wees van alle heersende vetes in die skrywerswêreld. Resensente moet liefs belange verklaar wanneer hulle genader word. As die boeke-

redakteur dan nog vir hulle kans sien, rus daar op hulle die verpligting om daardie belange nie te bevorder nie.”

Ek sluit hierdie komponent van my resensie-artikel af met wyse raad van Uys Krige. Dit is uit ’n brief wat Krige in 1934 uit Spanje aan sy broer, Bokkie, skryf. In die brief bied Krige met verwysing na Roy Campbell ’n goeie perspektief op die invloed van onbillike kritiek op die digter:

Soos Roy sê, **daar is niks wat die ware digter meer op prys stel nie as net opreg, intelligente, opbouende kritiek**, hoe streng en onverbiddelik dit ook mag wees! Maar as die minderwaardigheid van die kritikus sonneklaar uit elke sin en frase van hom spreek, en hy boonop nog kwaadwillig en met opset die werk waaraan jou liefde en opoffering, al die gawes wat jy mag hê van hart en verstand met geloof en hoop en volharding maande- en jare lank gewy het, verkeerd en verdraaid voorstel—wanneer, sê ek, hy met ’n paar haastige strepies van die pen dogmaties en nadruklik jou alle talent of begaafdheid weier en ontsê—dan, meen ek, is dit hoogtyd om van jou ledekant op te staan en met een hou, meedoënloos, daardie swaap-kop te verbrysel... (343)

In die volgende deel van hierdie bydrae verskuif die fokus na mentorskap en die rol van uitgewers. In my betoog gebruik ek Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel as aanknopingspunt. In die slotgedeelte van dié resensie-artikel kom my beoordeling van *’n ope brief aan Dorian Gray* ter sprake.

In sy repliek op die Gouws-resensie “Moes ek digter só teen homself beskerm?” (13) probeer Odendaal ’n korrekatief bied op die oneerbiedige resensie van Gouws. Dit is goed dat hy gereageer het, maar ongelukkig verval sy respons grootliks in *the professor doth protest too much*-retoriek. Dit gaan te veel om selfverontskuldiging en irrelevante verskonings wat hy namens Fourie aanbied. Ek weet steeds nie wat die diefstal van Fourie se rekenaar met die uiteindelijke kwaliteit van die gepubliseerde bundel te doen het nie. Die Afrikaanse poësieleser betaal baie geld om boeke aan te skaf en resensente spandeer baie tyd om publikasies vir lesers in perspektief te plaas. Lesers en resensente stel werklik nie belang in die tragedies agter die skerms nie, hulle is slegs geïnteresseerd in die finale produk op die winkelrak.

Miskien moet studente tydens formele en informele kreatiewe skryfprogramme beter mentorskap ontvang oor die afronding van bundelmanuskripte. ’n Manuskrip wat ingedien word vir die doeleindes van ’n formele kwalifikasie in Kreatiewe Skryfkuns is nie noodwendig gelykstaande aan ’n voorlegging aan ’n uitgewer nie. Dit is twee verskillende kontekste waarin verskillende maatstawwe geld. Weldeurdagte dade en denke is op almal van toepassing wat oorweeg om ’n bundelmanuskrip aan ’n uitgewer voor te lê of jy nou Kreatiewe Skryfkuns formeel bestudeer of nie.

Dit is opvallend hoe dikwels debuutbundels kort ná **die voltooiing van akademiese programme** in Kreatiewe Skryfkuns verskyn. Sommige van hierdie bundels is uitstekend en vernuwend (die debute van Loftus Marais, Bibi Slippers, Hennie

Nortjé en Fourie Botha is goeie voorbeelde), terwyl ander minder indrukwekkend is. Ek is oortuig dat die swakkeres beter sou wees indien groter geduld en indringender skaafwerk aan die dag gelê is. Dit is uiteraard tot mentors, graadprogramme en universiteite se voordeel indien afgestudeerde studente so gou moontlik hul digbundels publiseer en veral as hierdie debuutbundels pryse wen, maar haastige honde verbrand soms hul monde.

Spies het gelyk as sy in 'n koerantartikel van 2 Oktober 2017 maan teen Afrikaanse digbundels wat op "die lopende band" (9) verskyn en die "onbesonne publikasie van debuutbundels" (9). Sy is verder van mening dat Odendaal sy student "ferm, maar vriendelik" (9) op die gebreke in sy digkuns moes wys. Die implikasie is dat Odendaal as mentor medeverantwoordelik is vir die gebreke in Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel. Dit is gewoon nie 'n billike taksering nie. As dit geldig is, sal alle dosente wêreldwyd voor stok kom indien hulle afgestudeerde studente in die arbeidsmark misluk.

Ek stem saam met Spies dat mentors 'n groot aandeel het in die vorming van jong digters, maar dit is steeds die student se keuse of hy wil ag slaan op voorstelle en vermanings. Dit is en bly steeds Ruan Fourie se werk en nie Bernard Odendaal s'n nie. As die afgestudeerde of huidige student op eie houtjie sy onafgeronde verse aan 'n uitgewer voorlê, is dit ongetwyfeld nie die mentor se skuld nie. Ruan Fourie het self besluit om sy werk aan 'n uitgewer voor te lê wat dit toe gepubliseer het. Ek is oortuig dat Odendaal goeie mentorskap aan Fourie gebied het. Swak leermeesterskap deur Odendaal is nie die oorsaak van ooglopende gebreke in Fourie se debuutbundel nie, alhoewel oorhaastigheid en gebrekkige redaksionele mentorskap van uitgewerskant wel 'n rol speel. Dit is presies waarteen T. S. Eliot waarsku in sy toespraak voor die Society of Young Publishers in 1952. Hy identifiseer twee kernprobleme in die uitgewer-digterverhouding:

The first is to dissuade a poet from wanting to publish too soon: before he has *enough* good poems for a volume without putting in inferior poems. The other is to prevent a poet from wanting to publish too often. The saturation point of the market for poetry, for poetry even by a very well-known poet, is low. It does even a good poet harm to bring out his volumes in rapid succession.

In Erika Terblanche se profiel oor Wilma Stockenström op *LitNet* sluit sy sêgoed van Stockenström in. In een van haar uitsprake wat oorspronklik in 'n 1988-uitgawe van *Die Suid-Afrikaan* verskyn, bied Stockenström 'n meer satiriese perspektief op haastige publikasiebesluite: "Afrikaanse skrywers, dink ek, tref dit so gelukkig. Hier is baie uitgewers vir 'n klein taaltjie. Ons digters! Hemel, jy hoef net 'n gedig te poep, dan word hy uitgegee." Alhoewel beide Eliot en Stockenström se uitsprake lank gelede gemaak is, bly hulle menings relevant vir Afrikaanse digters vandag. Daar verskyn jaarliks 'n goeie oes Afrikaanse digbundels ten spyte van 'n klein leserspubliek en bedenkbare winsgrense. Die kwaliteit van bundels bly wisselvallig en dikwels is 'n

groter aanbod van swakker verse aanwesig. Die rede hiervoor is waarskynlik oorhaastige publikasie.

Dit bly jammer dat Fourie oorhaastig was met die uitgee van sy bundel. My spyt gaan nie om 'n onderdrukking of ontkenning van sy talent nie, maar juis die teenoorgestelde. Ek is vas oortuig dat Fourie baie kon baat by terugvoering van kritieser lesers (nie net vriende, Instagram-ondersteuners en kollegas nie) en 'n intensiewer ontginning van beskikbare toetsterreine. Het hy ooit gedigte voorgelê vir NB-Uitgewers se *Nuwe stemme*-reeks? Sterk debutante soos Ilse van Staden, Bernard Odendaal, Ronelda Kamfer, Loftus Marais, Hennie Nortjé en Bibi Slippers het almal aanvanklik in *Nuwe stemme* gepubliseer. Die *Nuwe stemme*-reeks bied aan opkomende digters die geleentheid om waardevolle terugvoering te ontvang van samestellers, mededigters en die Afrikaanse poësieleser.

Behoorlike manuskriptontwikkeling van uitgewerskant, is 'n belangrike faktor in die uiteindelijke kwaliteit van debuutwerk. In dié opsig vervul die redakteur 'n sleutelrol in die verbetering van die manuskrip. Dit behels veel meer as tegniese versorging en idees oor hoe om die boek te bemark. Sinvolle manuskriptontwikkeling help die digter om ooglopende gebreke te oorkom. Ek sien min bewyse in Fourie se debuutbundel dat intensiewe mentorskap en manuskriptontwikkeling plaasgevind het.

'n ope brief aan *Dorian Gray* is weens verskeie redes 'n onbevredigende debuut, alhoewel dit duidelike tekens van potensiaal vertoon. In Fourie se geval is die vrugte nog nie heeltemal ryp nie.

Die tematiese beperktheid van die bundel is 'n **beduidende gebrek**. Die verwoording van die liefde is 'n bekende tema in die digkuns, maar dit is eentonig om 'n hele digbundel aan die wel en weë van 'n jeugdige liefdesgeskiedenis te wy. Boonop is die meeste liefdesgedigte so verstandelik en strak dat dit min ontroering by die leser veroorsaak. Die bundel bevat te veel intertekstuele speletjies en poëtiese truuks wat grootliks bydra tot die verlies van 'n eie stem.

Die intertekstuele spel met Oscar Wilde se roman, *The picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), voldoen nie aan die verwagtinge nie, aangesien die hedonisme, erotiek en sensualiteit van die oorspronklike teks nie deeglik genoeg neerslag vind nie. Die verplasing van die Victoriaanse era na die Potchefstroomse studentelewe kom geforseerd en pretensieus voor. Die probleem lê nie by die digter se belesenheid nie, want dit is duidelik dat hy oor grondige literêre kennis beskik. Die tekortkoming is dat die talryke motto's, direkte aanhalings en optelfrases in 'n groot mate versiering is wat min bydra om diepgang aan die verse te verleen.

Die liefdesgedigte is dikwels niksseggend, omdat dit oorwegend bestaan uit 'n klomp futlose gedagtes wat lukraak neergepen word, sonder dat dit duidelik is wat die spreker eintlik wil sê. Wat beteken reëls soos: "die lewe is tydrowend / en het tyd vir niemand nie." (59) en "daar's dooie blare by my voete en lewendes aan die takke"? (47)

Verder bly die toon in die liefdesverse wroegend en sentimenteel. Die liefde neem kennelik nie vir hierdie spreker 'n duisend vorme aan nie. Dit dwarrel voort "soos die lied van 'n meisie / in haar liefde verlaat."

Die kere wanneer die spreker wel 'n bietjie sensueel verkeer, is dit in die trant van onoortuigende pretensie en oppervlakkigheid: "en spuit saans Coco Mademoiselle / op die kussing wat ek vashou— / sodat dit soos Chanel N°5 se flessie geur / tydloos moet word. / van hier kan ek jou olfaktories vlugtig / maar altyd herroep, *ma vie en rose*." (56)

In 'n gedig soos "die man wat val" (46) tref die spreker verbande tussen 'n reël van Christina Koning uit 1992 en die 9/11-tragedie nege jaar later. Die spreker beskou die reël "It was September, / season of dying falls." as 'n soort voorspelling van die terreuraanval in New York waartydens 'n man na sy dood spring. Hy kom in die slotreël tot die gevolgtrekking dat talige konnotasies niks anders is as "... 'n soeke na die einddoel van niks." Hierdie is een van 'n aantal voorbeelde waar die gedig nie bo die vanselfsprekende uitstyg nie. Uiteraard is die spreker se geforseerde juks-taponering van uiteenlopende sake 'n niksseggende onderneming. Dit kom voor asof die spreker iets verhewe sê, maar in der waarheid sê hy niks betekenisvol nie.

Fourie se meer gekondenseerde verse is beter as die langer verhalende gedigte. 'n Goeie voorbeeld is "i. Temperaat" (47) uit die gedigreëks "ekwinoks" (47–8) wat met sterk beelde 'n oortuigende atmosfeer vir liefdestrategie skep:

'n kraai slaap, kou ongegrendel,
langs die volledige werke van Shakespeare
en ek treur terwyl rose in 'n pot
dood kook vir Turkish delight

Ongelukkig verloor die gedig sy trefkrag omdat dit deel vorm van 'n drieledige reeks waarin die spreker onverstaanbare verbande tussen sy liefdesbeleving en die 9/11-tragedie probeer lê. **Die drie gedigte (met verskillende datums onder die gedigtitels)** sluit op geen logiese wyse bymekaar aan nie. Waarom gedigte wat beter op hul eie sou staan in 'n reeks aanbied? Onsinnighede soos dié frustreer en irriteer lesers.

'n Ander voorbeeld van ondeurdagtheid is die onfunksionele plasing van gedigtitels onderaan gedigte. 'n Verdere stoornis is die flou herdigtings van bekende Ingrid Jonker-verse: "het ek gesoek na die grootpad / om daarlangs terug te vlug, / hier het dit my by Verlies se Halte gebring." (57)

In die gedig, "mens" (63), beïndruk Fourie wel met slim woordspel, bondigheid en funksionele leestekengebruik:

ek is mens
ek is mensgemaak
ek is mens, gemaak
om te verwoes.

'n Ander hoogtepunt is "rigor mortis" (66) aangesien die doodseel en die liefdesverlies assosiatief skakel en die spreker die sentrale metafoor van begin tot einde deurvoer. Die insig waartoe die spreker in die slotstrofe kom, is eenvoudig dog treffend en die woordspel effektief:

met troebel oë
bewonder ek die ingesonke wange,
dink ek terug aan hoe hierdie wese

my meegevoer het
en hoe ek my wêreld laat krimp het
om plek te maak in my
vir die wêreld van 'n ander.

Ongelukkig word die gedig ontsier deur geykte beskrywings soos "troebel oë" en "ingesonke wange". Mooiskrywery is 'n slagat waarin Fourie dikwels trap. Dit is asof hy te hard probeer om "poëties" te klink en verhewe kunsteoretiese stellings te maak. Hy moet eerder van hierdie lastige donsvere ontslae raak en onbevange dig.

Daar is voorbeelde van sterk beelde, intelligente ontginning van intertekste en kreatiewe taalspel in die bundel, maar die meeste verse is onafgerond. Uiteindelik moet die vers in sy totaliteit as kunswerk slaag. 'n Mooi beeld hier of 'n vernuftige woordkeuse daar beteken nog lank nie 'n geslaagde gedig nie. Dit is immers die geheelindruk waarin die meeste kritici en lesers belangstel.

Dalk kan Fourie ook ag slaan op die bevrydende woorde van Nellie Forbush in *South Pacific*: "I'm gonna wash that man right outa my hair, and send him on his way." Goeie digters lees en het lief, maar hulle sprei ook hul vlerke om nuwe horisonne te ontdek.

Die verskyning van 'n ope brief aan *Dorian Gray* het weens verkeerde redes aandag getrek. Dit is 'n bundel wat soveel beter sou wees mits strenger selfkritiek en former redaksionele mentorskap toegepas is. Dié twee gebreke het Ruan Fourie verhinder om sy aantoonbare digtalent, literêre bevoegdheid en kreatiewe gawes oortuigend aan te wend. Hopelik sal Tom Gouws se onbenydenswaardige "kritiek" hom nie verhinder om sy digterskap te ontwikkel en 'n meer afgeronde tweede bundel uit te gee nie.

Die slotbeskouing oor die Gouws-resensie is gewoon die volgende: resensente en boekeredakteurs moet hulle distansieer van destruktiewe kritiek, want hulle speel 'n sleutelrol om integriteit en professionaliteit in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf te bevorder.

My beoordeling van Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel sluit aan en verskil van Crous, Bennett en Hambidge se beskouings. Dit is grootliks 'n bykomende betekenis wat ek toeken of produseer. In *Criticism and Truth* (1966) merk Roland Barthes die volgende op: "Criticism is not science. Science deals with meanings, criticism produces them." (79)

Ongeag die toekenning van verskillende en grootliks negatiewe betekenis aan 'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray is die digter en sy werk byna deur die bank met respek behandel. Ongelukkig is dié uitspraak nie op Gouws van toepassing nie.

Gelukkig bestaan daar ook selfstandige response van lesers. 'n Goeie voorbeeld is Gedigteleser van Kuilsrivier wat as volg op Fourie se bundel reageer:

En toe gaan haal ek Gouws se eie debuutbundel uit die rak, *Diaspora* (1990), blaai dit deur en wonder hoeveel lesers dit lees en byvoorbeeld 'n gedig soos "aarsspieël" waardeer. En toe lees ek weer Fourie se bundel deur en dink: Dalk het Gouws die gedigte byna net so vinnig deurgelees soos Grové die "stapeltjie gedigte".

Want ek dink Fourie se bundel moet gekoop en gelees word, veral deur jong mense, want hulle sal aanklank vind by gedigte soos "ekwinoks" (bl. 47–48), "Marina Joyce" (bl. 55), "que sera sera" (bl. 59), "mens" (bl. 63) en "typo" (bl. 70)—om 'n paar te noem. (11)

Dit is ingeligte en intelligente lesers soos dié wat resensente en boekeredakteurs in gedagte moet hou, want boekliefhebbers se opinies dra miskien die grootste gewig. Baie van hulle bespreek daaglik ywerig Afrikaanse boeke by leeskringe en boekfeeste dwarsoor die land.

Ten slotte wil ek 'n voorstel aan leeskringe maak: plaas 'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray op julle leeslyste, sodat lojale lesers ook aan die debat hieroor kan deelneem.

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Resensieredakteur

Prof Andries Visagie
Departement Afrikaans en Nederlands
Universiteit van Stellenbosch
Matieland X1
Stellenbosch 7602
agvisagie@sun.ac.za

Review editor

Prof Andries Visagie
Department Afrikaans and Dutch
Stellenbosch University
Matieland X1
Stellenbosch 7602
agvisagie@sun.ac.za

Borg / Sponsor: Marie Luttig Testamentêre Trust

Neil Cochrane

Neil Cochrane is verbonde aan die Departement Afrikaans en Algemene Literatuurwetenskap, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika in Pretoria. E-pos: cochrn1@unisa.ac.za

RESENSIE-ARTIKEL / REVIEW ARTICLE

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray en 'n peiling van die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray and an assessment of book reviewing practice in Afrikaans

'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray

Ruan Fourie. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2017.

75 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4853-0747-1.

The young Afrikaans poet, Ruan Fourie, published his debut volume of poetry, *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*, (An open letter to Dorian Gray) in 2017. Fourie's debut received predominantly negative reviews from Afrikaans critics. A review by Afrikaans critic, Tom Gouws, was particularly destructive and transgressed acceptable professional standards. This example of destructive criticism is scrutinized in relation to similar transgressions in Afrikaans book reviews. In addition, a comparable Irish case study and theoretical viewpoints by C. J. van Rees and Susanne Janssen are considered to provide a nuanced perspective on current practices in Afrikaans literary criticism. The article also focuses on the responses of Bernard Odendaal and Lina Spies to Fourie's poetry to provide a critical and independent opinion on aspects such as publishing decisions, mentorship, manuscript development and editorial mentorship. The last part of the article consists of a substantiated evaluation of *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*. It is concluded that despite evidence of creative talent, there are too many shortcomings due to questionable editorial mentorship and impetuous publishing decisions.

Keywords: literary criticism, Afrikaans poetry, book reviewing, Ruan Fourie, literary mentorship.

Die jong digter, Ruan Fourie, se debuutbundel, *'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray*, is taamlik lou en selfs swak ontvang deur die meeste kritici. Resensies van Marius Crous op *Versindaba* en Nini Bennett op *LitNet* beklemtoon min of meer dieselfde gebreke, alhoewel Crous minder negatief is as Bennett. Joan Hambidge oordeel meer positief en verwys na die "baie talent" wat aanwesig is.

Die bundel het ongelukkig ook tot die snedigste "kritiek" in 'n lang tyd gelei. Die resensie van Tom Gouws ("Digter nie teen homself beskerm") wat op 10 Julie 2017 in *Volksblad* verskyn, is 'n laagtepunt in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf. Gelukkig het 'n handjievol literatore soos Bernard Odendaal, Hambidge en Daniël Hugo sterk beswaar aangeteken, maar die skade is gedoen. Die probleem lê nie by die besware wat Gouws identifiseer nie, maar by die onsmaklike en onoortuigende wyse waarop hy sy "argumente" aanbied.

Dit is onaanvaarbaar dat hy hom tot die skatologiese (“Dis suiwer kak.”) moes wend om sy misnoeë uit te spreek. Dit is veral die patroniserende toon van die ouer akademikus wat my neurone tot in hul kern irriteer. Dit is lafhartig dat hy woorde in die mond van die ontslape professor A. P. Grové lê. Verder is dit aanmatigend om namens “alle literatuurdosente” (7) te praat. Behoede my en die Afrikaanse letterkunde as dosente so ’n meerderwaardige houding teenoor hul minderes koester.

Dit is jammer dat Gouws se “tyd en geduld ontbreek” (7) om ’n indringender resensie te skryf, want dit is immers die belangrikste taak van die resensent: om bundels en digters met respek te behandel. Dit beteken dat jy moeite doen en erns maak met die bundel op jou lessenaar. Dit beteken nie ’n lysie van ongemotiveerde gebreke of vae frases soos “veel, veel meer” (7) nie. Beide dui gewoon op laksheid.

Die eendimensionele aard van Gouws se resensie is ’n verdere knelpunt. Dit is iets wat gereeld sy kop uitsteek in Afrikaanse resensies. Ek twyfel of enige boek ooit só goed of só sleg kan wees om ’n algehele lofprijsing of vervloeking te regverdig. Al wat skrywers en digters verwag is ’n intelligente oordeel, selfs al is dit negatief. Daniel Mendelsohn som dit goed op in sy artikel “A critic’s manifesto” (2015) wat in *The New Yorker* verskyn: “The intelligent negative review, indeed, does its own kind of honor to artists: serious artists, in my experience, want only to be reviewed intelligently, rather than showed with vacuous raves — not least, because serious artists learn from serious reviews.”

Ek wil nie in die strik beland om resensies te resenseer nie, want hierdie vakature is reeds deur Crito gevul. Elke week plaas die resensie-resensent, Crito, op sy/haar *LitNet*-blog getrou sy/haar indrukke oor die jongste resensies wat oor Afrikaanse boeke verskyn. Daar is min sprake dat Crito ooit die boeke lees wat geresenseer word, aangesien die fokus eerder op subjektiewe uitsprake oor die gehalte van resensies val. Derhalwe bied hy/sy nie werklik vir die potensiële leser enige aanvullende perspektief op nuwe Afrikaanse publikasies nie.

Dit laat vrae ontstaan oor die doel van Crito se saai onderneming, want wie stel regtig belang of ’n resensie aan Crito se norme voldoen? Dit is elkeen se goeie reg om te blog of nie te blog nie en geen voorskrifte bestaan waaroor mense mag blog nie. Dit kan strek van Bengaalse tiere tot pottebakkerie, maar kriptiese bloginskrywings van ’n selfaangestelde resensiewaghond dra min tot vitale boekgesprekke by.

Literêre smeerveldtogte, persoonlike aanvalle en wraakgedagtes dra nog minder tot die bevordering van die letterkunde by. Die Gouws-resensie oor die Fourie-bundel is allermens die eerste voorbeeld van sarkasme en nydigheid in die Afrikaanse letterkunde. Dit het al dikwels gebeur dat Afrikaanse boekresensente die pers gebruik om persoonlike gevegte te loods. ’n Skreiende voorbeeld is die saak Du Plessis versus Hambidge wat uit 1991 dateer. In Phil du Plessis se resensie oor Hambidge se bundel, *Die verlore simbool* (1991), raak hy die volgende kwyt: “Tensy Joan Hambidge haar literator(?)trise-skap en haar neurotiese woede beter kan integreer, gaan haar poësie

nog lank ly. So ook die leser, wat maklik wil weghol soos van 'n kwylende, dol teef." (6)

Du Plessis se resensie is voorafgegaan deur 'n uitspraak van Hambidge in die vermaakbylae, *Kalender*, 'n maand of wat vantevore waarin sy Du Plessis beskryf as 'n "minor-minor-minor-poet". Dit is uit dié gegewens duidelik wat hier gebeur—'n moddergooiery in die pers.

Hambidge het in die 1990's 'n weeklikse rubriek, *Op my literêre sofa*, vir *Beeld* behartig. Haar rubriek is veral gekenmerk deur polemiese uitsprake oor literêre sake en gedurende haar redelike lang sitting op haar sofa het sy 'n hele paar publikasies tot literêre rampgebiede verklaar. Dit het dan gelei tot vermanende lesersbriewe van die verontregte skrywers en hul vriende met opskrifte soos "Joan moet ophou met haar private vetes" (Toerien 3) en "Joan hou haar nie aan reëls van welvoeglikheid" (Scheepers 8).

'n Onderskeid is nodig tussen historiese reaksies op billike kritiek en wettige besware teen onbilike kritiek. Soms is skrywers se velle te dun of kritici se wraaksugtige ego's te groot. Hierbenewens bestaan daar beslis iets soos blatante misinterpretasie. 'n Goeie voorbeeld is Ampie Coetzee se resensie van Johann de Lange se bundel *Die algebra van nood* (2009) wat op 20 April 2008 in *Die Burger* verskyn. In dié resensie tipeer Coetzee die bundel as "onnoemenswaardig" (11) en wys foutiewelik op De Lange se "verkragting /ontkragting" (11) van Van Wyk Louw. Dit is duidelik dat Coetzee nie besef het dat Van Wyk Louw as een van De Lange se belangrikste literêre vaders figureer nie.

'n Ander geval is Tom Gouws se misinterpretasie van die voorblad van Henning Pieterse se kortverhaalbundel, *Omdat ons alles is* (1998). In sy resensie wat op 19 Oktober 1998 in *Beeld* verskyn, verwys hy verkeerdelik na die voorbladillustrasie as "'n pragtige Middeleeuagtige houtsnewerk van 'n Sebastiaan-figuur... (6). Dit is twak, want op die voorblad word die twaalfde kaart van die Tarot, die gehangde man, uitgebeeld soos Pieterse (14), Hambidge (14) en Roodt (10) in hul reaksies op die Gouws-resensie aantoon.

Probleme in die resensiebedryf is nie uniek aan die Afrikaanse letterkunde nie. In 2015 ontstaan 'n herrie in die Ierse resensiebedryf ná Eileen Battersby se snedige resensie van Paul Murray se roman, *The Mark and the Void*. Na aanleiding hiervan besluit die joernalis, Martin Doyle om 'n verskeidenheid rolspelers oor die volgende kwessies te nader: die eerlikheid van Ierse boekresensente oor die werk van Ierse skrywers binne 'n klein literêre landskap en die hantering van negatiewe kritiek. Die verskillende response verskyn op 16 Julie 2015 in *The Irish Times* in 'n artikel getiteld "Reviewing Irish books: the good, the bad and the ugly truth."

Daar is 'n aantal redes waarom ek na hierdie artikel verwys. Eerstens vertoon die Ierse en Afrikaanse sisteme 'n aantal ooreenkomste. Beide sisteme is relatief klein en 'n beperkte aantal rolspelers is by resensering betrokke. Dit veroorsaak dat skrywers en resensente mekaar persoonlik ken wat terselfdertyd 'n hoë premie op

integriteit plaas. Daar is Ierse kritici soos John Boyne wat uiters pessimisties is oor dié stand van sake:

The truth is, and I know this from experience, you can't even criticise another Irish writer's work any more without being accused of professional jealousy. It's utterly ridiculous, particularly when we live in an era where mediocrity is so celebrated. In my view, books by Irish writers should be reviewed by complete outsiders who have neither axes to grind nor friendships to maintain.

Crous bied in sy bydrae “**n Skalpel vir die vernislaag oor die *découpage*” ’n uitstekende perspektief op die soortgelyke dilemma van resesentkeuses in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf. Anders as Boyne is Crous krities oor die voorstel dat kennis nie mekaar se werk moet resenseer nie: “As ons hierdie maatstaf toepas, mag niemand meer resensies skryf nie, want daar bestaan nie iets soos ’n smettelose, objektiewe tabula rasa as dit kom by die resensiebedryf in Afrikaans nie.” (7)**

Die tweede rede waarom die artikel van Doyle van belang is, het te make met die reikwydte van die response wat betrek word. Die debakel oor Tom Gouws se resensie van Ruan Fourie se debuut bied ’n goeie vertrekpunt om op soortgelyke wyse uit eie geledere te besin oor kwessies soos integriteit, billikheid en gepaste response op negatiewe kritiek. Dit is alleenlik sinvol indien alle rolspelers (boekeredakteurs, skrywers, uitgewers en resesente) op ’n gekonsolideerde forum tot die gesprek toetree. ’n Paar lesersbriewe hier en daar bied nie voldoende impetus aan dié belangrike debat nie.

Die Gouws-resensie van Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel is ’n bewys dat onvanpaste literêre kaperjolle steeds in die Afrikaanse literêre wêreld aanwesig is. Vir sommige mense beskik haatlike resensies seker oor vermaaklikheidswaarde of dalk is dit ’n manier om tanende lesersgetalle van koerante te verhoog. Dit is ewe grappig as bekende aartsvyande mekaar se werk resenseer. Hoe dit hoegenaamd gebeur, gaan my verstand te bowe. Weet die boekeredakteur dan nie van beter nie? Hierdie punt is ook deur H. P. van Coller geopper in ’n lesersbrief (“Gouws oordeel oor Hambidge hoort nie”) wat op 4 Januarie 2017 in *Volksblad* verskyn.

Dit bly jammer as Afrikaanse boekresensies nie aan basiese voorwaardes soos gebalanseerdheid, nugterheid en professionaliteit voldoen nie. Dit is veral betreurenswaardig as Afrikaanse boekeblaaië begin lyk soos *The Jerry Springer Show*. Basta met die “rioolslootkritiek” (6) soos ene Perfidious Albion dit so mooi in *Volksblad* stel.

In die literêre bedryf gaan dit nie net om waardebepalings oor literêre werke en skrywers nie. Volgens Van Rees (284) staan boekresesente en kritici konstant in ’n mededingende verhouding tot mekaar en ding hul mee om ’n gesaghebbende posisie in ’n literêre gemeenskap. Van Rees (284) verduidelik die tweeledige rol van die kritikus as volg: “a critic not only produces belief in the properties and quality he has assigned to the cultural products he is concerned with; at the same time he

aims at producing belief in his own value, that is his status as connoisseur, his ability to assess the properties and quality he deems peculiar to a work.”

Indien mens die Gouws-resensie aan bogenoemde twee voorwaardes meet, is dit duidelik dat dit ver te kort skiet. Eerstens oortuig Gouws se resensie nie die leser van die eienskappe en kwaliteit van Fourie se debuutbundel nie, omdat hy nie moeite doen om die bundel behoorlik te bespreek nie. Sy resensie bestaan uit ’n irrelevante buitetekstuele anekdote, ongemotiveerde waardeoordele en ’n uiters oppervlakkige aanduiding van gebreke.

Tweedens bevestig Gouws met sy blatante sarkasme allermens sy waarde, status en vermoë as ’n poësiekenner. Die uiteindelijke gevolg is dat medekritici, die digter en poësielesers min waarde aan sy oordeel heg. Gouws se vreemde benadering tot die Fourie-bundel, onderskei hom van ander kritici en ontlok kontroversie, maar dit hou ook ’n wesenlike gevaar vir sy reputasie in en verminder die waarde van sy beoordeling. Die belangrikste rede hiervoor is dat sy beoordeling (en die wyse hoe hy dit formuleer) grootliks verskil van medekritici (Crous, Bennett en Hambidge) se meer gebalanseerde en beskaafde waardeoordele. Dié meganisme word goed deur Janssen (295) opgesom:

Besides, reviewers take into account their colleagues’ statements. In the final analysis these constitute the sole test for a reviewer’s own statements, the only way he may be proved right or wrong. A critic’s recognition as a connoisseur depends to a great extent on the similarity or comparability of his choices and statements to those made by his colleagues. In repeatedly taking a dissenting view, a critic risks his status of literary expert.

Die Gouws-resensie dien as ’n soort voorbeeld van onaanvaarbare praktyk. Hopelik sal boekeredakteurs en resensente hul bes probeer om ’n **herhaling van die onsmaklike voorval** te voorkom. In dié verband kan hulle ’n paar riglyne in gedagte hou. As ’n boek die resensente om welke rede ook al irriteer, kan hy of sy eerder die boek aan die boekeredakteur terugstuur. Dieselfde riglyn geld as die resensente nie die tyd of energie het om ’n behoorlike resensie te lewer nie. Resensente is veronderstel om etiese standaarde te handhaaf wat onder meer beteken dat hulle botsende belange verklaar. Verder het boekeredakteurs ’n verantwoordelikheid om sover moontlik te verhoed dat swak, wraaksugtige en beledigende resensies verskyn.

Onlangs het Kerneels Breytenbach ’n bruikbare en insiggewende bydrae op *Lit-Net* gepubliseer getiteld “Hoe om ’n boekresensie te skryf”. Ek gaan akkoord met sy raad, maar dink tog dat boekeredakteurs kennis moet dra van die belangrikste vetes en vyande in die literêre wêreld. Sodanige kennis sal almal verleentheid spaar, maar Breytenbach het gelyk dat boekeredakteurs ook nie alwetend is nie: “Boekeredakteurs kan onmoontlik op hoogte wees van alle heersende vetes in die skrywerswêreld. Resensente moet liefse belange verklaar wanneer hulle genader word. As die boeke-

redakteur dan nog vir hulle kans sien, rus daar op hulle die verpligting om daardie belange nie te bevorder nie.”

Ek sluit hierdie komponent van my resensie-artikel af met wyse raad van Uys Krige. Dit is uit ’n brief wat Krige in 1934 uit Spanje aan sy broer, Bokkie, skryf. In die brief bied Krige met verwysing na Roy Campbell ’n goeie perspektief op die invloed van onbillike kritiek op die digter:

Soos Roy sê, daar is niks wat die ware digter meer op prys stel nie as net opreg, intelligente, opbouende kritiek, hoe streng en onverbiddelik dit ook mag wees! Maar as die minderwaardigheid van die kritikus sonneklar uit elke sin en frase van hom spreek, en hy boonop nog kwaadwillig en met opset die werk waaraan jou liefde en opoffering, al die gawes wat jy mag hê van hart en verstand met geloof en hoop en volharding maande- en jare lank gewy het, verkeerd en verdraaid voorstel—wanneer, sê ek, hy met ’n paar haastige strepies van die pen dogmaties en nadruklik jou alle talent of begaafdheid weier en ontsê—dan, meen ek, is dit hoogtyd om van jou ledekant op te staan en met een hou, meedoënloos, daardie swaap-kop te verbrysel... (343)

In die volgende deel van hierdie bydrae verskuif die fokus na mentorskap en die rol van uitgewers. In my betoog gebruik ek Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel as aanknopingspunt. In die slotgedeelte van dié resensie-artikel kom my beoordeling van ’n ope brief aan *Dorian Gray* ter sprake.

In sy repliek op die Gouws-resensie “Moes ek digter só teen homself beskerm?” (13) probeer Odendaal ’n korrekatief bied op die oneerbiedige resensie van Gouws. Dit is goed dat hy gereageer het, maar ongelukkig verval sy respons grootliks in *the professor doth protest too much*-retoriek. Dit gaan te veel om selfverontskuldiging en irrelevante verskonings wat hy namens Fourie aanbied. Ek weet steeds nie wat die diefstal van Fourie se rekenaar met die uiteindelijke kwaliteit van die gepubliseerde bundel te doen het nie. Die Afrikaanse poësieleser betaal baie geld om boeke aan te skaf en resensente spandeer baie tyd om publikasies vir lesers in perspektief te plaas. Lesers en resensente stel werklik nie belang in die tragedies agter die skerms nie, hulle is slegs geïnteresseerd in die finale produk op die winkelrak.

Miskien moet studente tydens formele en informele kreatiewe skryfprogramme beter mentorskap ontvang oor die afronding van bundelmanuskripte. ’n Manuskrip wat ingedien word vir die doeleindes van ’n formele kwalifikasie in Kreatiewe Skryfkuns is nie noodwendig gelykstaande aan ’n voorlegging aan ’n uitgewer nie. Dit is twee verskillende kontekste waarin verskillende maatstawwe geld. Weldeurdagte daad en denke is op almal van toepassing wat oorweeg om ’n bundelmanuskrip aan ’n uitgewer voor te lê of jy nou Kreatiewe Skryfkuns formeel bestudeer of nie.

Dit is opvallend hoe dikwels debuutbundels kort ná die voltooiing van akademiese programme in Kreatiewe Skryfkuns verskyn. Sommige van hierdie bundels is uitstekend en vernuwend (die debute van Loftus Marais, Bibi Slippers, Hennie

Nortjé en Fourie Botha is goeie voorbeelde), terwyl ander minder indrukwekkend is. Ek is oortuig dat die swakkeres beter sou wees indien groter geduld en indringender skaafwerk aan die dag gelê is. Dit is uiteraard tot mentors, graadprogramme en universiteite se voordeel indien afgestudeerde studente so gou moontlik hul digbundels publiseer en veral as hierdie debuutbundels pryse wen, maar haastige honde verbrand soms hul monde.

Spies het gelyk as sy in 'n koerantartikel van 2 Oktober 2017 maan teen Afrikaanse digbundels wat op "die lopende band" (9) verskyn en die "onbesonne publikasie van debuutbundels" (9). Sy is verder van mening dat Odendaal sy student "ferm, maar vriendelik" (9) op die gebreke in sy digkuns moes wys. Die implikasie is dat Odendaal as mentor medeverantwoordelik is vir die gebreke in Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel. Dit is gewoon nie 'n billike taksering nie. As dit geldig is, sal alle dosente wêreldwyd voor stok kom indien hulle afgestudeerde studente in die arbeidsmark misluk.

Ek stem saam met Spies dat mentors 'n groot aandeel het in die vorming van jong digters, maar dit is steeds die student se keuse of hy wil ag slaan op voorstelle en vermanings. Dit is en bly steeds Ruan Fourie se werk en nie Bernard Odendaal s'n nie. As die afgestudeerde of huidige student op eie houtjie sy onafgeronde verse aan 'n uitgewer voorlê, is dit ongetwyfeld nie die mentor se skuld nie. Ruan Fourie het self besluit om sy werk aan 'n uitgewer voor te lê wat dit toe gepubliseer het. Ek is oortuig dat Odendaal goeie mentorskap aan Fourie gebied het. Swak leermeesterskap deur Odendaal is nie die oorsaak van ooglopende gebreke in Fourie se debuutbundel nie, alhoewel oorhaastigheid en gebrekkige redaksionele mentorskap van uitgewerskant wel 'n rol speel. Dit is presies waarteen T. S. Eliot waarsku in sy toespraak voor die Society of Young Publishers in 1952. Hy identifiseer twee kernprobleme in die uitgewer-digterverhouding:

The first is to dissuade a poet from wanting to publish too soon: before he has *enough* good poems for a volume without putting in inferior poems. The other is to prevent a poet from wanting to publish too often. The saturation point of the market for poetry, for poetry even by a very well-known poet, is low. It does even a good poet harm to bring out his volumes in rapid succession.

In Erika Terblanche se profiel oor Wilma Stockenström op *LitNet* sluit sy sêgoed van Stockenström in. In een van haar uitsprake wat oorspronklik in 'n 1988-uitgawe van *Die Suid-Afrikaan* verskyn, bied Stockenström 'n meer satiriese perspektief op haastige publikasiebesluite: "Afrikaanse skrywers, dink ek, tref dit so gelukkig. Hier is baie uitgewers vir 'n klein taaltjie. Ons digters! Hemel, jy hoef net 'n gedig te poep, dan word hy uitgegee." Alhoewel beide Eliot en Stockenström se uitsprake lank gelede gemaak is, bly hulle menings relevant vir Afrikaanse digters vandag. Daar verskyn jaarliks 'n goeie oes Afrikaanse digbundels ten spyte van 'n klein leserspubliek en bedenkbare winsgrense. Die kwaliteit van bundels bly wisselvallig en dikwels is 'n

groter aanbod van swakker verse aanwesig. Die rede hiervoor is waarskynlik oorhaastige publikasie.

Dit bly jammer dat Fourie oorhaastig was met die uitgee van sy bundel. My spyt gaan nie om 'n onderdrukking of ontkenning van sy talent nie, maar juis die teenoorgestelde. Ek is vas oortuig dat Fourie baie kon baat by terugvoering van kritieser lesers (nie net vriende, Instagram-ondersteuners en kollegas nie) en 'n intensiewer ontginning van beskikbare toetsterreine. Het hy ooit gedigte voorgelê vir NB-Uitgewers se *Nuwe stemme*-reeks? Sterk debutante soos Ilse van Staden, Bernard Odendaal, Ronelda Kamfer, Loftus Marais, Hennie Nortjé en Bibi Slippers het almal aanvanklik in *Nuwe stemme* gepubliseer. Die *Nuwe stemme*-reeks bied aan opkomende digters die geleentheid om waardevolle terugvoering te ontvang van samestellers, mededigters en die Afrikaanse poësieleser.

Behoorlike manuskriptontwikkeling van uitgewerskant, is 'n belangrike faktor in die uiteindelijke kwaliteit van debuutwerk. In dié opsig vervul die redakteur 'n sleutelrol in die verbetering van die manuskrip. Dit behels veel meer as tegniese versorging en idees oor hoe om die boek te bemark. Sinvolle manuskriptontwikkeling help die digter om ooglopende gebreke te oorkom. Ek sien min bewyse in Fourie se debuutbundel dat intensiewe mentorskap en manuskriptontwikkeling plaasgevind het.

'n ope brief aan *Dorian Gray* is weens verskeie redes 'n onbevredigende debuut, alhoewel dit duidelike tekens van potensiaal vertoon. In Fourie se geval is die vrugte nog nie heeltemal ryp nie.

Die tematiese beperktheid van die bundel is 'n **beduidende gebrek**. Die verwoording van die liefde is 'n bekende tema in die digkuns, maar dit is eentonig om 'n hele digbundel aan die wel en weë van 'n jeugdige liefdesgeskiedenis te wy. Boonop is die meeste liefdesgedigte so verstandelik en strak dat dit min ontroering by die leser veroorsaak. Die bundel bevat te veel intertekstuele speletjies en poëtiese truuks wat grootliks bydra tot die verlies van 'n eie stem.

Die intertekstuele spel met Oscar Wilde se roman, *The picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), voldoen nie aan die verwagtinge nie, aangesien die hedonisme, erotiek en sensualiiteit van die oorspronklike teks nie deeglik genoeg neerslag vind nie. Die verplasing van die Victoriaanse era na die Potchefstroomse studentelewe kom geforseerd en pretensieus voor. Die probleem lê nie by die digter se belesenheid nie, want dit is duidelik dat hy oor grondige literêre kennis beskik. Die tekortkoming is dat die talryke motto's, direkte aanhalings en optelfrases in 'n groot mate versiering is wat min bydra om diepgang aan die verse te verleen.

Die liefdesgedigte is dikwels niksseggend, omdat dit oorwegend bestaan uit 'n klomp futlose gedagtes wat lukraak neergepen word, sonder dat dit duidelik is wat die spreker eintlik wil sê. Wat beteken reëls soos: "die lewe is tydrowend / en het tyd vir niemand nie." (59) en "daar's dooie blare by my voete en lewendes aan die takke"? (47)

Verder bly die toon in die liefdesverse wroegend en sentimenteel. Die liefde neem kennelik nie vir hierdie spreker 'n duisend vorme aan nie. Dit dwarrel voort "soos die lied van 'n meisie / in haar liefde verlaat."

Die kere wanneer die spreker wel 'n bietjie sensueel verkeer, is dit in die trant van onoortuigende pretensie en oppervlakkigheid: "en spuit saans Coco Mademoiselle / op die kussing wat ek vashou— / sodat dit soos Chanel N°5 se flessie geur / tydloos moet word. / van hier kan ek jou olfaktories vlugtig / maar altyd herroep, *ma vie en rose.*" (56)

In 'n gedig soos "die man wat val" (46) tref die spreker verbande tussen 'n reël van Christina Koning uit 1992 en die 9/11-tragedie nege jaar later. Die spreker beskou die reël "It was September, / season of dying falls." as 'n soort voorspelling van die terreuraanval in New York waartydens 'n man na sy dood spring. Hy kom in die slotreël tot die gevolgtrekking dat talige konnotasies niks anders is as "... 'n soeke na die einddoel van niks." Hierdie is een van 'n aantal voorbeelde waar die gedig nie bo die vanselfsprekende uitstyg nie. Uiteraard is die spreker se geforseerde juks-taponering van uiteenlopende sake 'n niksseggende onderneming. Dit kom voor asof die spreker iets verhewe sê, maar in der waarheid sê hy niks betekenisvol nie.

Fourie se meer gekondenseerde verse is beter as die langer verhalende gedigte. 'n Goeie voorbeeld is "i. Temperaat" (47) uit die gedigreeks "ekwinoks" (47–8) wat met sterk beelde 'n oortuigende atmosfeer vir liefdestrategie skep:

'n kraai slaap, kou ongegrendel,
langs die volledige werke van Shakespeare
en ek treur terwyl rose in 'n pot
dood kook vir Turkish delight

Ongelukkig verloor die gedig sy trefkrag omdat dit deel vorm van 'n drieledige reeks waarin die spreker onverstaanbare verbande tussen sy liefdesbeleving en die 9/11-tragedie probeer lê. **Die drie gedigte (met verskillende datums onder die gedigtitels)** sluit op geen logiese wyse bymekaar aan nie. Waarom gedigte wat beter op hul eie sou staan in 'n reeks aanbied? Onsinnighede soos dié frustrer en irriteer lesers.

'n Ander voorbeeld van ondeurdagtheid is die onfunksionele plasing van gedigtitels onderaan gedigte. 'n Verdere stoornis is die flou herdigtings van bekende Ingrid Jonker-verse: "het ek gesoek na die grootpad / om daarlangs terug te vlug, / hier het dit my by Verlies se Halte gebring." (57)

In die gedig, "mens" (63), beïndruk Fourie wel met slim woordspel, bondigheid en funksionele leestekengebruik:

ek is mens
ek is mensgemaak
ek is mens, gemaak
om te verwoes.

'n Ander hoogtepunt is "rigor mortis" (66) aangesien die doodsbeelde en die liefdesverlies assosiatief skakel en die spreker die sentrale metafoor van begin tot einde deurvoer. Die insig waartoe die spreker in die slotstrofe kom, is eenvoudig dog treffend en die woordspel effektief:

met troebel oë
bewonder ek die ingesonke wange,
dink ek terug aan hoe hierdie wese

my meegevoer het
en hoe ek my wêreld laat krimp het
om plek te maak in my
vir die wêreld van 'n ander.

Ongelukkig word die gedig ontsier deur geykte beskrywings soos "troebel oë" en "ingesonke wange". Mooiskrywery is 'n slagat waarin Fourie dikwels trap. Dit is asof hy te hard probeer om "poëties" te klink en verhewe kunsteoretiese stellings te maak. Hy moet eerder van hierdie lastige donsvere ontslae raak en onbevange dig.

Daar is voorbeelde van sterk beelde, intelligente ontginning van intertekste en kreatiewe taalspel in die bundel, maar die meeste verse is onafgerond. Uiteindelik moet die vers in sy totaliteit as kunswerk slaag. 'n Mooi beeld hier of 'n vernuftige woordkeuse daar beteken nog lank nie 'n geslaagde gedig nie. Dit is immers die geheelindruk waarin die meeste kritici en lesers belangstel.

Dalk kan Fourie ook ag slaan op die bevrydende woorde van Nellie Forbush in *South Pacific*: "I'm gonna wash that man right outa my hair, and send him on his way." Goeie digters lees en het lief, maar hulle sprei ook hul vlerke om nuwe horisonne te ontdek.

Die verskyning van 'n ope brief aan *Dorian Gray* het weens verkeerde redes aandag getrek. Dit is 'n bundel wat soveel beter sou wees mits strenger selfkritiek en ferner redaksionele mentorskap toegepas is. Dié twee gebreke het Ruan Fourie verhinder om sy aantoonbare digtalent, literêre bevoegdheid en kreatiewe gawes oortuigend aan te wend. Hopelik sal Tom Gouws se onbenydenswaardige "kritiek" hom nie verhinder om sy digterskap te ontwikkel en 'n meer afgeronde tweede bundel uit te gee nie.

Die slotbeskouing oor die Gouws-resensie is gewoon die volgende: resensente en boekeredakteurs moet hulle distansieer van destruktiewe kritiek, want hulle speel 'n sleutelrol om integriteit en professionaliteit in die Afrikaanse resensiebedryf te bevorder.

My beoordeling van Ruan Fourie se debuutbundel sluit aan en verskil van Crous, Bennett en Hambidge se beskouings. Dit is grootliks 'n bykomende betekenis wat ek toeken of produseer. In *Criticism and Truth* (1966) merk Roland Barthes die volgende op: "Criticism is not science. Science deals with meanings, criticism produces them." (79)

Ongeag die toekenning van verskillende en grootliks negatiewe betekenis aan 'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray is die digter en sy werk byna deur die bank met respek behandel. Ongelukkig is dié uitspraak nie op Gouws van toepassing nie.

Gelukkig bestaan daar ook selfstandige response van lesers. 'n Goeie voorbeeld is Gedigteleser van Kuilsrivier wat as volg op Fourie se bundel reageer:

En toe gaan haal ek Gouws se eie debuutbundel uit die rak, *Diaspora* (1990), blaai dit deur en wonder hoeveel lesers dit lees en byvoorbeeld 'n gedig soos "aarsspieël" waardeer. En toe lees ek weer Fourie se bundel deur en dink: Dalk het Gouws die gedigte byna net so vinnig deurgelees soos Grové die "stapeltjie gedigte".

Want ek dink Fourie se bundel moet gekoop en gelees word, veral deur jong mense, want hulle sal aanklank vind by gedigte soos "ekwinoks" (bl. 47–48), "Marina Joyce" (bl. 55), "que sera sera" (bl. 59), "mens" (bl. 63) en "typo" (bl. 70)—om 'n paar te noem. (11)

Dit is ingeligte en intelligente lesers soos dié wat resensente en boekeredakteurs in gedagte moet hou, want boekliefhebbers se opinies dra miskien die grootste gewig. Baie van hulle bespreek daaglik ywerig Afrikaanse boeke by leeskringe en boekfeeste dwarsoor die land.

Ten slotte wil ek 'n voorstel aan leeskringe maak: plaas 'n ope brief aan Dorian Gray op julle leeslyste, sodat lojale lesers ook aan die debat hieroor kan deelneem.

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RESENSIES / REVIEWS

Skollie: One man's struggle to survive by telling stories.

John W. Fredericks. Cape Town: Penguin Random House. 251 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77609-199-7.

DOI: dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4377

The growth of South African film since 1994 has been astonishing, mainly due to a new generation of adventurous scriptwriters and filmmakers, new challenges and new funding mechanisms. Directors who previously battled for years to raise budgets for films that break the mold and which innovate thematically are now attracting investment. *Noem my Skollie* is one of these, now followed by the written story on which the film is based. Normally, it is the book that informs the film. In this case, the film preceded the book, and the fit—bar a gratuitous raunchy sex scene with characters whose connection to the story are unclear—is quite close.

Not only did the book follow a locally-financed movie, but it is published by an international firm. Also, the book retains the earthiness of the film, with English translated from *tsotsitaal*, or gangster language, specifically that Cape Flats Afrikaans dialect that is found only in

the lawless and violence-ridden coloured townships on the Cape Peninsula. One can almost hear the very distinctive Western Cape accent via the idiosyncratic spelling of the phrasing and the Afrikaans words in the written version. The Afrikaans is recurrently inserted in italics after specific English sentences. The result is an italicized almost visual rhythmography augmenting the English-language narrative. After a while, for readers who want to skip the dialect Afrikaans, their eye will jump over the text connecting the English though doing this for the entire text can be quite taxing.

Skollie means miscreant or gangster, although translated in the movie subtitle as “thief”, who is both the differently named character in the film and the autobiographical writer of the book. It's an unusual biography as it is written as a stream of consciousness, lacking the normal signposted specifics of autobiographies. Speaking colourful language, slang and profanity Skollie takes us from his childhood into his adulthood by writing about very specific incidents and events relating to him and his friends, and how he came to become a gangster. And, the experience, is not pretty, easy on the mind, or reassuring.

The sense of “being there” is very powerful, sometimes overwhelming, and always is laced with anticipation. How does a barely educated gangster actually remember, compose and then write such a story? We learn a lot about the character, his circumstances, his family, his friends and his very violent enemies. The last few chapters deal with the screenwriting and production processes. This is where we read about Fredericks’ encounter with film and TV, who helped him enter the industry, who open doors for him, where and how he learned the craft of script-writing, and the trials and tribulations of getting films made. A moment of poignant resonance for both of us was that one of his early supporters from within the industry, Johan Blignaut, had sent each of us separate personalised notes on his tragic suicide, something of which I was unaware until I read the book. We are all bound together by various networks and layers of meaning. Johan was looking after his friends and associates even in his most dire moment of anguish. This almost throwaway line is what characterises the book as a whole. Behind the violence is a latent empathy, a story of a new beginning, of recognizing the opportunities and then leveraging them.

The final chapters are actually the most interesting, as John navigates his way through script training courses, working on film sets, writing and promoting projects, negotiating with clueless directors, and in overcoming disappointment. He used gangsters to protect film crews in dodgy areas even as he was educating youngsters out of violent

drug-addicted life and conditions. He presents himself as a role model for the future, taking responsibility for himself and his past behaviour. These included coping with punishment for actions of which he was innocent but of which he was accused. In the process Skollie/Fredericks develops something of an implicit autoethnography and blueprint for others caught up in gangster-ridden areas to not only escape that life but to turn it into content that can be produced, marketed and be educational and therapeutic. While his identities are multiple, his temper is barely controllable, his desire to kill those who cross him ever-present, but his fixation on a broader objective is what always saves him.

The seamless narrative of the character of Skollie is offered as a continuous unfolding of events from young boy, raped by someone he knows, to successful writer; there are no periodisations other than as a child, a skollie, a jailbird and after release (which includes his work in film, TV and writing). The typewriter—the means to representation—is in the foreground, while apartheid—the prime cause of the social conditions—is in the background. The 1976 uprising presented Fredericks job opportunities to legally leverage his and deploy his gangster skills as a security guard. Life is immediate, conditions are experienced within a small township radius, and of course, prison, where Skollie evades being raped because he is able to tell spell-binding stories to the inmates, stories that remind them of their own everyday lives and the consequences of their ill-advised

behaviors. All events, vignettes, incidents simply meld into each other, as the stories about Skollie's story unfolds. The strategies developed to deal with prison, soft and hard labour, cruel warders and dragging time, are fed through the stories told by Fredericks. This film is very hard to watch but its mise-en-scène and frame lighting draw one in, hypnotically so. This is a South Africa we all hear about but rarely experience, let alone "see" (as in the film) or imagine as in the book. The constantly moving camera positions viewers as observers looking through a window into a segment of real life where everything is contested, expectant however that Skollie's better judgement will prevail in the end. And it does.

Keyan G. Tomaselli
tomasell@ukzn.ac.za
University of Johannesburg
Johannesburg

the constitution of selfhood and the production of memory. The narrator finds himself in a small mining town, unaware of his whereabouts, his history and his identity. He has rented a neglected house some distance from the town, and a large overgrown hedge separates his house from an identical one next door.

Characterisation in the novel is fractured and opaque, and the narration shifts between describing the protagonist in the singular, referring to him elsewhere as "Karl" (and "the Karl creature"), and even describing the protagonist and Karl as two distinct characters who are present simultaneously. As the novel progresses, readers realise that the protagonist has experienced several traumas that gradually come into view. Conventional characterisation is further questioned through the protagonist's sustained personification of the house (referred to as a "harlot") who functions repeatedly as a female interlocutor for his thoughts.

The novel is structured into three parts, titled "Karl", "Henri", and "Elgar", and focalisation shifts seamlessly between these characters and others. Whereas the first part of the novel introduces readers to Karl and the protagonist, the second part introduces us to Henri, a young boy who moves into the neighbouring house with his abusive, drug-dealing father and his abused, ineffectual mother. When Henri's father urgently needs money, he instructs his wife to prepare the outside room for their son (with a new bed and linen that should emphasise his youthfulness). It becomes clear not only that the father intends to charge people to have

A Gap in the Hedge.

Johan Vlok Louw. Cape Town: Umuzi, 2017. 233 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4152-08915.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4284](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4284)

A Gap in the Hedge begins with a somewhat obscure declaration from the narrator: "I reckon it's very mean to cut a man out of the world and leave only his shadow. What if it gets lonely, misses itself? Because it does, you know?" (7). Johan Vlok Louw's third novel is a curiously sparse and compelling text that interrogates our understanding of narrative perspective and characterisation, and explores the impact of trauma on

sex with his young son, but that this has happened previously.

The title of the third part of the novel, "Elgar", refers to the police officer who investigates the later murder of Henri's mother by his father and who discovers Henri walking in the rain after Henri has presumably shot and killed his father.

Throughout the novel, however, the protagonist's and Henri's narratives overlap in several ways. Before Henri and his parents move in, the protagonist discovers children's toys in an outside room: "He bends down. A dusty old Tonka Toy lorry still in good condition. He knows of it, and of a boy of about nine, ten" (41). However, Henri's parents only take occupation of the neighbouring house after this discovery and only then does Henri move his new toy cars into the room. Similarly, whereas at one point the protagonist looks out and somewhat incoherently drops the phrase "an old, purple Citroen" (52) into his narration, Henri later tells the police that his father's killers drove a round purple car. The protagonist's feeling that an old lady in the town might be his mother is strikingly resonant with Henri's later concern for his then missing mother. Both the protagonist and Henri seem to have a habit of slowly saying certain words, spelling them out and savouring their sounds. When the novel recounts the protagonist's late-night description of the inner-workings of the neighbouring house, the protagonist observes that it is easy to avoid making a noise when "one must simply be lighter than air" (76), and readers are left uncertain about his

intimate knowledge of their home.

It is only at the end of the novel that the truth is revealed: Henri is not the neighbour's boy in the present, but rather the protagonist's memory of his childhood in the past. In the final chapter, the use of the pronoun "I" comes to mark out both the protagonist and Henri (and the Karl persona seems entirely absent). As he is about to burn down the site of his traumatic childhood, he observes: "In Dad's room, I see that someone has filled up the bullet hole. It's been painted over but you can make it out easily, if you know where to look" (233). The temporal juxtaposition has given way, and now the adult protagonist can make sense of the bullet hole from many years beforehand. The integration of both narrative time and characterisation is most clear when he concludes that after killing his father, "Henri comes out onto the driveway, and we walk towards ourselves" (233). The ontological tension between these two characters depends on subtle suggestion and carefully discarded fragments of memory. The astutely crafted narrative gives clues about the complex psychological interplay but does not undermine the reader's surprise at the final revelation. It is highly unfortunate, however, that the blurb on the back cover of the book, as well as the publisher's press release, anticipate this revelation about the characters when they state that "the real connection between Henri and Karl is revealed". This paratextual forewarning unnecessarily primes the reader for the conclusion and undoes much of the power of Louw's extraordinarily subtle and disciplined storytelling.

While both Jennifer de Klerk's (2017) and Brian Joss's (2017) reviews of the novel use the metaphor of the missing puzzle piece to think about the explanatory information provided in the final chapter, this overstates the overall coherence of the text. Things do not necessarily "fit" as easily as their metaphor suggests. Narrative time, the malleability of memory and the reconstitution of selfhood are not completely resolved in the novel: there are expressions, descriptions and moments that are not assimilable into linear notions of time or conventional understandings of character development. These do not appear to be signs of authorial carelessness but rather they work to produce a narrative jaggedness that resists any easy sense of closure.

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Andy Carolin
carolas@unisa.ac.za
University of South Africa
Pretoria

Iziganeko zesizwe: Occasional Poems (1900–1943).

S. E. K. Mqhayi. Eds. and trans. Jeff Opland and Peter T. Mtuze. Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2017. 469 pp. ISBN: 9781869143343; e-ISBN: 9781869143350.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4273](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4273)

Iziganeko zesiswe: Occasional Poems is a chronological collection of S. E. K. Mqhayi's occasional poems documenting significant events of local and international importance from 1900 to 1943. Included in this collection are Mqhayi's poems on Easter, Christmas and reflections on the past and coming year spanning four decades. Although Mqhayi is a well-known and celebrated Xhosa writer, poet, biographer and historian, this volume brings to the fore Mqhayi's poems in newspapers which would have largely been lost to the public arena and academia if it were not for this collection.

Furthermore, Jeff Opland and Peter Mtuze took on the mammoth task of translating each poem into English. Now, Mqhayi's work can be read by non-Xhosa speakers who can also engage with his views and do comparative work with other authors writing in the same period as Mqhayi. In the introduction Opland admits that there were challenges in the translation process and that they took a democratic approach to translation. My only criticism of the book is the inconsistencies in the translation of some words and phrases. In the poem "Ikresimesi ka 1906" ("Christmas 1906"), the Xhosa phrase "*Nik' abafaz' ukubinq' omfutsha-*

nana” is translated as “give women various tasks” whereas in the poem “Ukufa ko 1906 nokungena ko 1907” (“The end of 1906 and the start of 1907”), the same phrase is translated as “give women a state of readiness”. A similar phrase appears in the poem “U1908 no1909” (“1908 and 1909”) “*Nabhinqa emifutshanana*” which is translated as “You girded yourselves here and then”.

This inconsistency is quite disturbing with the translation in the last instance being literal whereas in the first two instances the translation was the inferred meaning of the phrase, even though the same phrase is rendered with two different meanings in English. There is no footnote to explain this. The collection can be used as a great object of examination in translation studies by looking at the challenges in translating works of literature, especially poetry. Despite these instances, I believe the overall translation of the work into English is commendable and renders most poems beautifully and poetically and comes very close to doing justice to Mqhayi’s poetic prowess.

The strength of this volume is that it exposes the reader to Mqhayi’s ideas and views on socio-political events ranging from the Frontier Wars, the sinking of the Mendi, the visit of the Prince of Wales to South Africa, the First and Second World War to the concept of time through the eyes of a Xhosa poet. His poems also provide an alternative if not counter account of how some black South Africans who embraced Christianity perceived it in relation to colonial domination yet found ways to sift Christianity from European

culture which was positioned to replace Xhosa culture. This Mqhayi did with such ease from a young age when his teachers refused him leave to go through the Xhosa rite of passage into manhood, *ulwaluko*, because they saw the practice as barbaric and ungodly. Mqhayi defied his teachers and went through this process and returned to school to receive a stern warning; but as Opland explains in the introduction, Mqhayi could not conceive of becoming a servant to his people and nation and to the gospel without first becoming a man in the fashion of his culture.

In a number of poems in this volume Mqhayi tackles the issue of presenting European culture as Christian and Xhosa culture as barbaric; he goes to the extent of saying that Xhosa people are yet to receive teachings about Christ alone without European culture embedded in the gospel and imposed on them. In this regard, he cites the great Xhosa prophet Ntsikana’s sayings and hymns which point to the need for Africans to seek out God for themselves instead of relying on European missionaries.

The end of year and beginning of the New Year poems are the gems in this collection. After several of these poems Mqhayi begins to question the concept of a year and time from a Xhosa perspective. He becomes self-reflexive about his own easy adoption of the European concept of a year. In the last poem he writes about the end of the year and the coming of the New Year where he reiterates what many rural Xhosa people often asked when Xhosa people who had been through formal education became excited about the end

of the year or celebrated the New Year. The rural people ask Mqhayi where the old year is going. What is it going to do there? Where does the New Year come from and what has it come to do? In order to make this concept relatable to rural Xhosa people at the time he begins by personifying the outgoing year to an old man dying who summons his son, the New Year, to give him advice on the role he is about to take on. The outgoing year summons his son, the New Year, and gives him advice on what makes a good year, what humans expect from a year and how he can never fully please them even though he might give them rain and bountiful harvest. The outgoing year concludes that humans always blame the year rather than their own actions and those of their fellow humans in how they treat each other and steward the earth and that although his son, the New Year, can do all he advises him to, humans are complex beings who can never be satisfied.

Although Mqhayi wrote to newspapers under the pseudonym *Imbongi yakwaGompo* (The East London poet), he was given another pseudonym by the editor of the newspaper *Abanto-Batho*, Cleopas Kunene. Mr Kunene began publishing Mqhayi's work under the pseudonym *Imbongi yakwaGompo neyēsizwe jikelele* (The poet of East London and the whole nation); his reason for giving Mqhayi this new title is that Mqhayi's work transcends local concerns, he wrote about issues of national significance, a title which Mqhayi graciously accepted. This collection is another example why Mqhayi should not only be celebrated

as a great Xhosa writer but as one of the greatest South African writers.

Thulani Mkhize
t.mkhize@ru.ac.za
Rhodes University
Grahamstown

Oorlog en terpentyn.

Stefan Hertmans. Vertaal deur Daniel Hugo. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2016. 335 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4853-0610-8; e-Boek: 978-1-4853-0722-8; Epub: 978-1-4853-0723-5.

DOI: dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4282

Oorlog en terpentijn (2013) van de Vlaamse schrijver Stefan Hertmans (1951) verscheen net voordat het 100 jaar geleden was dat de Grote Oorlog uitbrak. Het werd in België bekroond met de Vlaamse Cultuurprijs voor de Letteren (2012–13) en in Nederland met de AKO Literatuurprijs (2014). De *New York Times* roemde de Engelse vertaling *War and Turpentine* als een van de beste tien boeken van 2016. De verwachtingen over Hugo's Afrikaanse vertaling waren hooggespannen.

In het boek vertelt Hertmans het verhaal van zijn grootvader, Eerste Wereldoorlog-veteraan Urbain Martien. De gewezen oorlogsheld besloot op zijn oude dag ervaringen van de oorlog op papier te zetten. In twee cahiers vormde zich een 600 bladzijden tellend manuscript dat hij vlak voor zijn dood aan zijn kleinzoon gaf. Die liet het 30 jaar achterin zijn bureaulade liggen, niet wetend wat ermee te doen. Martien werd geboren in 1891 en stierf in 1981: "Dit lyk of sy lewe

niks anders was as die oormekaarspring van twee syfers in 'n jaartal nie", skryf Hertmans. (15) Hij schreef er uiteindelijk een roman over, hoewel die noemer maar zeer ten dele de lading dekt. Het boek is een indringende reconstructie van een verloren tijdgewricht.

De roman is verdeeld in drie delen. Het middelste deel ("1914-1918") bestaat volledig uit dagboekfragmenten van Martien (hoewel sterk geredigeerd door Hertmans), en in de omringende delen vertelt Hertmans over de effecten van de oorlog en zijn grootvader. "Deur die helse gate wat die oorlog in die humanisme geskiet het, het die hitte van 'n morele leegte ingewaai gekom", skryf Hertmans. (268) Sergeant-majoor Martien had geleerd te vechten met een degen, en uit eergevoel en zelfrespect te salueren voor de vijand. Maar Duitse machinegeweren verscheuren deze deugden met de rest van de "negentiende-eeuse moraal" tot "naïewe opvattinge". **Zelftucht en vroomheid** martelen Martien als hij 's nachts in de loopgraven zijn makkers – al maanden zonder vrouw en mentaal gebroken door alle terreur en ellende – de hand aan zichzelf hoort slaan voor een moment afleiding.

De urgentie van de dagboekfragmenten maken het middelste deel bijzonder aangrijpend. Tegelijkertijd is de combinatie van het drieluik zoveel meer. Behalve een boek over een oorlog is het ook een familiegeschiedenis. Martien groeide op in een arm, gelovig arbeidersmilieu. Hij ontsnapt aan het werk in de gelatine-fabrieken, maar is als leerling-schilder langdurig van huis om kerkschilderingen

in binnen- en buitenland te restaureren. Beetjes geld stuurt hij op. Zijn moeder sterft jong. Zoals zovelen van zijn generatie verliest Martien zijn jeugd en toekomst aan de oorlog. Het oxymoron oorlog en terpentijn is "die konstante gegewe van sy lewe: Om heen en weer geslinger te word tussen die soldaat wat hy noodgedwone was en die kunstenaar wat hy wou wees". (334) Het derde deel van de roman opent met een motto van de Duitse schryver W.G. Sebald: "Nooit, so het hy gesê, het hy geglo hoe lank die dae, die tyd en die lewe kan duur vir iemand wat op 'n sypoor gerangeer is nie". Martiens verhaal is de tragedie van alle veteranen, toen en nu.

Opmerkenswaardig zijn verder de vele illustraties in het boek. Schilderijen, zelfportretten en foto's construeren Hertmans' zoektocht naar de wereld van zijn grootvader visueel. Daarbij is het boek in hoge mate en expliciet poëticaal. Zoals de minister van cultuur bij de Vlaamse Cultuurprijs voor de Letteren toelichtte: "[*Oorlog en terpentijn* is ook een boek] over de manieren waarop een kunstenaar in goedgekozen lijnen en kleuren of dwingende metaforen iets van de hel en de hemel van het leven kan oproepen. De eigenlijke oorlogservaring benadert Stefan Hertmans omzichtig, via uiteenlopende vormen en stijlen, steeds in het besef dat de realiteit van het vervlogen leven onbereikbaar blijft". Dit **subtiele ontdekken** in vorm en inhoud van de complexe verwevenheid van heden en verleden doet denken aan *Kapellekensbaan* (1953) van de grote Vlaamse romancier Louis Paul Boon, hoewel dat nadrukkelijk experimenteler is.

Oorlog en terpentijn is boven alles een

Belgisch boek, ingebed in een stevige couleur locale. De bladzijden zijn doorsprekt met Vlaamse geschiedenis, Gents dialect en Franssprekende officieren. Tijdens het Woordfees in Stellenbosch omschreef Hertmans zichzelf in 2017 als “meertalig in mijn eigen taal”. Hugo heeft dat in zijn sprankelende Afrikaanse vertaling prachtig weten te behouden én toegankelijk gemaakt. Het Frans heeft hij voorzien van een Afrikaanse vertaling (tussen haakjes), en dialect staat tussen dubbele aanhalingstekens. Slechts enkele geschiedenisfeitjes zullen vraagtekens oproepen: weinig niet-Belgen zullen weten dat “die triomfantelijke intog van koning Albert en die weermag te Brussel” (268) op 22 november 1918 formeel het einde van de oorlog in België markeerde. Maar dat staat los van Hugo’s vertaling.

De Eerste Wereldoorlog echoot veel nadrukkelijker in de Belgische dan in de Nederlandse letterkunde, zoals onder meer Edwin Mortiers *Godenslaap* en Kris Van Steenberges *Woesten* laten zien. *Oorlog en terpentijn* is een belangrijke, internationaal gezagwekkende toevoeging aan het genre, en veel meer dan een roman.

Geraadpleegde bronnen

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Schrijversonderhoud met Stefan Hertmans.

(Woordfees-vertaalworkshop onder leiding van Daniel Hugo, Stellenbosch, 4 maart 2017).

“Stefan Hertmans wint Vlaamse Cultuurprijs voor de letteren.” *De Standaard* Cultuur en media. 21 feb. 2014. www.standaard.be.

Tycho Maas

t.a.j.maas@uva.nl

Universiteit van Amsterdam / Universiteit

Stellenbosch

Amsterdam / Stellenbosch

Groen soos die hemel daarbo.

Eben Venter. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 212 pp. ISBN: 978-0-624-08261-3.

DOI: dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4374

Soos ná goeie seks laat *Groen soos die hemel daarbo*, Eben Venter se agste roman, die leser enersyds vervuld en andersyds effens uitgeput. Hierdie ambivalensie loop regdeur die roman wanneer Simon Avend se (veelvuldige) intense sekservarings in verskillende wêreldstede afgewissel word met gedetailleerde disseksies van sy psige tydens besoeke aan die (ietwat onkonvensionele) psigoterapeut, dr. Jo Spiteri.

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Die roman bevat **ál die elemente kenmerkend** van sy oeuve, insluitend die

unieke hantering van die hoofkarakter se bewussynstroom, die uitbeelding van alternatiewe manlikheidsbeelde, die ouer/seunverhouding, transnasionisme, die plaas en stad as ruimtes, seksualiteit en identiteit. Soos in *Ek stamel ek sterwe* (1996), *Begeerte* (2004), *Santa Gamka* (2009) en *Wolf, wolf* (2013) toon Venter 'n bewustheid van die breë menslike ervaring en toestand, maar in *Groen soos die hemel daarbo* word veral die ervaring van 'n gay man in 'n toenemend snelbewegende wêreld ondersoek. Simon beklemtoon hierdie bewustheid (en sentrale tema van die roman) wanneer hy met dr. Spiteri praat oor "die kans om [...] meester van jou eie bemeestering te word, om 'n afgewerkte mens te wees" (209).

Die skynbaar teenstrydige titel is afkomstig van die Xhosa-frase *luhlaza okwesibhakabhaka* wat "blou" of letterlik *groen soos die hemel daarbo* beteken en soos volg in die roman verduidelik word: "Dis iets wat jy nie kan sê hoe dit is. Miskien dink jy jy kan daaraan vat, maar jy kan nie." (208). Hierdie frase is ook die metafoer van Simon se soeke regdeur die roman om die ontasbare tasbaar te probeer maak.

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Venter-aanhangers sal byna onvermydelik outobiografiese elemente in die teks identifiseer, maar Venter laat dit aan die leser oor om te besluit wat hulle van sodanige elemente wil maak. Die foto van homself op die voorblad kan die leser van meet af aan kodeer om die roman te benader in terme van biografiese gegewens oor Venter se lewe, maar dit was volgens hom nie die bedoeling nie.

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Aan die einde van die roman lees Simon vir 'n vriend voor uit sy *cruising-*

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Eben Venter prikkel met *Groen soos die hemel daarbo* veel meer as net die fisieke—die roman is ‘n ongebreidelde verkenning van menslikheid.

Stefan van Zyl
stefanvanzyl@hotmail.com
Noordwes-Universiteit
Potchefstroom

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Stefan van Zyl
stefanvanzyl@hotmail.com
Noordwes-Universiteit
Potchefstroom

Die wêreld van Charlie Oeng.

Etienne van Heerden. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2017. 559 pp. ISBN 978-0-624-08052-7.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4322](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4322)

Aan die einde van die Nederlandse skrywer Harry Mulisch se roman *De aanslag* (vertaal as *Die aanslag*) word die vraag gestel: “Is almal skuldig en onskuldig? Is die skuld onskuldig en die onskuld skuldig?” Die verteller aan die woord verwys na Anton Steenwijk se insig dertig jaar ná die aanslag gedurende die Tweede Wêreldoorlog waartydens hy as jong kind sy gesin op gewelddadige wyse aan die dood moes afstaan. Hierdie woorde kan ook pasklaar op Etienne van Heerden se nuwe roman van toepassing gemaak word, want skuld en die

rol van die verlede is sentrale temas in *Die wêreld van Charlie Oeng*. Die roman vertel die lewensverhaal van Tian Kilian en die verskriklike aand toe sy ouers in 1964 voor sy oë vermoor is. As die leser die boek oopmaak, is daar enkele aantekeninge—wat gewoonlik op die flapteks aangebied word—wat eksplisiet na die moord verwys. Die skuldproblematiek word ook onomwonde gestel: “Hoe harder Tian probeer om die pyn wat hom sedert sy jeug vergesel te verstaan, hoe tergender word die vraag: Waar eindig Charlie Oeng se skuld en waar begin sy eie aanspreeklikheid?”

Die roman word aangebied asof dit deur Tian geskryf is. In ‘n “nota” voor die eerste hoofstuk verduidelik die skrywer dat die 36 hoofstukke gegrond is op oud-Chinese opgetekende krygstaktye. Dit is egter nie etiese, dapper slagveldmaneuvers nie, maar “taktieke van misleiding”; van “vals beskuldiging en dwaalspore”. Hierdie erkenning is dan ook ‘n sleutel vir die leser by die lees van die roman, want dit dien as ‘n metafoor van die selfbewuste skrywer se strategieë in die omgang met die skryfproses en sy leser.

Die intrige draai om die gegewens van die noodlottige Guy Fawkes-nag en die koelbloedige moord op Tian se ouers tydens ‘n vuurwerkvertoning deur die Kantonees Charlie Oeng op die familieplaas. Die verhaal stel uiteindelik die raaisel van die aard en motivering van die moord, sowel as die identiteit van die moordenaar(s) met omweë en dwaalweë, en deur die strukturering van verskillende verhaallyne aan bod.

Daar is 'n heen-en-weer beweging in tyd en ruimte soos wat die verskillende verhaallyne telkens opgeneem en weer opsy gelaat word.

Die verlede word die dwingendste gegee in die verhaal. In die verlede lê die fataliteit van die gebeure opgesluit en Tian word gedwing om die noodlottige nag (en die faktore wat aanleiding daartoe gegee het) te ondersoek deur dit te rekonstrueer en te vertel—dit is dus 'n essensieel sinsoekende en singewende aktiwiteit. Die sentrale vraag in die roman is uiteindelik voor wie se deur die skuld van die gebeure gelê moet word. Hiermee saam gaan die tema van die noodsaak om die eie geskiedenis te ken ten einde sin te maak van die ontsettende gebeure. Tian sien homself as medepligtige en worstel met sy eie skuldproblematiek. Hy erken dan ook dat dit een van die redes is waarom hy Charlie Oeng se verhaal skrywe (496). Deur hom dieper en dieper in Charlie Oeng se gemoed te begeef in 'n poging om hom te verstaan, soek Tian ook 'n roete na homself, 'n roete na begrip ten einde homself te bevry. Hy rekonstrueer sy eie lewensverhaal, maar veral ook die van Oeng op grond van dit wat hy opgelees het, sowel as besoeke aan die plekke waar Oeng hom in die loop van sy veelbewoë lewe bevind het. Oeng is in Amsterdam gebore en het daar grootgeword. As gevolg van 'n ongelukkige sameloop van omstandighede (wat moord insluit) beland hy in Hongkong. Hy word egter ingehaal deur die ondergrondse beweging met wie hy bande gehad het in Amsterdam, en ná nog 'n gedwonge moord vlug hy vroeg in die

1960's na Suid-Afrika. Tydens sy reis raak hy verlief op 'n geheimsinnige skoonheid (slegs bekend as Sy), verloor sy geliefde en beland uiteindelik op 'n Karoodorpie. Hier kruis sy pad met Tian Kilian se ouers en uiteindelik lei die interaksie met die plaaslike bevolking daartoe dat hy as uitgewekene wraak beplan.

Die uiteenlopende ruimtes en kulture van Amsterdam (Europa) en Hongkong (China) word aangevul met die lokale ruimte en problematiek op eie bodem: onder andere rasse-onderdrukking, die swart mense se lyding en die verstikkende apartheid van die sestigerjare. Etienne van Heerden het reeds herhaaldelik bewys dat hy knellende aktualiteite van die dag naatloos verweef met die fiksionele romangeewe. In *Die wêreld van Charlie Oeng* is dit dan ook die geval, want die plaasmoord van die sestigerjare is (ten spyte van verskille) is ook reeds 'n ironiese vooruitwysing na die plaasaanvalle in Suid-Afrika wat tans 'n dwingende nuusgeewe is. Hierby kan ook gevoeg word die sogenaamde nuwe mobiliteitsparadigma in die sosiale wetenskappe wat rekenskap gee van die beweging van mense, idees, konsepte, inligting en goedere, en die sosiale implikasies daarvan. Hierby sluit aan die problematiek van die leefwyse van verskillende kulture in dieselfde ruimtelike opset.

Die vervlegting van ruimtes beklemtoon (soos in *30 Nagte in Amsterdam*) die tuiste of ontuiste van die mens as gevolg van die gebondenheid aan 'n vaderland, of as gevolg van die ervarings van die uitgewekene in 'n geboorteland, maar ook van die vlugteling in 'n vreemde land.

In die leefwêreld van Charlie Oeng is hy aanvanklik verskeurd tussen sy Kantoneese/Sjinese en Nederlandse identiteit. Tydens sy verblyf in Suid-Afrika ervaar hy identiteitloosheid, vernedering en spot as hy benoem word met allerlei vervormde of neerhalende byname soos Chinaman, Koekepan, Konfoes, Chopsticks, Bootchinesees of Soutchinesees. Van Heerden slaag uiteindelik daarin om die onbegrip en gebrek aan medemenslikheid in 'n globaliseerde samelewing op genuanseerde wyse aan die leser te stel. Hiermee saam gaan ook die problematiek van stereotipering en die uitdaging om mense se identiteit op onbevooroordeelde wyse te erken.

Die wêreld van die roman word bevolk met uiteenlopende en enigmatiese karakters wat deurentyd boei. Soos die eksentrieke tantes van *Kikoejoe* en *30 Nagte in Amsterdam*, is dit ouma Voetjies ('n selfbewuste Chinese skoonheid met opgebinde voete) en ouma Ogies (die blinde siener wat "die agterna vooraf kan sien") wat die leser se verbeelding aangryp. Die onwaarskynlike drieluik, Charlie Oeng, Cor van Gogh en Witkant die albino, verteenwoordig as uitgewekenes ook drie kontinente (China, Europa en Afrika) en is grootliks verantwoordelik vir die uitspeel van broeiende kragte in die skynbaar rustige Karoo-ruimte. Tian, die (skynbare) ek-verteller, kom dan ook reeds vroeg in die roman tot die insig: "Niks is soos dit met die eerste oogopslag lyk nie. Dis asof ek 'n rat voor die oë gedraai word. Als speel met my parte." (66) Uiteindelik handel die roman ook oor die selfbewuste handeling van skryf: om die

verlede op te skryf; op te droom. In aansluiting by die kreatiewe handeling van skryf, speel kuns en kunstenaars 'n rol in die verhaal en word daar selfs bepaalde sieninge oor die rol van kuns gegee (400).

Tipies van Van Heerden se oeuvre is ook die vermenging van die realistiese en die magiese, die oorskryding van die grens tussen die siende en die onsiende (508). In die wêreld van Charlie Oeng word daar met swaelspuwende drakies in die Karoo geboer, en is daar 'n uitruil van "Karoooor" en "Chinese oor" (295). Daar is ook pogings om die angswekkende Skreeu wat in die spoelste op Sloopplaas klink in 'n bottel te vang. Hierdie Skreeu sou egter uiteindelik ook gelees kan word as 'n aanklag teen die kollektiewe skuld of allesomvattende skuld van die mens.

Die wêreld van Charlie Oeng is 'n voortrefflike roman wat buiten die intrige ook boei met interessante karakters en insiggewende perspektiewe op die kulturele ander, sowel as (steeds) knellende vraagstukke uit die verlede.

Adèle Nel

Adele.Nel@nwu.ac.za
Noordwes-Universiteit
Vanderbijlpark

Die diepblou see.

François Loots. Kaapstad: Umuzi, 2017. 239 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4152-0953-0.

DOI: dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4285

Een van die gevolge van Suid-Afrika se ingewikkelde geskiedenis—en ons omgang met daardie geskiedenis—is dat eertydse belangrike persone vandag bloot as randfigure onthou word. Dit is steeds die geval met politici en intellektuele soos byvoorbeeld die SAKP se Bram Fischer en die ANC se Bethuel Setai. Maar waar die historiografie en populêre geskiedenis-diskoerse stil raak, of selfs opsetlik swyg, tree die literatuur in.

Met *Rooi Jan Alleman*, François Loots se 2013-roman, pak die outeur 'n herwaardering van Bram Fischer aan. Dié roman is vir die UJ-prys vir skeppende skryfwerk benoem. Hierop volg in 2017 *Die diepblou see*, waarin die kort lewe en loopbaan van Jan Hofmeyr, 'n ander meestal afgeskepte figuur, onder die loep geneem word.

Net kortliks oor Jan Hofmeyr: Op die ouderdom van 17 het hy reeds 'n MA in Klassieke Tale aan die Universiteit van Oxford verwerf. Op 22 word hy die prinsipaal van die instansie wat onder sy bestuur die Universiteit van die Witwatersrand sou word, en in 1924 word hy deur Jan Smuts aangestel as Administrateur van Transvaal. Hierop volg 'n politieke loopbaan waartydens hy as liberaalgesinde in verskeie regerings diverse portefeuljes in die kabinet bestuur het, en uiteindelik alom beskou is as opvolger van Smuts. Hofmeyr sterf egter skielik in 1948, kort ná die Nasionale

Party se veelbesproke oorwinning. Sy rol as leier in die progressiewe Afrikanerpolitiek kon jammer genoeg nooit tot volvoering kom nie. In *Die diepblou see* word daar gepoog om weer te besin oor Hofmeyr se moontlik durende invloed op ons politieke landskap.

Die gebeure in *Die diepblou see* begin in 1897, oënskynlik die jaar waarin Jannie as kleuter baie siek was. Die magiese toon van die roman word reeds in die eerste hoofstuk gevestig, met die narratiewe fokus op die figuur van God wat moet besluit of hy die gebede van jong Jannie se ma Deborah gaan aanhoor en haar siek seun se lewe gaan spaar. Hierna spring die verhaal vooruit na rondom die middel 1920's, terwyl Hofmeyr gedien het as administrateur, en saam met sy moeder besoek aflê by familie op 'n klein dorp in die Bo-Karoo.

Eerder as om in groot detail die hoofkarakter aan die lesers bekend te stel, verweef die outeur die merkwaardige Hofmeyr in die kleindorpse Karoolandskap. Dié indrukwekkende man word nie ensiklopedies bekendgestel nie; die leser leer hom ken deur 'n gesprek tussen twee plaaslike vroue by die algemene handelaar op die dorp (37):

“Jannie Smuts het hom die werk gegee.”

“Hulle sê hy het op veertien al skool klaargemaak.”

“Ek het gehoor op elf.”

“Dit is so. Op veertien het hy al graad gekry.”

“Ek kan my sulke mense nie indink nie.”

“Hulle sê hy onthou alles.”

“Hy kyk net so na ‘n boek.”
“En dan onthou hy regtig alles?”
“Dit is so.”

Die roman gaan in op Hofmeyr se kort tydjie waar hy wegbreek van sy verpligtinge as administrateur, en gee daardeur ook vir die leser ‘n blik op die kompleksiteit van sy werk en hoe hy hom amper sy lewe lank dikwels ooreis het. Wat Loots met geslaagdheid verrig, is dat Hofmeyr ‘n spil word waarom die Karoo se plaas- en dorpsmense se lewens vir die duur van sy besoek blyk te draai, van sy tante Magriet en haar gesin, tot die alleenloperboer Hannes, en die selfstandige skoolonderwyser, Joy. Dit skep by die leser die indruk van die effek wat Hofmeyr dikwels as politikus op andere kon hê deur juis die karakter vanuit die perspektief van ander te benader. Deur die klem te lê op Hofmeyr se afsydigheid word die ontwikkeling van sy politieke denke en ook, meer verrassend, sy seksualiteit, verken.

Die motief van water is een waarna die roman telkens terugkeer. In die gedeeltes wat deur Hofmeyr gefokaliseer word, sien ‘n mens die vryheid en ont-snapping wat hy in swem vind—waar hy probeer helderheid verkry oor die politieke stryd wat woed tussen konser-watisme en liberalisme. Hierdie stryd word veral voorgestel deur die motief van mure, en die simboliese en letterlike skeiding, oftewel apartheid, wat daardeur gevestig kan word. Albei motiewe tree herhaaldelik na vore in Hofmeyr se drome. Hierdie drome bring by die leser tuis hoe verterend Hofmeyr se loopbaan

naderhand geword het, terwyl hy hom deurgaans oor die toekoms van Suid-Afrika besorg het.

Die tweede deel van die roman speel nader aan die 1948-verkiesing af. Die narratief volg steeds vir Hofmeyr, maar ons word ook voorgestel aan Robert, sy sekretaris in die parlement. Robert is ‘n weeskind; die kind van ‘n immigrant wat hom as baba in die sorg van die Katolieke Kerk gelaat het. Die ontwortelde Robert voel ‘n sterk drang na ‘n soort tuiste wat hy nooit as jong seun gehad het nie, maar as gay man voel hy vervreem van sy omgewing. Hy bewonder vir Hofmeyr, maar weens laasgenoemde se afsydigheid dryf Robert al hoe verder van die liberale waardes van Hofmeyr na die meer radikale vryheid wat beloof word deur die sosialisme.

Met die eerste leeslag het ek moeilik bygehou met *Die diepblou see*. Die verbeeldingspronge en magies-realistiese gebeure word uitgebeeld as deel van die verhaalwêreld ten einde blote fantasie te vermy, maar dit geskied juis in so ‘n mate dat die verhaal se vloei ‘n reeks strome word wat almaardeur ineenvloei, en die taalgebruik is soms verwarrend. Nadat ek nog ‘n slag die verhaal deurgedraf het—want die roman is nie besonder lank nie—het ek ietwat meer waardering vir die wyse waarop die bogenoemde motiewe van water en mure ingespan word om die verskillende karakters te kompliseer en af te rond, al stomp die gereelde herhaling van dié beelde hul trefkrag toenemend deur die loop van die roman af. Oplaas bind die verhaal die karakters en gebeure effektief genoeg as geheel saam.

Met tye skiet die roman miskien te ooglopend vooruit om Hofmeyr op 'n podium te plaas as die grondlegger van die (blou) progressiewe politiek in Suid-Afrika. Alle lesers sal nie noodwendig hierdeur gesteur word nie. Loots skets 'n kort en met tye meesleurende beeld van 'n figuur uit ons geskiedenis wat weliswaar weer oorweeg moes word, maar die roman doen nie heeltemal bevredigend aan sy aanvanklike belofte gestand nie.

Reinhardt Fourie

fourir@unisa.ac.za

Universiteit van Suid-Afrika

Pretoria

kuns- en musiekbewegings, aktiviste-groepe, sosiaal uitgeworpenes, ook die voorlopers van wat deesdae as die LGBT-gemeenskap bekend staan.

Ná sy ingenieurstudie in Pretoria ontsnap die protagonist, Etienne Nieuwenhuis, na Londen, ooglopend om diensplig te ontduik, maar in essensie om weg te kom van 'n verdrukkende patriargale bestel waarvan sy politikus-pa die versinnebeelding is. In Londen word Etienne onder meer deur sy libidineuse drifte na die marge van die samelewing getrek; die homoërotiek is die verhaal se vernaamste motoriese krag. 'n Tromstel wat uit Suid-Afrika aangestuurd word, help om hom te vestig in die kring van die alternatiewe musikante van Bonnington Square, 'n buurt wat deur aweregtheid en boheemsheid afgekond word van "Thatcher se laksmanne" en konvensionele moraliteit.

In hierdie permissiewe sfeer is Etienne ooglopend soos 'n vis in water. Daar is geen spoor van 'n Calvinistiese skuldgevoel nie; hy probeer sy Afrikaanse aksent so vinnig moontlik afleer en sy ma se hunkerende briewe wat hom agtervolg, ontketen slegs heel kortstondig 'n warreling in sy gemoed. Daardie "Republiek van Stof" het hy volledig afgesweer, en in sy nuwe tuiste—sy van is nie verniet Nieuwenhuis nie—ontmoet hy sy groot liefde, Axel. Hierdie Duitse verpleërkunstenaar met 'n eikeboom-tatoe op sy rug en 'n heel makabere artistieke visie en dominerende persoonlikheid laat Etienne nie net die uiterstes van erotiese verrukking smaak nie, maar ook feitlik elke denkbare grens van die bewussyn

Die derde spel.

S. J. Naudé. Kaapstad: Umuzi, 2017.
342 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4152-0747-5 (Druk).
ISBN: 978-1-4152-0748-2 (ePub).

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4278](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4278)

Dit is 'n roman oor beswyming, hierdie vervolg deur S. J. Naudé op sy lieflike debuut, die kortverhaalbundel *Alfabet van die voëls* (2011). Dis 'n roman oor die beswyming deur dwelms, deur musiek, deur seks, en opmerklik dan beswymings as bolwerk teen die verlede spesifiek die verlede van twee karakters afkomstig uit van die mees problematiese kulture van die twintigste eeu, naamlik Suid-Afrika en Duitsland. Die roman speel af in die 1980's, die tydperk net voor die val van enersyds die Berlynse muur, andersyds apartheid. Die geestesklimaat is dié van die kontrakultuur, eers in Londen en dan in Berlyn: hippie-kolonies, alternatiewe

toets. En dit is hy wat Etienne, wat in die filmkuns begin studeer het, op die spoor plaas van 'n verlore film uit die era net voor die Nasionaal-Sosialistiese oorname in Duitsland.

Die soektog na die verlore film se drie spoel word Etienne se lewensprojek. Sy soeke lei hom uiteindelik na Berlyn—'n nog verdeelde Berlyn waar die helder rasionaliteit van die Weste sprekend gekontrasteer word met die chaotiese, donker, gevaarlike Ooste. Die parallel van hierdie Oos-Wes-verdeling met die onderskeid in die psigologie tussen die bewuste en die onbewuste is voor die hand liggend, en indien jy beswyming as Freudiaanse verdringing lees dan kom alles wat verdring word inderdaad met weerwraak terug. Die ekstase van musiek en seks—van dwelms—kantel in die tweede deel van die roman oor na iets oneindig weëgs, en per slot van rekening word die raaiselroman al hoe opmerkliker 'n droewe liefdesverhaal. En die liefde, blyk dit ten slotte, was uit die staanspoor 'n masker vir die dood.

Hierdie laaste gevolgtrekking is nie so voor die hand liggend nie, want nie net is die protagonis blind vir sy eie sielkundige dryfvere nie, uiteraard, maar die vertelling se minusieuse beskrywings, die essayagtige uitweidings en uitasem-erotiek maak nie net die romanstruktuur amorf nie, maar dit skep soms die indruk dat die implisiete outeur ook blind was vir die sielkundige onderbou van die intrige. Bydraend tot hierdie indruk is die feit dat die personaal gebonde derdepersoonsverteller heel beperkte toegang tot die protagonis se binnewêreld het.

Onderliggend aan die intrige is die vraag waarom Etienne so vatbaar is vir al Axel se manipulerings. Op 'n ietwat ongeloofwaardige wyse sit Axel nie net vir Etienne op die spoor van die verlore film nie, maar hy maak homself ook die objek van Etienne se soeke. So word Etienne se soektog na Axel eintlik 'n speurtoeg na homself—hy wórd Axel; sy verdrukkende Suid-Afrikaanse kindertyd word verplaas deur Axel se veel erger Duitse verlede. Die ontheemde subjek word in die poststrukturalistiese sin 'n kettingreaksie van verplasinge waarin selfs die dood ten slotte nie 'n absolute einde is nie, maar net nog 'n verplasing. Hierdie losdrywendheid van Etienne het 'n betekenisvolle teëhanger in die lotgevalle van twee vroue in die verhaal, naamlik Etienne se ma en Axel se ouma. Albei verguisdes word aan die einde van hul lewe, wanneer hulle hul sinne verloor het, gekenmerk deur wartaal, taal wat kontak verloor het met die werklikheid—met 'n tuiste—en juis daarom die allure van poëtiese lewenskragtigheid verkry.

Daar is blyke dat bogenoemde talige ontheemding ook op vertelvlak voltrek word, want veral die dialoog word gekenmerk deur 'n teësin in idiomatiese Afrikaans, hoewel die inkonsekwentheid daarvan en ietwat onpresiese taalversorging die vermoede skep dat hierdie kenmerk van die prosa onbedoeld is. Vergelyk byvoorbeeld die Engelse patroon van die volgende reaksie van Etienne: "Kan nie. Ek het klas vanoggend. Hoekom ek dit bywoon, weet God alleen. Daar kom niks van nie," (77) met Etienne se Duitse musiek-kamerade wat eg Afrikaans

vloek: “Donner,” sê Christof, “... kyk al die fokken tamaties” (275). Maar in dieselfde stukkie dialoog word Christof se Duits dan ook met die volgende onidiomatiese Afrikaans weergegee: “Hier is waar ons veronderstel is om môre te speel.” Dit bring die berekendheid van die sigbare taalverbleking in die roman onder verdenking en dit word dan ‘n aspek van Naudé se **prosa wat, soos die te karikatuuragtige** uitbeelding van die protagonis se Afrikaanse gesins- en skoollewe en die hartelose afrekening met die ma, afbreuk doen aan die oortuigingskrag van die roman se groots opgestelde en implikasie-ryke prosesse van afskeid en verlies en die verweefdheid hiervan met nuwe moontlikhede en groei.

Francois Smith
smithfah@ufs.ac.za
Universiteit van die Vrystaat

geheel. Die spreker van Coetzee (90) se gedig "Gaia" kon netsowel die Moeder van Aronofsky se film gewees het:

Nee magtag,
'n ma kan net soveel vat.
Kyk hoe lyk die plek!
'n Varkhok! Dit stink!
Verniel! Ópgemors!
Al wat ek doen is gee!
Al wat julle doen is gryp!
Nóg hê, nóg hê, dis al wat julle ken!
Weet altyd beter!
Helsekinders!

Sit terug!
Maak aan die kant!
Maak skoon! Skrop!
En nog 'n ding, hou op teel!

Moenie dat ek hier opstaan nie.

Nou, hier.

Corné Coetzee. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 2017. 107 pp. ISBN 978-0-7981-7620-0.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4281](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4281)

Verskeie van die temas in Corné Coetzee se debuutdigbundel stem ooreen met dié in Darren Aronofsky se riller *Mother!* (2017). In die film is die verskrikking van 'n huishoudelike aard. Ongenooide gaste maak nie agter hulle skoon nie en hulle interpersoonlike drama veroorsaak dat 'n eers rustige huishouding in chaos ontaard. Die huishouding, en die Moeder wat daarvoor waak, raak metafories vir die wêreld en die menslike bestaan in

Die titel "Gaia" verwys na die Griekse godin wat die verpersoonliking van die aarde is en in die gedig word die frustrasies van die huisvrou, soos in *Mother!*, met vrese rondom ekologiese verwoesting in verband gebring. Die lot van die tuis-teskepper word nie in die bundel verromantiseer nie. Veral die tweede afdeling van die bundel "Die vreemdeling in ons arms" **bevat gedigte wat herinner aan Simone de Beauvoir (449–50)** se argument dat solank wat sy tot die huishoudelike sfeer beperk is, die vrou nie haar omstandighede kan oorstyg nie.

In die eerste afdeling van die bundel, "*Nymphaea gloriosa*", is daar verskeie liefdesgedigte. Die titel van die afdeling is gehaal uit die gedig "Vleiland", waarin die spreker haar verwonder oor hoe

haar geliefde van haar “n geil, geheime vleiland [maak] / vol naaldekokers en paddavisse en skrywertjies / en as jy vanaand weer kom / staan hier môre ‘n plaat *Nymphaea gloriosa*” (12). Teen die einde van die afdeling begin probleme in die verhouding duidelik raak, en in “Hoogsomer” vra die spreker wat hulle sou gemaak het as hulle geweet het, “dat die laaste vy ryp geword het” (14). Weereens word ekologiese verwoesting en alledaagse interpersoonlike verhoudings dus metafories aan mekaar gelykgestel.

In die tweede afdeling is gedigte wat gaan oor verhoudings wat heeltemal versteen het tot tradisionele geslagsrolle. “Huisgod” gaan oor ‘n man (of ten minste sy “Stres”) met sy “ontsagwekkende kantoornure” wat net naweke, soggens en saans in die huis teenwoordig is, maar in dié tye “voetskuifelend en godvresend” (28) deur die res van die gesin behandel word. Langs hierdie gedig word “Kombuis” geplaas, waarin die arbeid van die vroulike ek-spreker beskryf word: “Gretig woel en werk en bak en brou ek, / vee en vlyt ek, goeie, flukse vrou, ek.” (29). Dit sluit aan by “Binne, buite”. In dié gedig word die man se wêreld “buite”, in die publieke sfeer, waar “beleide bewinde / dwingende belange noodsaak” en die vrou se wêreld “binne”, waar brood gebak word (22), in een gedig gekontrasteer. Die aanhalings uit hierdie gedigte gee ‘n indikasie van Coetzee se treffende gebruik van alliterasie – tegelykertyd beheers en skynbaar moeiteloos.

Kommentaar op die man se tradisionele plek in die openbare sfeer en die vrou s’n in die huis, neem ‘n meta-

poëtikale vorm aan in die gedig “septemberoggend”, waarin die spreker sê dat sy die natuurskoon van die titel se septemberoggend in ‘n gedig sal “sit”. Sy is egter te besig met “bredieaandiegangsit / manpaai kindersvoer / lewerkookvir-dieblindeouhond / regmaakvirwerk” (24). Die gedig tree dus in gesprek met vroeër Afrikaanse gedigte waarin die onversoenbaarheid van huiswerk en die skryf van gedigte verken word, soos Elisabeth Eybers se “Digteres as huisvrou” en Antjie Krog se verwysing na daardie gedig in “weereens”.

Nou, hier se “huisvrou-gedigte” (soos Coetzee self daarna verwys in ‘n onderhoud met Ullyatt op *Versindaba*) is dus in hierdie opsig nie vernuwend nie, behalwe dat dit toon dat hierdie vorm van feministiese kritiek steeds relevant is. Wat die gedigte “Die huisvrou verbeel haar wat”, “Oomblik op die trap” en “Kameleon” wel anders maak, is dat die tuisteskepper se monotone bestaan haar afsny van die spirituele vervulling wat sy in die natuur vind. Die spreker van “Kameleon” droom byvoorbeeld daarvoor om “suutjies ná die opwas” uit te sluip “tot waar dit oop veld word” sodat sy “stil op ‘n klip [kan] gaan sit” (27). Waar die spreker se geliefde haar in “Vleiland” juis op ‘n vrugbare manier in verbinding met die res van die werklikheid geplaas het, ontnem hierdie spreker se plek in haar gesin haar daarvan.

Die maniere waarop die alledaagse, immanente verantwoordelikhede die mens kan weerhou van spirituele transendensie word ook verken in ‘n gedigsiklus in die laaste afdeling van die

bundel wat gaan oor die ervarings van die Siddharta Boeddha se familieledede. Die Boeddha laat die materialistiese en sosiale bestaan agter (94-95). Die familieledede bekommer hulle oor sy toestand en veiligheid (97). 'n Tipe sintese van die alledaagse en die transendentale eenwording met die natuur word uitgebeeld in "Voor, ná", waar die bestaan van die hedendaagse Boeddhistiese non Tenzin Palmo beskryf word: "Sy slaap sittend, / somers plant sy rape, / herfs, winter, lente sien sy 'n muur van sneeu. / Sy bid sonder ophou: / mag dit goed gaan met elke wese." (102). Hierdie sintese word in die volgende strofe ook binne die bereik van ander vroue, en veral ook moeders, geplaas: "In die voetheuwels tussen dorp en rivier / loop Tsjijono die skropvrou / kind op die rug, emmer in die hand; / sy bewonder die wolke in die water." Daar word egter weer (soos in die huisvrougedigte) beklemtoon hoe moeilik dit is om hierdie oomblikke van eenwording, "nou, hier" te behou: "Emmer gee mee: g'n water, g'n wolke. / Tsjijono loop kind op die rug, emmer in die hand." (102).

In die afdeling "Hierdie tyd" is gedigte wat nie net gaan oor hoe tuisteskepping die natuur (en spirituele eenwording daarmee) uithou nie, maar ook ander mense. Ook hierdie aspek, die manier waarop die nader beweeg van vreemdelinge ervaar word as 'n inbraak, sluit aan by die temas van Aronofsky se film:

bure

die bure word al hoe meer
kom al hoe nader
raak al hoe luidrugtiger

in al hoe vreemder tale
gedra hul al slegter
gluur al brutaler

na waar ons blaamloos
kristalwynglas in die hand
sit op ons werf

nou hoe't ons dan gedink

Die ironiese beskrywing van die spreker as "blaamloos / kristalwynglas in die hand" (61) illustreer hoe onvolhoubaar die kapitalistiese strewe na 'n luukse vorm van huishoudelikheid is. In "Staan-gemaak", die gedig wat teenoor "bure" geplaas is, word daar ook eksplisiet gesê dat die spreker se gemaklike lewensstyl en huis "staangemaak" is, "op die rûe van die skares ongeteldes, / dié sonder straat of lig of wandeling / of ledige uur." (60).

Nou, hier bevat skynbaar eenvoudige gedigte waarin die alledaagse lewe en huishoudelikheid in verband gebring word met 'n verskeidenheid onderwerpe. Denke soos De Beauvoir se kritiek op die vrou se plek in die huishoudelike en die maniere waarop dit haar beperk en Christine Battersby se besinning oor die probleme wat die vroulike kunstenaar ervaar, tree in gesprek met sosiale kommentaar, 'n Boeddhistiese spiritualiteit en met vrese oor die mens se verwoestende impak op ekologiese sisteme.

Die bundel is besonder goed afgerond vir 'n debuutbundel, met net hier en daar 'n woord of versreël wat oorbodig is. In "My ystervark" is dit byvoorbeeld onnodig dat die ystervark wat "ritsel" wanneer "jy [...] land" aan die spreker se hart

gelykgestel word in die laaste reël (57). Dit was immers reeds die implikasie en dit beperk die metaforiese moontlikhede van die gedig.

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Bibi Burger

bibi.burger@up.ac.za

Universiteit van Pretoria

Pretoria

Radbraak.

Jolyn Phillips. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 2017. 68 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7981-7616-3.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4283](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4283)

Jolyn Phillips debuteer in 2016 met die kortverhaalbundel *Tjieng Tjang Tjerries and other stories*. Hierdie versameling kortverhale word baie positief ontvang. Antjie Krog sê in haar aanbeveling:

An impressive debut that brings across voices never heard before in South African English—not only in rhythm and timbre, but plumbing the unspoken. With such a remarkable ear, Jolyn Phillips is a young writer to watch.

Die lof wat Phillips toeval, is nie net vanweë haar sprankelende styl of humoristiese, lewendige vertelstem nie; sy word ook geprys omdat sy nuwe stories ontgin, of in die woorde van Meg Vandermerwe:

“[T]hese sparkling stories give a voice to a South African community too long ignored by the literary canon.” As ‘n mens kyk na die Afrikaanse letterkunde, is daar steeds opnuut sprake van apokriewe stories wat vertel moet word. Die betreklike onbekendheid met hierdie tipe stories is sowel ‘n politieke, ‘n maatskaplike as ‘n historiese kwessie, en sluit skrywers in van Adam Small tot A. H. M. Scholtz, van Jeanne Goosen tot Ronelda Kamfer.

Phillips teken in *Tjieng Tjang Tjerries and other stories* verhale op uit haar eie omgewing, Gansbaai, waar sy gebore is en waar haar identiteit begin vorm kry. Tans is sy besig met haar doktorsale tesis aan die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland; sy werk deelyds as ‘n dosent en tree ook op as sangeres. Die liriese kwaliteit van Phillips se Afrikaans is opvallend in haar verhale, en ook ‘n belangrike faktor in haar poësiëdebuut *radbraak*, wat in 2017 verskyn. In teenstelling tot die verhale is die gedigte hoofsaaklik in Standaard-afrikaans, maar Kaaps, Engels en Xhosa, en die verbroekeling van tale, spraak en uitdrukkingsvermoë speel eweneens ‘n belangrike rol, soos Phillips saamvat in “part 3” van “tong-trilogie” (39):

die biologie van my woord is ‘n ver-
broekelde fraktuur
hierdie is g’n woordbegrafnis nie
hierdie gedig grawe
my woordeskatkiste op daar waar
hulle spook

Phillips se debuut verskyn in ‘n tyd waarin jong Afrikaanse digters ‘n gebied ontgin wat klem lê op identiteit en outobiografie, gekoppel aan politieke en

maatskaplike ontwikkelinge. Wat beteken dit om Afrikaans en wit te wees in hierdie nuwe eeu? Wat beteken dit om Afrikaans te wees en in Afrikaans te skryf as jy nie 'n wit digter is nie? Wat maak jy met jou woede, jou hartseer, jou vroulikheid of manlikheid, jou persoonlike geskiedenis, met Kaaps, met jou bevoorregting, of juis met jou minder bevoorregte omstandighede of agtergrond?

Die vernuf en die durf om met taal te speel is opvallend, en die eksperimentele inslag noodsaaklik; Phillips maak die worsteling met Afrikaans in al sy fasette tot 'n tema, en die taal is hier grillig en gebreek—soos Phillips stel in “Diglossie” (64):

ek liegbek die hele tyd want ek breek by
die taalwiel die hele tyd sien ek my taal
beenbreuk hoe meer ek in my tong
praat hoe meer word ek onverstaanbaar
'n vraat by 'n bidwiel

Die titel wys die leser op die dringende inhoud van hierdie gedigte: “radbraken” dui in Nederlands op 'n ou vorm van marteling, letterlik die breek van jou bene op 'n rad. Om “geradbraak” te voel is om “uitgeput” te wees, “doodop”. Verbind mens hierdie betekenis met die gedigte, dan tref dit hoe die gedigte stories vertel van emosionele, institusionele, ekonomiese en historiese gebrek. Armoede, verslawing en geweld is temas wat steeds terugkeer.

Tog is die gedigte nie “swaar” nie, wat deels bewerkstellig word deur die uitmuntende taalspel, en deels deur die feit dat daar min eenduidige, anekdotiese en afgeronde “verhaalfigure” gepresenteer

word—ons kry net fragmente. Weliswaar lees ons van 'n ma se probleme om kop bo water te hou en van 'n pa se afwesigheid en sy alkoholisme, maar dit bly liriese gedigte, weliswaar gebroke, maar nogtans sing die digter. Trouens heelwat gedigte sou getoonset kon word, juis deur die sangerige kwaliteit en die herhalings wat soos refreine lees. Voorbeelde hiervan is “skoolstraat” (46), “Bea Benjamin se gebreekte ballade” (40), “snelsêer vir Annetjie se opskop” (61), “jy sê jy soek my” (48), “maai maai skoppelmaai” (58) of 'n gedig soos “geelsanger” (15) met die lieflike refrein: “Boeta sy hou jou vas / sy hou houvirhou jou rou”. Dikwels verwoord die liriese stem 'n ingehoue gevoel van heimwee of wanhoop, soos in “die einde van Dêrra” (17):

die tolskip sink sink sink sink
in jou drink drank dronk gesinkte skoot
die dekman gekman
wat sout word doer in die baai

Die liriese aspek is nie net ornamenteel nie, maar word inhoudelik gemotiveer. Hierdie digter sing, ten spyte van die feit dat die ruimte en die omstandighede waarin baie gedigte afspeel, nie juis idillies is nie. Tog is daar implisiet sprake van 'n sekere trots: op die plek, sy mense, sy taal én sy swaarkry. Die eerste strofe van die openingsgedig “terug van die af naweek” (7) is hiervan 'n sprekende voorbeeld:

ek het eiertand uit Grootkop
se skoot getik-tik-tik
tot ek haarlyn kraak
ek het skip daar aangekom
en nou sit ek vas palmietbossies
aan die rotse van die Baviaan

Dié gedig is simptome vir die h le bundel: Phillips vervleg geskiedenis, geografie, die persoonlike, die talige  n die anekdotiese ineen tot ’n teks wat jy weer en weer kan lees, en selfs m ot lees om heeltemal te deurgrond.

Sensualiteit en erotiek is twee ander aspekte wat *radbraak* voortstu. Die erotiek is nooit vanselfsprekend of soet nie, maar steeds oorrumpelend en terselfdertyd gewelddadig en meerduidig, soos in “tongvis” (8), met re ls soos “jy prooi tussen my bene / jou ou visbene / ek hyg nog met die hoek / in my bek” of “perlemoen” (60) waar die stroper en die perlemoen ’n intieme en geheime verbond aangaan:

hy steek my soen los teen die klip
hy gooi my in sy sak
hy noem my sy miljoen

op die strand ontskulp hy my
hy vat my mantel
hy los my buik

Party gedigte soos “Bokky polony” (34), “die soutkind” (44), “Drietjies en Dawetjies se beter-dae-sous” (45) en “vashou” (52) is meer anekdoties en toeganklik van aard as van die ander gedigte, maar steeds bly die gedigte meesleurend. Die fyn ironie sorg vir ’n ambivalente leeshouding wat jou as leser laat wonder hoekom en waarom jy eintlik lag, soos in “pakkry-storie part i: die ingelse lady” (22), waarin ’n “ingelse lady in ons straat” met die spreker en die ander kinders raas: “you bastard children! / get out you bastards! / when I catch you bastards...”. Die kinders hergebruik di 

rassistiese beledigings op tipiese wyse: lekker gelag en nou you bastard ons alles

“gee die bastard potlood” fluister ons in die klas

“oe dit is darem bastard skoene Alicia”

“bye bastard sien jou m re weer”.

Dit is die pa-figuur wat met ’n harde hand ’n einde maak aan di  speletjie. Die pa word onder andere getipeer in “dop system’s merry-go-round” (13), die enigste Engelstalige gedig in *radbraak*. Hierdie openhartige gedig is ’n aanklag teen ’n verwoestende stelsel wat vernedering en selfvernietiging in baie gemeenskappe in Suid-Afrika in stand hou,  n miskien ’n noodkreet aan ’n bestaande vaderfiguur: “my father comes home to midnight the dop system / inflames his veins black”.

Phillips is ’n belangrike en begeesterde nuwe stem in die Afrikaanse po sie, en ’n uitgesproke vroulike stem boonop. In *radbraak* sien ons ’n jong vrou wat, soos die ma, sterker is as die mans wat naby haar staan. Sy oorwin as ’t ware die liefde vir haar pa as sy in “heil die leser” (16) besluit:

in my pa se huis
skryf ek hom weg
wegter van my –
ek wysig sy swets

Sy oorleef ook haar geliefde broer, in “lyksang vir jou skollietaal” (24): “Ma en Pa gebruik jou dood soos button-pille maar / ek trek lang skywe met jou taal nip jou / in die asbakkie ek wil nie met my lewe so be-taal”.

Die Afrikaans poësie het 'n lang tradisie van sterk en belangwekkende digteresse, wat durf speel met klank en betekenis en nuwe ruimtes oopskryf, en wat selfbewus én kwesbaar durf wees in 'n wêreld wat deur ekstreme vorme van manlikheid gedomineer word. Phillips wys met *radbraak* dat sy midde-in hierdie tradisie staan.

Alfred Schaffer
aschaffer@sun.ac.za
Universiteit Stellenbosch
Stellenbosch

Vuurvas.

Carel Antonissen. Naledi, 2016. ISBN 978-0-928316-97-1.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4373](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4373)

Vuurvas is 'n debuutbundel wat die eenskappe van laatwerk vertoon. Dit is seker 'n paradoksale stelling gegewe die feit dat laatwerk vorige gepubliseerde bundels veronderstel. Tog is die bundeltitel *Vuurvas* alreeds 'n aanduiding dat die leser hier bes moontlik met 'n skrywer te make het wat al baie winters, of vure, beleef, deurleef en ook oorleef het en hierdie vermoede word versterk deur die stofomslag, die prent op die voorblad, maar ook die woorde van Marlene van Niekerk op die agterplat. Van Niekerk skryf onder meer: "Wat bely word, is ervarings van verlies en aanvaarding, maar veral die proses van loutering." Die bundel is pragtig uitgegee met 'n donker (gebrande?) stofomslag en 'n helder rooi en geel brandlelie wat 'n sterk kontras vorm met die houtskoolagtige agter-

grond. Die flapteks gee onder meer die volgende inligting aangaande die brandlelie: "Die brandlelie verskyn gewoonlik nege dae ná 'n veldbrand. Dit is die eerste teken van lewe wat soos 'n feniks uit die as verrys. Hierna bly dit periodiek groei, dikwels tot vyftien jaar." Beide die omslag en die inhoud van hierdie bundel maak dit duidelik dat die digter inderdaad lewenservaring het wat neerslag vind in sy debuutbundel. Temas soos ouderdom en sterflikheid kom dikwels in laatwerk na vore. Hierdie temas, maar ook ander temas wat daarop dui dat die leser nie hier met 'n jong skrywer te make het nie en wel met 'n skrywer wat al iets aan eie lyf beleef het van oriëntasie-disoriëntasie-heroriëntasie, word dan ook deurgaans aangesny in *Vuurvas*.

Die bundel is in vier afdelings verdeel, elk met 'n eie titel te wete "Bont krale en 'n rok wat sing", "Om die binneluike oop te stoot", "Die verskriklike tamboeryn" en "Kordaat met vuur". Hierdie titels is telkens uit een van die gedigte in die betrokke afdeling ontleen en, net soos die bundeltitel en die motto-gedig van McClelland oor die Karoo, dien hulle as sleutels vir die lees van die bundel. In "Bont krale en 'n rok wat sing" (deel 1) is die sterkste tema "die vrou" en handel bykans al die gedigte in hierdie deel oor vroue. Daar is onder andere vroue uit die Bybel soos Eva, Vrou Wysheid van die boek Spreuke, die Samaritaanse vrou uit die Johannes-evangelie; vroue uit die literatuur soos Dulcinea uit *Don Quijote*; 'n vrou as lewensmaat, ook 'n moeder en 'n dogter. Verder word die tema van ouderdom en sterwe in hierdie afdeling

alreeds opgeneem in gedigte waarin die digter die aftakeling van ouderdom by sy ma waarneem en laastens kan die tema van saamwees ook hier genoem word.

In die tweede afdeling word die tema van ouderdom en sterwe weer opgeneem, maar, anders as die saamweestema in afdeling een, word alleenheid en eensaamheid in verskeie verse verken. Die digter stoot in hierdie afdeling die binneluike oop deur terugskouend te kyk na die trap des ouderdoms. Hy doen dit onder meer deur ook terug te reis na sy grootwordjare en -wêreld, te wete Calvinia. Sekere van die gedigte in hierdie deel herinner aan Dolf van Niekerk se *Nag op 'n kaal plein* en sy herbesoek as ouer persoon aan Edenburg waar hy grootgeword het soos Antonissen op Calvinia. Hierdie tweede afdeling gebruik die landskap van die Karoo en 'n spesifieke plattelandse dorp, en ook die vloei van die tyd in die proses van grootword, om daarop te wys dat die mens se binneluike lewenslank oopgestoot word. Hier gaan dit oor verskeie soorte ontwakings, onder andere 'n teologiese ontwaking, maar veral ook ontwakings wat saamhang met grootword. Ten slotte is daar gedigte wat opgestel is as gesprekke met die digter se pa. Alhoewel die digter ook, soos byvoorbeeld Ernst van Heerden in sy bekende "Algemeene Handelaar", al meer sy pa in homself herken, is daar ook 'n kritiese toonaard in hierdie gedigte.

Die titel van die derde afdeling, "Die verskriklike tamboeryn", is afkomstig uit die gedig "Jefta se wroeging". Hier sluit Antonissen aan by skrywers soos Joost van den Vondel, Antjie Krog en Rachelle

Greeff, om enkeles te noem, vir wie die verhaal van die rigter Jefta (Rigters 11) in so 'n mate gefassineer het dat dit hulle beweeg het tot 'n kreatiewe skepping. Jefta se dogter het met tamboeryne en koordanse haar seëvierende vader met sy tuiskoms vanaf die slagveld tegemoet gedans, maar hy het haar geoffer soos wat hy in sy eed aan God belowe het hy sal doen. In hierdie derde afdeling verander die toonaard van die bundel saam met die klank van die verskriklike tamboeryn van Jefta se dogter. Die donker klank van daardie instrument gaan in hierdie deel veral oor 'n kritiese blik op Suid-Afrikaanse politiek, op die digter se eie belewenisse om as kritiese stem self ook kritiek moes verduur, oor belewenisse soos misdad en, soos in die vorige afdelings, ook oor ouderdom, sterwe en dood. Iets van die harde landskap van die boek Rigters, 'n landskap wat vanweë swak leierskap besaai lê met lyke, is in die agtergrond van hierdie derde afdeling, deurdat politiek en die dood hier lepelle.

Die titel van die laaste afdeling is "Kordaat met vuur" en die eerste gedig in hierdie vierde en laaste afdeling is ook die titelgedig van die bundel. Hier speel die digter met die uitdrukking "om met vuur te speel" en die vuur is nie alleen die louteringsvuur van die lewe wat saam met die ouderdom en sterflikheid kom nie, maar ook die vreugdevure van tuiskoms soos die wat brand by die tuiskoms van die verlore seun. Verskeie temas wat ook in die vorige drie dele alreeds aangesny is, keer ook weer in hierdie deel terug, byvoorbeeld 'n gedig oor Bonhoeffer en ook gedigte oor die

politieke situasie in Suid-Afrika. 'n Laaste tema wat sag in hierdie laaste afdeling se verse na vore kom, is die van vergifnis, versoening en hoop. Dit word pertinent as sodanig benoem, maar ook vergestalt in die (sinspeling op) die sakrament van die Nagmaal en spesifiek die elemente van brood en wyn wat in verskeie van die gedigte voorkom asook die vele duiwe (ook met 'n olyftak as simbool van vrede) in die gedigte.

Antonissen werk goed met taal en skryf op 'n gestroopte wyse wat pas by die aard van die bundel. As voorbeeld sonder ek net ouderdom, sterwe en dood uit en kan verwys word na beelde soos die "geel tande en pietsende stert" (van die ouderdom), asook "die klankdigte deur" en "onbewuste donkerte" (van die dood). Versreëls waarin gemymer word oor hoe dit sal wees om te sterf terwyl jy droom, klink soos volg: "en sagweg die geruis van druppels / op 'n dak voor, salig dan / die tweede slaap ons toevou / in 'n warmer velkombers."

Dit is nie altyd raadsaam om 'n skrywer soos Antonissen te gou ten opsigte van sy of haar nering te benoem en sy skryfwerk daarna aan die hand van daardie keurslyf (mediese dokter, regsgeleerde en veral – teoloog!) te interpreteer nie. Dit kan baie beperkend inwerk op die betrokke leeservaring. In die geval van Antonissen en sy *Vuurvas* kan daar wel 'n klein uitsondering gemaak word, aangesien hy biografies in die flaptেকs baie spesifiek as teoloog, predikant en voormalige direkteur van die Sentrum van Christelike Spiritualiteit benoem word, en, belangrik, aartsbiskop Desmond

Tutu se naam ook pertinent genoem word. Hier word dus 'n keuse uitgeoefen om die bundel ook aan 'n bepaalde teologiese tradisie te koppel. Gereeld is daar dan ook in van die gedigte Bybelse verwysings en word teksgedeeltes uit die Bybel onder gedigte se titels as sleutels aangegee, byvoorbeeld Spreuke 1:20–23 en Johannes 12:1–7. Hier is daar ten dele sprake van 'n digtende teoloog, maar van vroom versies is daar, God sy dank, geen sprake nie. Wat die teologiese klanke van die gedigte aanbetref, sou ek dit net waag om die volgende drie opmerkings te maak.

Eerstens dink ek kan die God wat in *Vuurvas* na vore kom in navolging van Richard Kearney as anateïsties benoem. Daar is sprake van 'n soort wegbeweeg van 'n eng teïstiese godsverstaan. Dit is egter 'n wegbeweeg in en deur 'n worsteling met God ten einde nuut en weer by God uit te kom, die reeds vermelde dialektiek van oriëntasie-disoriëntasie-reoriëntasie. Kearney (2010:39) skryf: "That is why I understand open atheism as a-theism, namely, a salutary moment of estrangement, a departure from God (a-dieu) that struggles with God (contredieu). It may thus allow the possibility of a return to a God beyond God (hors-dieu), a God who may come back to us from the future." Die vuur van *Vuurvas* is in hierdie opsig die louteringsvuur, maar ook en baie belangrik die passievolle vuur wat aanhou brand vir God. Sien in hierdie opsig die slotgedig getiteld "Nagg gesprek" en die reëls: "want jy bly my God en ek / jou verlore liefde." Tweedens, en met die naam van aartsbiskop Tutu in gedagte,

sluit die bundel aan by die tradisie van spesifieke teoloë, soos Dietrich Bonhoeffer en Beyers Naudé wat pertinent in hierdie bundel genoem word en met wie die digter dus ook assosieer. Dit is dus nie alleen 'n teologie wat *teologies-krities* is nie, maar ook en spesifiek 'n politiek-kritiese bewussyn het met 'n fokus op 'n aanspreek van ongeregtigheid en 'n versugting na geregtigheid (Antonissen se sogenaamde "Krane preek" is redelik bekend in sekere kerklike kringe, naamlik dat hy as predikant in Somerset-Oos in die apartheidsjare tydens sy preek in die wit NG Kerk op daardie dorp daarop gewys het dat daar meer krane in sy pastorie is as in die hele swart woonbuurt). Derdens is daar spore van 'n fyn aanvoeling van Christelike spiritualiteit in die bundel, 'n tradisie wat in die laaste jare 'n groot oplewing in die teologie beleef het en veel maak van die ou wysheid van byvoorbeeld die woestynvaders (vergeelyk die gedig "Woestynvader"). Hierdie drie punte is voorlopig en daar sal veel meer uit hierdie bundel geput kan word deur middel van 'n pertinente teologiese lees van die teks as die paar punte wat ek hier aanstip.

Vuurvas is 'n debuut; tog is dit die debuut van 'n digter wat iets verstaan van beide brande en brandlelies, van vure en ook van vuurvastheid. Daarom kan hierdie bundel gesien word as 'n debuutbundel wat die eienskappe van laatwerk vertoon. Dit is gedigte wat kom uit lewenservaring, die paradokse van die lewe wat nie te maklik opgelos word nie in versreëls aandurf en dit in 'n gestroopte poëtiese styl wat niks wil

bewys nie, maar alleen wil vat aan die ervarings van hierdie lewe; vat soos die hande van 'n ouer predikant wat sonder enige vertoon en met enige aarseling aan 'n stuk nagmaalsbrood vat.

Cas Wepener
cas.wepener@up.ac.za
Universiteit van Pretoria
Pretoria

Voor ek my kom kry.

Pirow Bekker. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2017. 110 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4853-0648-1.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4375](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4375)

Voor ek my kom kry (2017) is die tiende digbundel uit die pen van Pirow Bekker, wat hom reeds sedert sy debuut met *Die klip sing* (1965) op die Afrikaanse poësietoneel bevind, en daarna konsekwent bundels van gehalte bly lewer. Die nuwe bundel is die eerste ná die sterk drieluik bestaande uit *Stillerlewe* (2002), *Van roes en amarant* (2008) en *Atlas teen die vergeetrivier* (2013), waarin die gegewe van verganklikheid en sterflikheid vanuit verskillende hoeke belig en oor besin is.

Bekker se eerste bundels is veral gekenmerk deur 'n waardering vir en opgaan in die aardse, maar tog kom die dood van meet af aan in verskeie gestaltes in sy oeuvre ter sprake, en dan ook met 'n sterker wordende teenwoordigheid in die latere bundels. Wat van *Atlas teen die vergeetrivier* veral 'n besondere bundel maak, is die eenheidskeppende beeld van oorbrugging – tussen die geliefde hier en die onbekende hierna—wat deurgaans uitgewerk word.

Ook in *Voor ek my kom kry* handel heelwat gedigte oor die dood en die doodsbesef, terwyl daar ook teruggekyk word op 'n lewe wat volledig geleef is, maar enige oomblik kortgeknip kan word – 'n toestand wat dus kan verander nog voor jy jou "kom kry". Dit is dus feitlik onvermydelik dat die leser geneig sal wees om 'n vergelyking tussen die vorige en die nuwe bundel te tref – op tegniese sowel as tematiese vlak. Daarom sal die leser waarskynlik ook na die nuwe bundel gaan met die vraag in die agterkop: Het Bekker hierdie tema nie dalk al redelik uitgeput nie, oftewel, is hy in staat om, die bekende boustof ten spyt, nog daarin te slaag om te boei deur verrassende segswyses, beelde en vondste?

Op tegniese vlak vertoon *Voor ek my kom kry* kenmerke van Bekker se ouer én nuwer werk: Daar is die meer kriptiese, kort gedigte waarin ironie meermale domineer, en daar is die meer uitgesponne, vloeiende gedigte, wat in die ontmoeting tussen 'n meer hortent-ironiese trant en 'n besinning oor kwessies van tyd en ewigheid, 'n besondere liriese kwaliteit verkry.

Op tematiese vlak is die insetgedig ("Skeppingsprokie") 'n belangrike sleutel tot die lees van die bundel, en dan veral om die metafisiese inhoud daarvan te ontsluit—dit handel oor die "witjasman" wat 'n virus selekteer vir kweking in 'n laboratorium, "[om] hom met 'n edel doel/eers in sy kwaad te sterk." Hiermee word die filosofiese grondslag vir die bundel gelê—naamlik dat die mens hom in 'n kundige maar beheerende hand bevind wat hom toelaat om volgens sy natuurlike aard te leef, maar uiteindelik met 'n groter

en onbekende "edel doel".

Dit is dan byna te verwagte dat die eerste afdeling ("Aarde inbegrepe") hoofsaaklik handel oor die mens se verbondenheid aan die aardse en stofflike, wat, ten spyte van aardse geluk en genot, ook siekte en sterflikheid impliseer. In "Versoening na die karsinoom" (12) tel Bekker die drade van "Karsinoom en melanoom" ('n ironiese herskrywing van Leipoldt se "Boggom en Voertsek" en ook Opperman se weergawe daarvan in *Rasuur*) op. In die nuwe gedig kom daar egter 'n dimensie by deurdat 'n versoening van die uiterstes van aardse belewenisse—lewenskragtigheid en vernietiging—tot by 'n ruspunt gebring word: "En deur die rokerigheid / van 'n slagveld lê jul jul wapens neer."

Intertekstualiteit soos dit veral opduik as verdigtings van en repliek op die werk van die groot gekanoniseerde Afrikaanse digters vorm 'n belangrike aspek van Bekker se werk. So is "Vergete is die aarde nie" (16) 'n gesprek met Totius se "Die wêreld is ons woning nie", waarin die mens uitgebeeld word as deur sy bewussyn verbonde aan die aarde, ongeag die ewigheid waarin hy hom dalk straks mag bevind.

Die bundel beweeg verder en verken 'n uiteenlopende aantal temas deur die agt afdelings heen. Reeds in die tweede afdeling ("Erd-af") is daar sprake van skade en letsels (ook aan die eie land), maar heling kom in "Met voelhorings in die land" (22–3) in die visier. Heling wat manifesteer as oorstyging, samehang en ook oorgawe aan die groter doel word spesifiek in "Kersnagreis" (30) aan die

orde gestel, en die slotstrofe is eintlik 'n baie goeie opsomming van waaroor die bundel gaan:

Gewillig soos 'n kind gee ek my oor
aan die reis

Na die boom en die ster en hoe
hul spontaan

Kon getuig aan wie ook al 'n verk-
laring wil eis

Van hoe alles eers enkeld was en
eindelik saam.

In "Nuutskepping" (39) vind die leser Bekker op sy ironiserende beste waar hy spekuleer oor die modieus-eufemistiese "selfdood" wat "selfmoord" vervang het, maar sonder dat die aksie iets van sy angel ingeboet het. Vele ander uitstekende verse sorg vir 'n leesuitdaging én veel leesplezier, maar ook vir ontroering, soos "Proekamer van die liefde" (73), waarin die sintuie ingespan word om herinneringe aan aardse genot te herroep, alhoewel die natuurkragte vasbeslote sal saamwerk om die spreker daaraan te herinner dat die tyd daarvoor verby is.

In die vyf kort gedigte onder "oorskrydings" (108) stal Bekker sy tegniese vernuf uit, en hierdie klein reeks is dan ook 'n uitstekende voorbeeld van hoe die gedagte van oorskryding (of oorbrugging) konkreet vorm kry. Veral die derde gedig, met sy verrassende visuele beeld, is uiters geslaag:

Die berg van ouderdom
is beplant met bome
groener as olyf

Nog uiters geslaagde gedigte is onder meer "Eugène Marais op Pelindaba" (57),

"Aanspraak" (75) en "Wie is Bart Nel?" (55) (met laasgenoemde twee wat ook met die gedagte van oorskryding omgaan). Die slim bedinkte slotgedig "Toe ek my kom kry" (110) maak van vernuftige woordspel gebruik om aan te dui hoe die mens se pogings om die dood te fnuik, vrugtelos sal bly:

Dit is alles na die maan geblaas
toe ek van "gaan" "kom" probeer
maak het,
van "verloor" sonder omhaal "kry"
om so 'n ewige vermissing te
vermy.

Dat dit juis die mens se hoop op onsterflikheid is wat hom tot vergetelheid verdoem, is 'n moontlike interpretasie van hierdie gedig, wat op sy beurt 'n belangrike retrospektiewe sleutel tot die bundel is. En uiteindelik laat die bundel die leser dan met 'n wete wat vorm aanneem soos die bundel herbedink en herverteer word: Deur werklik te geleef het, is dit ook moontlik om te oorskry na 'n nuwe bestaan, sodat die dood oplaas bloot 'n proses van "verdoeking" raak, soos dit in "Op 'n punt van orde" (106) verwoord word. Soos 'n ou skildery tydens 'n restorasieproses na 'n nuwe doek oorgedra word, word lewe oorgedra na 'n nuwe substraat.

Dit is beelde soos dié wat die leser opnuut onder die indruk van Bekker se poëtiese register bring, en wat geen twyfel laat dat daar steeds veel te haal is uit 'n dalk bekende gegewe nie. Gewis is dit geen geval van 'n "seshoek-sel" waaruit daar niks meer te haal is nie.

Uiteraard is daar, soos in enige bundel,

enkele minder geslaagde gedigte. Soms neig die gedigte na die duistere, soos Phil van Schalkwyk (350) reeds aangedui het. “My uitgeklopte klip” (64) is moontlik so een, alhoewel ‘n fyn herlees baie dikwels help om die gedigte te ontrafel.

Met ‘n bundel soos hierdie sal dit ‘n sonde wees as Bekker nie gekanoniseer word as een van die mees geskakeerde en standhoudendste stemme in die Afrikaanse digkuns nie.

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Amanda Lourens
alourens@sun.ac.za
Universiteit Stellenbosch
Stellenbosch

Nuwe stemme 6.

Bibi Slippers en Charl-Pierre Naudé (samenstellers). Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2017. 176 pp. ISBN 9780624082644.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4373](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4373)

De bloemlezing *Nuwe stemme* mag na zes verzamelingen, waarvan de pilootaflevering in 1997 is samengesteld, worden beschouwd als een instituut in de Afrikaanse literatuur. Elke jaargang presenteert een selectie van contemporaine poëzie die niet eerder in boekvorm is verschenen. Het dichtwerk van nog niet met een bundel gedebuteerde schrijvers wordt in een polyfone compilatie voor het eerst op het openbare forum aangeboden. Naar het oordeel van de samenstellers zijn

de teksten van vooralsnog niet bekende schrijvers voldoende interessant om aan een breder publiek te presenteren. *Nuwe stemme 6* brengt de literaire productie van in totaal eenentwintig auteurs voor het voetlicht, waarvan medesamensteller Bibi Slippers in het voorwoord stelt dat ze “nuut [is] soos ‘n nuwe kind by die skool”. Tijdens Tuin van Digtters in Wellington, in september 2017, maakte ik als binnenwaartse buitenstaander kennis met een aantal van deze dichtersstemmen. In het programma is door samenstellers Slippers en de dichter-filosoof Charl-Pierre Naudé ruim aandacht besteed aan de bloemlezing. Méér dan tien schrijvers lazen teksten voor en vierden op die manier op de publieke tribune hun voordrachtdebuut. Audiovisuele opnamen zijn beschikbaar op de Zuid-Afrikaanse weblog LitNet. Een beschouwing van de binnenwaartse buitenstaander start bij wat hem vertrouwd is.

Bijna twee decennia geleden, in 1999, verscheen de vuistdikke bloemlezing *De Afrikaanse poëzie in duizend en enige gedichten*. Gerrit Komrij grasduinde daarvoor in de poëzieproductie van een eeuw in het Afrikaans. Het boek diept voor Nederlandstalige lezers parels op uit de Afrikaanse dichtkunst in Zuid-Afrika. De anthologiebundel was voor menig lezer een introductie in het werk van vele schrijvers wier naam mij totaal onbekend was. Hun poëzie is niet vertaald, laat staan dat uitgaven beschikbaar zijn in het Nederlandse taalgebied. Niettegenstaande veel aan te merken is op Komrij's eigengereide en sterk poëticaal bepaalde keuzes biedt het boek een interessante

staalkaart van een eeuw Afrikaanstalige dichtkunst.

Begin juli 2017 publiceerde PEN Afrikaans een lucratieve oproep. Aanleiding was de oprichting van een eigen Vertaalfonds. Bij gebrek aan letterenfonds voor de Afrikaanse literatuur neemt PEN het voortouw om bij te dragen tot “de internationale doorbraak” van schrijvers. Buitenlandse uitgeverijen met belangstelling voor werk van Zuid-Afrikaanse schrijvers kunnen voortaan een beroep doen op betoelaging. Het initiatief moet bijdragen tot een ruimere verspreiding van literair werk in het Afrikaans in andere taal- en cultuurgebieden. Daaraan bestaat nood, zoals de volgende kleine steekproef aantoont.

Canonieke contemporaine stemmen in de Afrikaanse poëzie, onder wie Breyten Breytenbach, Antjie Krog, Wilma Stockenström en Marlene van Niekerk, hebben naast bijvoorbeeld Ingrid Jonker en Elisabeth Eybers al langer een publiek in de Lage Landen. Hun werk wordt vertaald in het Nederlands en het is ook in andere cultuurgebieden beschikbaar. Sinds Komrij's anthologie, pakweg de voorbije twee decennia, manifesteert zich in het Afrikaans een bont gezelschap van “nuwe stemme” die aanspraak maken op belangstelling en waardering buiten het eigen taalgebied. Naast vele anderen zijn Andries Bezuidenhout, Gilbert Gibson, Ronelda Kamfer, Danie Marais, Loftus Marais, Charl-Pierre Naudé, Johan Myburg, Pieter Odendaal en de in Kaaps Afrikaans schrijvende Nathan Trantraal markante stemmen in de hedendaagse Afrikaanse poëzie. Vorig jaar publiceerde

Bibi Slippers haar in Zuid-Afrika zeer opgemerkte debuutbundel *Fotostaat-masjien*. De lijst met verrassend nieuwe geluiden in het Afrikaans breidt elke dag uit. Misschien op Naudé en Kamfer na is van deze op jonge en latere leeftijd debuterende schrijvers vooralsnog geen gedicht vertaald, ook niet in het Nederlands. De podiumpoëzie, met rap en hiphop van overwegend maar niet uitsluitend “bruin skrywers”, floreert als nooit tevoren in het Afrikaans en in alle variëteiten van de standaardtaal. Nogal wat vermelde namen duiken voor het eerst op in de reeks *Nuwe stemme*. De anthologiereeks, uitgegeven door Tafelberg, presenteert een plejade van in het Afrikaans schrijvende dichters van wie zoals gezegd nog geen debuutbundel is uitgegeven. Zij vertegenwoordigen met hun bonte gezelschap nieuwe geluiden in Afrikaans. In totaal zijn tot op heden zes afleveringen van *Nuwe stemme* op de markt gebracht. Gezaghebbende academici en toonaangevende dichters maken steevast de selectie en laten de bloemlezing voorafgaan door een korte verantwoording waarin uitgangspunten en poëticaal gemotiveerde selectieprincipes worden geëxpliciteerd. De meest recente afleveringen zijn samengesteld door Antjie Krog en Alfred Schaffer (2005), Ronel de Goede en Danie Marais (2010) en Heilna du Plooy en Loftus Marais (2013). En nu is er dus deel zes, twintig jaar na de eersteling.

Recent is dichtwerk van Breyten Breytenbach (*De zingende hand*) en Antjie Krog (*Medeweten*) in het fonds van Podium (Amsterdam) verschenen. Mogelijk in

het najaar van 2018 verschijnt de vertaling van *Kaar* door Marlene van Niekerk. *Hammie*, de derde bundel van Ronelda Kamfer, in een vertaling van Alfred Schaffer is pas uitgebracht. De aanwezigheid van met name (Zuid-)Afrikaanse schrijvers in het Nederlands berust niet op toeval. Het succes van André Brink, S.J. Naudé (*Het vogelalfabet!*), Francois Smith, Etienne van Heerden en onlangs ook *Buys* van Willem Anker, heeft te maken met de zusterrelatie van Afrikaans en Nederlands. Vertalers, redacteurs en uitgevers in de Lage Landen volgen literaire ontwikkelingen aan de zuidpunt van Afrika al langer op de voet. Podium in Amsterdam spant zich aanzienlijk in om Afrikaanse poëzie bekend te maken in Nederland en België.

Literaire kwaliteit drijft steevast boven. De zesde editie van *Nuwe stemme* toont dat overtuigend aan. De poëzie in Afrikaans bloeit en fonkelt als nooit tevoren. De taal staat in tijden van dekolonisatie, na de stigmatisering door apartheid, met name op universitaire campussen zwaar onder druk. In de Zuid-Afrikaanse academische wereld is zij de dupe van een algehele verengelsing. Ondanks de penibele taalpolitieke situatie zorgen de Afrikaanse letteren vandaag voor gensters. Er broeit wat en de taal is lenig genoeg om alle calamiteiten te trotseren. Het buitenlandse succes van canonieke schrijvers is veelbetekenend, maar er is dus veel méér in de aanbieding dan wat wij als binnenwaartse buitenstaanders bevroeden. Een verzameling als *Nuwe stemme* werpt een licht op de veelzijdigheid en meerstemmigheid van de heden-

daagse Afrikaanse poëzie. Opmerkelijk in het merendeel van de gebundelde gedichten is het gebruik van de parlandotoon, overwegend narratieve teksten waarin hier en daar ironie en vooral maatschappelijke betrokkenheid een rol spelen. De ik-poëzie waarin de belijdenis van een emotie centraal staat, is duidelijk van alle tijden (Yabadaka Shamah, Marcel Spaumer, Elna van Niekerk, Remona Voges en anderen). Mijn aandacht gaat vooral naar de gedichten van Franco Colin en de lyrische prozafragmenten van Jaco van der Merwe bij foto's van Wikus de Wet. De bundel presenteert gedrukte teksten, letters op papier, hoewel in Afrikaans ook een bloeiende slam poetry bestaat. In hoeverre een boekuitgave zoals *Nuwe stemme* voldoende recht doet aan andere hedendaagse tendensen in de Afrikaanse poëzie (orale tradities) kan ik alleen vermoeden. Van de schrijversoptredens in Wellington herinner ik mij overwegend klassieke voordrachten, op de overtuigende en bij het publiek veel bijval oogstende hiphopdichter ("kletsrymer") Churchill Naudé na.

Het pleidooi van PEN Afrikaans verdient in Nederland en Vlaanderen de aandacht van literaire uitgeverijen. Het verdient aanbeveling en het zal zonder meer revelerend zijn voor het lezerspubliek, gebaseerd op zes voorliggende *Nuwe stemme* een tweetalige bloemlezing samen te stellen met deze nieuwe dichtersgeluiden. Fondsen die nu beschikbaar zijn, dragen ertoe bij dat het zelfs lucratief wordt om voortaan Afrikaanstalige dichters onder de aandacht van een Nederlandstalig publiek te

brenge. Er kan worden nagedacht over de organisatie van een dichtertournee in de Lage Landen. De jaarlijkse Week van de Afrikaanse roman kan zich voortaan misschien toeleggen op poëzie.

De nieuwe subsidieregeling maakt het kortom aantrekkelijk voor uitgevers de jongste dichterslichting een forum te geven. *Nuwe stemme* toont aan dat zich in het Afrikaans, in al haar mengvormen, al jarenlang schitterende parels vertonen. Schrijvers die in de bloemlezing hun visitekaartje afleveren, breken de volgende jaren door met een bundel. Het is deze literaire meerstemmigheid die buiten Zuid-Afrika gehoor moet vinden. *Nuwe stemme* is helemaal terecht in de woorden van Tafelberg een “opwindende poësiereeks” die onregelmatig in het Afrikaans verschijnt. Alfred Schaffer en ik hebben al eerder opgeroepen dat uitgeverijen en bibliotheken in de Lage Landen de stemmen ontdekken en beluisteren. En binnenkort een publieke tribune geven. Benieuwd welke stemmen tot wasdom komen, hoe de poëzie van deze nieuwelingen zich de komende tijd zal ontwikkelen. *Nuwe stemme* is gebaseerd op een origineel format dat in het Nederlandse taalgebied zijn gelijke niet kent. Bibi Slippers en Charles-Pierre Naudé doen met hun keuze uit vele ingezonden manuscripten, na een open oproep, verrassende stemmen resoneren die laten uitkijken naar wat de volgende jaren het daglicht ziet. Sinds Komrij’s oogst hebben zich in de Afrikaanse poëzie talrijke nieuwe stemmen geopenbaard die ook voor Nederlandse en Vlaamse lezers het ontdekken waard zijn. *Nuwe stemme* biedt een prachtige gelegenheid voor

ontdekkingen. Benieuwd welke van de eenentwintig namen binnenkort met een eigen bundel in de poëziebibliotheek zullen staan en met literaire prijzen worden bekroond.

Een deel van deze tekst verscheen als opiniestuk op de website van het Vlaamse kritische weekblad *Knack Magazine* en is voor deze uitgave aanzienlijk bewerkt. De oorspronkelijke tekst is voorgelegd aan en ook ondertekend door Alfred Schaffer.

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Yves T’Sjoen

Yves.TSjoen@UGent.be

Universiteit Gent / Universiteit Stellenbosch

Uittogboek.

Johan Myburg. Pretoria: Protea, 2017.
100 pp. ISBN: 9781485307761.

DOI: dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4380

Uittogboek (2017) is Johan Myburg se vierde bundel, en kan as 'n hoogtepunt van sy oeuvre beskryf word. Die gedig "animula vagula blandula" deur die Romeinse keiser Hadrianus gaan die bundel as motto vooraf. Dit is die gedig wat Hadrianus vermoedelik op sy sterfbed op sou sê – vergelyk die laaste versreël van "In die maand Hathor" (94): "het hy / naby Napels op sterwe gelê en, volgens *Historia Augusta*, 'n resitasie opgesê". Myburg se Afrikaanse vertaling hiervan word as openingsgedig tot die bundel gebruik:

liewerste klein swerwersiel
metgesel en gas van die lyf
waarheen mik jy nou: 'n oord
waar jy kaal en koud en styf
geen grap meer kan verwoord

Verskeie temas word deur die gedig ontsluit, byvoorbeeld kameraadskap, 'n reiselement, liggaamlikheid, die skryfaktiwiteit en verganklikheid. Terselfdertyd hou die temas verband met die verklaring van die woord "Uittogboek" soos dit in die gedig "Prosopopeia" (95) uitgelê word: "kwotasies / as 'n soort gids deur die git van die onbekende", waarin die "onbekende" telkens *anders* in die bundel voorgestel word, byvoorbeeld as plek, gevoel of dood.

Die bundel bestaan uit agt afdelings, waarvan keiser Hadrianus in vyf van die gedigte in die eerste afdeling aan die woord gestel word. Die gedigte is "Keiser, by homself 1" (11), "Keiser, by homself 2" (12), "Hadrianus" (13), "Keiser, buite homself" (14) en "Memoires" (15), wat voortborduur op Marguerite Yourcenar se historiese roman, *Memoirs of Hadrian* (1951). Die figuur Hadrianus word deur die digter ingespan om die verlede in Rome en die hede in Suid-Afrika op 'n parallelle wyse in oënskou te neem. Vergelyk "Keiser, by homself 1": "Hier sal ek / my gat sien: 'n klein voorval dalk, / 'n vinnige skoot by my tuinhok, / 'n morsige sny tog diep genoeg / aan die nek".

Die tweede afdeling bestaan uit 'n gedigsiklus met ses gedigte, getitel "Fremdkörper" (19–21), wat 'n vreemde voorwerp veronderstel, byvoorbeeld 'n splint wat onder jou vel bly sit of 'n

inskrywing in 'n teks wat nie heeltemal steek hou met die tyd waarin die teks tot stand gekom het nie. Dié gegewe word uitgewerk in gedigte soos die eerste oor die spreker se moeilike geboorte, waaraan die moeder hom meermale sou herinner, en die vierde gedig oor die plek van uitheemse plante: "En steur / bome hulle aan politieke grense, by wyse van spreke?" Die gesprekke rondom vreemdheid word in die sesde gedig tot hoogtepunt gevoer: "Hier sal ek bly staan, solank ek voortdurend kan bedink / hoe anders om vreemdheid as die voorhande te formuleer".

In die derde afdeling skets die digter portrette in 'n poging om iets omtrent sy subjekte vas te vang. In "Duif" (26) word 'n aantal retoriese vrae gevra oor 'n dooie duif se laaste vlug soos hy nou "stokstyf onder / die linkerluik" [...] "'n perfekte portret voltrek"; in "MB2" (29) word 'n deerniswekkende portret van wyle Marthinus Beukes se verslawingstryd uitgebeeld. Die digter skep 'n aantal ekfrastiese gedigte, waarvan 'n roettekening van Diane Victor tot 'n kunswerk in eie reg te omskep word: "vlam roep vlym roep vlek roet roep / wroet roep onvermydelik ook bloed". Sien ook "Portret van Anitnous" (95) in afdeling agt as voorbeeld van 'n geslaagde ekfrastiese gedig.

'n Aantal plekgedigte, wat strek van Johannesburg tot Deir al-Qamar, kom in afdeling vier na vore, wat veral fokus op die onderlinge verbondenheid tussen mense, diere en plante. Die intieme saambestaan word op 'n sterk sensoriese wyse uitgebeeld. Vergelyk die beskrywing van "Jozi" (38): "Gerysmier, / liefde-

loos, maak jy alarm uit vrees". Die digter omvorm dan ook die "vrees" tot 'n vorm van skoonheid in "Misdaadtonele" (40): "Sus jousef aan die slaap met tak-tak-tak-Nachtmusik as droom,/ met elektrisiteit wat metronomies deur 'n notebalk van drade stroom". Beminlik staan die spreker teenoor bome in "Düsseldorf" (43): "Ek kus die bome, nie vaarwel nie,/ maar oopmond soos 'n getroue minnaar". "Reitzstraat, Potchefstroom" (44), 'n huldigingsvers opgedra aan T. T. Cloete, laat sien die verband tussen tuinmaak en die skryf van gedigte: "Sedertdien swymel ek steeds oor die boeket / van tuine en die toorkrag van 'n rymende eindkoeplet".

Soos die voorafgaande ekfrastiese gedigte, maak die digter ook gebruik van musikale intertekste soos "Ombra mai fu" (52-3) in die vyfde afdeling, waarin Xerxes I van Persië 'n plataanboom besing. Die dood word ook in hierdie afdeling sterk op die voorgrond gestel. In die tweede gedig van "Sentripetaal" (58) herroep die spreker sy gestorwe vader in 'n droom, wat 'n transendente wêreld onthul: "sit hy orent / op 'n stoel geelperskes en skil" [...] "sny hy deur dié vrug / 'n hele boord, tot hy met 'n enkele pit in sy linkerhand sit". In "Postuum" (60) tree die spreker weer in gesprek met sy gestorwe vader en beken:

[...] miskien makliker
nou by nabaat
dalk omdat ek weet
jy nie terug
kan praat nie
nie verwyf nie
nie wyd
my leemtes uit

kan wys nie
my nie misverstaan nie.

'n Soort uitgangspunt vir die bundel kom in "Kodisil" (70) na vore, waarin die spreker sy weerloosheid ter tafel lê: "Hoe verklaar 'n mens sestig jaar op papier?" In navolging van Lucebert se uitspraak, "Alles van waarde is weerloos", verklaar die spreker: "Alles van waarde laat ek weerloos/ na", met insig oor wat van 'n mens ná 'n leeftyd word: "om te leef om te oorleef om oorleef te word". Die vergelyking sluit aan by die strekking van "Kennisgewing" (10), wat herinner aan dié soort kennisgewings in koerante, met inligting betreffende oorledenes en diegene wat hulle oorleef. Hierin is dit egter nie 'n persoon wat die oorledene oorleef nie, maar 'n verpersoonlikte huis, met sy "stygende vog in bros / mure vrotter wordende plafonne muf agter / rakke boeke laaie vergeelde papiere". Laasgenoemde "vergeelde papiere" suggereer ook iets omtrent die wyse waarop die digter poog om die dood deur sy uittoegboek as nalating tot 'n mate uit te stel, wat eweneens Don DeLillo se motto tot die gedig bekragtigt: "Maybe there is no death as we know it. Only documents changing hands." Die dood word dan ook deurgaans op uiteenlopende maniere gestalte gegee, soos byvoorbeeld in "Restant" (85) in die sewende afdeling, wat handel oor die opspraakwekkende foto van die Siriese seuntjie, Alan Kurdi, wat uitgespoel het op die Turkse strand.

In "Ars poetica" (93) in die laaste afdeling van die bundel gee die digter op humoristiese wyse, à la Gaius Plinius

Secundus, nuttige wenke om jou eie toga te kleur, wat terselfdertyd iets weergee van die moeite om een gedig te produseer: "LW: Om jou te tooi / in 'n toga van Tiriese praal moet jy vir 1 g kleursel reken op 10 000 slakke as prooi". Laasgenoemde gedig vertoon die vakmanskap wat Myburg deurgaans in *Uittogboek* ten toon stel, en op 'n vernuwende wyse aan die hand van 'n veelheid van onderwerpe in sy bundel laat sien. Die gedigte hou dan ook op 'n tematiese wyse met mekaar verband, wat die leser noop om nie net enkele gedigte te lees nie, maar ondersoek in te stel na die wyse waarop die gedigte op 'n betekenisvolle wyse met mekaar saamhang. Voorwaar is dit 'n bundel wat vra om deeglik bestudeer te word.

Alwyn Roux
erouxap@unisa.ac.za
Universiteit van Suid-Afrika
Pretoria

na die meerduidige betekenis wat die bundel gaan heg aan die krap en die see.

Die vier afdelings in die bundel word voorafgegaan deur 'n inleidende gedig met die titel "Krappegesang". Alhoewel die spreker in hierdie gedig die krap teken as monsteragtig, lagwekkend en abjek, besing hy hom ook as 'n "bloedbroer" wat hy "bemin". Aan die een kant wil hy die krap mooi maak (sy karapaks poets, sy knypers vryf tot 'n vonk spat) en aan die ander kant wil hy hom amper gewelddadig verbruik (met 'n hamer oopbreek, skud soos 'n blik spykers en witvleise uit sy doppe skraap). In die slotstrofe roep die spreker uit: "hoe jeuk en krap dit nie/in hierdie skedelpan van my kop?", wat suggereer dat die krap beeld is van 'n verwickelde innerlike wat uiteindelik tot uiting kom in die "krapp-egesang" van die gedig en die bundel.

Die krap keer terug in die vierde afdeling se eerste gedig, "Reusespinnekopkrap", waarin vertel word hoe die spreker die krap dophou in 'n akwarium en vir hom vra:

Waarom krabbel almal so oor jou?
In jou pype is daar g'n murg—
jy is 'n bal gekoude papier,
maar ook 'n boodskap, 'n gedig—
my krapp-ige tweelingbroer.

Weer word die krap aangespreek as broer en ook voorgehou as "'n gedig", al is dit dan een waarvan die spreker in vorige reëls gevoel het dat dit "jammerlik lelik" is. Daar is dus weer die suggestie dat die krap dit verteenwoordig wat so eie is aan die spreker as 'n tweelingbroer én gesien kan word as die gedig wat die resultaat

Krap uit die see.

Fourie Botha. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2017. 64 pp. ISBN 9781485307570.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4381](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4381)

Fourie Botha het in 2011 gedebuteer met die bundel *Donkerkamer* waarin hy onder andere die verband tussen foto-beeld en gedig ondersoek het. Sy tweede bundel *Krap uit die see* stuur weg hiervan, maar die leser se aandag word tog gevang deur die skakel tussen die bundeltitle en die rare buitebladfoto van 'n Japannese man wat 'n reuse-spinnekopkrap vashou. Beide bundeltitle en foto wys vooruit

is van daardie verwantskap. In hierdie opsig herinner dit aan Wilma Stockenström se gedig oor die kluisenaarskrap in *Monsterverse* waar die skeppende mens eweneens in verband gebring word met die krap en die motiewe van monsteragtigheid, maar ook weerloosheid ter sprake kom.

Die deurlopende aanwesigheid van 'n ek-spreker en die vae suggestie van chronologiese progressie tussen die bundel se vier afdelings nooi die leser uit om die bundel as 'n narratief te lees. Die eerste afdeling, met die "see"-titel "Laagwater", handel oor die ervarings van 'n kind in die midde van 'n familie bestaande uit pa, ma, broer, ouma en opa. In die begin-gedig "Plaasdam" word jong seuns wat swem in 'n plaasdam se eerste ervarings van liggaamlikheid en seksualiteit gesuggereer deur die verwysings na paddavisse en otters. Hulle speelsheid en verwondering word in die tweede strofe gestuit wanneer die pa 'n slang skiet langs die dam. Daarná sirkel die seuns versigtig op die rand van die dam om te kyk na die derms van die slang op "die bodem se slyk". Hulle seksuele bewuswording word dus vroeg reeds gekontamineer met geweld, skrik en skuld. Dié gedig vorm dus 'n gepaste inleiding tot die bundel waarin sowel liggaamlike plesier as emosionele verbintenis meermale getint is met pyn, verlies en melankolie.

Talle gedigte in hierdie afdeling registreer spanning en struweling in die familie, veral tussen die pa en ma (vergelyk die gedigte "Rok", "Bokkeveld", en "ek droom van my pa"). Dit is veral drome

wat die sleutels verskaf tot die inhoud van die onbewuste wat in hierdie gedigte na vore tree. In "My ma se perde" (19) is daar byvoorbeeld sprake van diep-verborge skuldgevoelens wat opduik in drome oor die ma se perde wat vermink is of in die see swem en oor die "inkubus" of seksuele demoon met die onderkaak van 'n perd in die spreker se kamer.

Die eerste afdeling eindig op 'n onheilspellende toon met "Die koms", waarin die motief van drome (vergelyk die reëls "**Uit die pierings/van binnekop-bene/stort ons slegte drome**") voortgesit word en kulmineer in 'n apokalips waarin die son vir altyd verdonker: "Die son is op-/ gevreet, Vandag was die eerste nag". Die leser kry die gevoel dat in hierdie eerste afdeling afgetuur word in die verlede asof dit 'n donker getypoel is waaruit begrip vir dit wat daarna volg, afgelees kan word.

Die tweede afdeling "Vuisneste" teken 'n volwasse bestaan wat voortbou op die emosionele aksente gelê in die eerste afdeling. Daar is byvoorbeeld sprake van masochistiese elemente in die verhoudings wat beskryf word: in "God complex" is daar 'n verwysing na manne wat die spreker "genadiglik nek omdraai soos ek nooit kon nie" en in "Daar is niks soos ware liefde" word die beeld van 'n roдео gebruik vir die gewillige blootstelling aan seksuele geweld. Daar is egter ook elemente van sadisme in die spreker, soos in "On the rebound" waarin die spreker sy minnaars nie net fisies nie, maar "ook woordeliks goed opfok".

Die ambivalensies en kompleksiteite van die liefde word saamgevat in die pa-

radoksale beeld van die liefde as 'n "sagte slagveld". Die mespunt waarop gee en neem, vryheid en inperking in verhoudings balanseer, blyk uit die volgende kwatryn uit "Domestic bliss":

In jou ribbekas se kou
word 'n blouvalkharthart gehou.
Ek voer hom repies vleis,
maar hy vra my troetelmuis.

Ook die gedig "Might he but moor tonight in me" (31), wat verwys na Emily Dickinson se "Wild nights! Wild nights", vertel iets van die getraumatiseerde besitlikheid waarmee die spreker telkens sy minnaar groet: hy is die hawe waarin sy "skeepvaarder-lover" tuis kom, maar van waar hy ook weer "die oop waters invaar".

Die behoefte aan gedomestikeerde geluksaligheid, die pogings tot vestiging, koestering en beveiliging, word telkens in hierdie afdeling afgespeel teenoor die drang om daaruit weg te breek. In "Bed" word die nesmaak-behoefte byvoorbeeld afgeweer teenoor die behoefte om petrol oor die bed te gooi en dit af te brand soos 'n wilgeboom wat vervuil is van vinkneste. Terugskouend is die afdelingstitel "Vuisneste" dus 'n samevatting van die geweld wat daar sluimer in die mees koesterende en intieme samesyn.

In die derde afdeling, "Rakende", kom mense en gebeure buite die private kring van familie en verhoudings aan bod, soos byvoorbeeld 'n bekende Siamese tweeling wat 'n lewer gedeel het ("Chang Bunker aan sy Siamese broer, Eng"), 'n grusame vonds in Meksiko ("Drie koolkoppe"), die gewelddadige moord op Juliet Haw ("Dood van 'n redakteur") en 'n non wat

haarself aan die brand gestee het in protes teen die Chinese besetting van Tibet ("Brandende non"). Effens uit die patroon van hierdie gedigte wat uitwaarts beweeg, is 'n gedig oor die broer se religieuse oplewing ("Born-again") en die liedjie oor onbeskermd seks ("Barebacking.com") wat dan gevolg word deur 'n gebed ("Vir spys en drank") wat daarop gemik is om iemand "wie se ribbene / sedert sy diagnose maergesuig word van binne" te kry om te eet. Op 'n manier wat herinner aan Johann de Lange se werk word die gedwonge voeding van ganse deur 'n buis of "gavage" om hulle lewer vet te maak, gekombineer met die religieuse simbool van die kruis. Dit skakel op sy beurt met die gedig oor die Siamese tweeling Chang en Eng Bunker, wat eindig met Chang se woorde: "Vir jou huil ek deur my lewer".

Soos reeds gesê, neem die eerste gedig in die vierde afdeling "Dryf" weer die motief van die krap op. In aansluiting by die beeld van die digter en gedig as krap, suggereer die gedig "Mondwerk" dat die digter ook 'n seekat kan wees wat sy lesers "onder ink steek" soos wat 'n mens iemand "onder klippe" kan steek. Dit is dus nie vreemd dat dié see-dier se gedig in 'n vreemde, afwykende taal geskryf sal wees nie, vergelyk "brok krolg di sega en swee krameruur, / bram kor di mafe hor brek krak rebuur". Dit is reëls wat die digter se skatpligtigheid aan Peter Blum se gedig "Man wat mal word" verraai (net soos die woord "foknawyf" in "On the rebound").

Ook opvallend is die elegiese toon van sommige van die gedigte in hierdie laaste afdeling, byvoorbeeld die gedigte "Wakend", "'n Vakansiefoto van jou,

hande agter die rug" en "Cow's skull with calico roses", wat elk spreek van kwesbaarheid, afstroping en verlies. Die laaste twee gedigte sluit die bundel af deur terug te keer na die motiewe van die see en die krap. In "See" word daar eksplisiet verwys na die see as die buik of moer waaruit alles voortkom en "watergraf" waarheen alles weer terugkeer. Die slotgedig "Mosambiek" teken 'n toneel waarin die spreker "voel [...] hoe die wêreld moontlik/sou kon terugtrek soos die oseaan / met laagwater, 'n krap in sy nuwe dop". Die see, die laagwater en die krap word hier bymekaar gebring vir die afsluiting van die bundel waarin die ek homself gereed maak om in 'n klein holte in te kruip en daar te wag op die gety om hom "die stroming in te dra". In 'n sekere sin voltooi hierdie moment van selfopheffing en opgaan in die see se ritme van gaan en keer die narratiewe boog wat met die eerste afdeling begin het.

Met *Krap uit die see* slaag Fourie Botha die gevreesde toets van die tweede bundel: dit is 'n waardige voortsetting van sy eerste bundel en oortref dit selfs deur die groter samehang en subtiele bindings tussen die gedigte en motiewe, die deeglike uitwerk van bepaalde metafore en die onopgesmukke taal wat desnieteenstaande diep sny. Dit is 'n bundel wat sonder groot vertoon en omhaal 'n besonder veelduidige boodskap oordra.

Louise Viljoen
lv@sun.ac.za
Universiteit Stellenbosch
Stellenbosch

Skepelinge. Aanloop tot 'n roman.

Karel Schoeman. Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 2017. 576 pp.

ISBN: 978079817610.

DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4376](https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4376)

Karel Schoeman het 'n onskatbare bydrae gelewer tot die Afrikaanse romankuns en historiografie. In sy boek *Skepelinge. Aanloop tot 'n roman* is daar 'n verbinding van die twee genres—"Skepelinge" dui op die historiese aard van die boek, maar die newetitel suggereer dat dit iets romanmatig bevat. Die vroeë hoofstuk "Dieptes" herinner aan die inleiding van die roman *Verliesfontein*, waar vertel word van die luister na nouliks hoorbare stemme, 'n literêre verhaal oor die afdaal in die persoonlike en die kollektiewe onbewuste. Hierdie afdaal is 'n pynlike proses wat duisterhede onthul. In die woorde van Jung: "Hoe dieper ek kom [...] des te vreemder en donkerder het ek geword" (13).

In 'n latere hoofstuk, getitel "Die versonke wêreld", is daar 'n versmelting van die eerstepersoons- en derdepersoonsvorm – die "hy" van die geskiedenis word verbind met die "ek" van die verteller. Die leser word op 'n reis geneem wat sowel "uitwaarts" gaan na historiese figure as "inwaarts" na die psige van die verteller/skrywer. 'n Fiktiewe karakter word geskep, saamgestel uit verskillende historiese figure, geskep deur die verbeelding van die skrywer. Geheue, verbeelding en inbeelding word tot 'n hegte eenheid verbind.

Ná die subjektiewe begin word die relaas meer histories. Daar word vertel van

die voorgeskiedenis van die koloniste aan die Kaap: die werwing van VOC-werkers, en vervolgens 'n uitgebreide vertelling van die verskriklike reise na die Kaap. Die verskillende tipes 'skepelinge' word van mekaar onderskei: die elite wat in relatief aangename omstandighede reis, teenoor die matrose en soldate wat die haglike toestande op die reis moet verduur. Nie sonder rede nie, word die reise met Dante se "Inferno" vergelyk, en selfs met die Nazi-konsentrasiekampe (171–2, 256). Schoeman se kennis van hierdie voorgeskiedenis van die Kaapse kolonie is verstommend; sy beskouings word met vele aanhalings bevestig.

Hierna word oorgegaan tot die geskiedenis van die VOC-werknemers aan die Kaap. Veel van die verlede het verlore gegaan, en dikwels is dit net name wat oorbly, name wat nou in 'n tipe litanie opgeroep word (346–7); maar soms kom meer as name na vore, want die die verlede is soos 'n palimpsest: "die plek waar die letters weggeskraap is [bly] sigbaar, en by ultravioletlig kan die ou teks nog altyd gelees word" (449). In Schoeman se weergawe van die gebeure aan die Kaap word klem gelê op die onreg en wreedheid van die koloniste. Dit is 'n reaksie teen die verheerliking van die geskiedenis in die ouer Afrikaanse geskiedskrywing:

Hoe gretig word, waar die geleentheid hom voordoen, nie altyd nog charades opgevoer nie, in figuurlike sowel as letterlike sin, met hoepelrokke en bepluimde hoede, sykouse, silwergepes en fladderende waaiers, wat dan as die verlede aangebied word; dog dit is

wensdenkery, nie werklikheid nie [...] Dit is die Kaapse verlede hierdie, dit is die voorgangers en die pioniers, die voorgeslag, hierdie ongewaste, onwelriekende bende van die oorloopdek (271–2).

Die boek is negatief oor die Afrikanerverlede en somber oor die hede en die toekoms. Die koloniste van die VOC was indringers in 'n land wat hulle nie verwelkom het nie; hulle het in aanraking gekom met inheemse inwoners wat hulle (tereg) as 'n bedreiging beskou het; hulle het beland in 'n wêreld waar wedersydse angs en geweld die verhouding tussen die groepe gekenmerk het.

Die leser mag in 'n stadium dink dat Schoeman darem te eensydig is in sy sienings, dat hy slegs melding maak van goeie mense wat daar was (237) sonder om verder aandag aan hulle te gee. Maar dit is belangrik om te onthou dat die skrywer meer as een keer daarop wys dat sy weergawe van die geskiedenis subjektief is. Herhaaldelik maak hy melding van sy slapelose nagte; wat hy in die boek weergee, is die dinge wat hom in die nagte kwel—'n verlede vol onreg en wreedheid wat sy vingerafdrukke op die hede gelaat het. Aan die begin van die boek word die doel van die vertelling genoem: die soeke na sin, die geloof en die hoop dat alles nie verniet was nie (42). Maar hy kom tot die slotsom dat sy soektog na sin niks opgelewer het nie:

Net **ék, slaaploos in die donker, luis-**terend na die stemme, weet nog van hierdie dinge, net ek hoor nog die stemme en luister nog daarna; dog ook **ék** kan geen sin in die gebeure vind, kan nie eers meer probeer voorgee dat

dit eens sin besit het nie, so klaarblyklik is dit nié die geval nie. (454)

manskrywer Schoeman sal in *Skepelinge* 'n boek van besondere waarde vind.

En tog, soos wat 'n mens by Schoeman verwag, is die boek nie sonder ambivalensie, ironie en verborge moontlikhede nie. Dis 'n boek van afskeid, van spore wat doodgereën het, van 'n skrywerslewe wat sy doel verloor het (528); dit herinner aan die skrywer se beëindiging van sy lewe net nà die voltooiing van die manuskrip. En tog het hy met hierdie boek verskeie mense uit die vergetelheid ontruk en aan hulle 'n blywende tekstu-ele bestaan gebied (487); ook sal sy naam voortleef in die tekste wat hy geskep het. Alles was dus nie sinloos nie.

Sinloosheid is wel dominant in die persoonlike en kollektiewe geskiedenis, en tog is daar ander maniere waarop na die geskiedenis gekyk kan word: "Hiér bestaan die moontlikheid van 'n alternatief, 'n keuse, nie wat betref die gegewe, die gebeurde nie, want dit is onherroeplik, maar in die manier waarop dit opgeroep en ondersoek word" (475). Sy siening van die geskiedenis is dus nie die enigste moontlike een nie: "'n Draai van die silinder, 'n halwe draai, en 'n volkome nuwe patroon ontstaan, al bly die skyfies in werklikheid dieselfde" (477).

Dalk kan hierdie land dalk wees soos die Hartbeesrivier, wat vir die reisiger droog mag voorkom, maar wat, tipies van die riviere van Afrika, met verborge waters verbind is: "Subterranean streams of water pass under most of them in this part of Africa" (531).

Lesers wat in die VOC-geskiedenis belangstel **én aanhangers van die ro-**

Chris van der Merwe
chris.vandermerwe@uct.ac.za
Universiteit van Kaapstad
Kaapstad

Die reis gaan inwaarts: Die kuns van sterwe in kreatiewe werke van Karel Schoeman.

Cas Wepener. Stellenbosch: Sun MeDIA MeTRO. Druknaam: SUN PRESS, 2017. 233 pp. ISBN: 978-1-928355-14-4 (Druk); ISBN: 979-1-928355-15-1 (e-boek).

DOI: dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.4279

“Ten dele staan Schoeman se hele kreatiewe oeuvre in diens van die (afwesigheid van) inwaartse reis van die Afrikaners.” (185) Met hierdie kragtige stelling gee Cas Wepener ‘n sleutel vir die dubbelsinnige verhouding van afstand en intimiteit tussen Afrikaans se grootste romansier en sy primêre lesersgehoor. In hoeveel ander kultuurgemeenskappe gebeur dit dat hulle grootste romansier deur so min mense gelees word? Kan dit wees dat daardie Afrikaners wat Schoeman se fiksie waardeur juis dié is wat self die reis inwaarts aangepak het, en dat hulle maar ‘n klein minderheid is in ‘n gemeenskap gefikseer daarop om “prakties” te wees? Stellig, ja.

En wat is dan die inwaartse reis? “Ten diepste is dit ‘n reis wat behels dat iets van die tydelikheid van die mens se bestaan beter verstaan word, dat daardie kennis ‘n persoon se optrede gevolglik kleur wat verder ook bepalend is vir hoe

hy of sy hulle eie sterflikheid en dood en die van ander hanteer.” (194–5)

Wepener sluit in hierdie boek aan by ‘n eeue-oue opvatting dat die goeie lewe afhang van die erkenning van ons sterflikheid. Lewenskuns is belangrik, ja, maar so ook die kuns om te sterwe. In die Middeleeuse Latynse Christendom word die kuns om te sterwe en die oordeelkundige begeleiding van om te sterwe die *ars moriendi*. Wepener vra aan die hand van hoofsaaklik drie Schoeman-romans na wat dit ons leer van die *ars moriendi* en kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat dit afhang van die mate waartoe die een wat sterf en die een wat die sterfte begelei die reis inwaarts beoefen: “Dit is die karakters wat iets kan aanvoel en insgelyks beliggaam oor die misterie van die lewe en die dood en dat dood en lewe nie noodwendig teenoor mekaar staan nie, maar dat sterwe, afhangende van hoe dit hanteer word, juis ook die lewe kan dien deur heil en genesing te bring.” (194)

Dit is welbekend dat die kontemplatiewe lewe soos beliggaam in die Katolisisme en die Zen-Boeddhisme die twee grootste vormingselemente van Schoeman se eie lewens- en romankuns was. As sodanig kan Schoeman gewoon nie bloot sekulêr geles word nie. Wepener, teoloog en dosent in Liturgie en Homiletiek, lewer daarom ‘n kritieke bydrae tot die sekondêre literatuur oor Schoeman deur in te lees op hoe Schoeman in sy fiksie omgaan met die lewe en die dood as allereers ‘n geestelike saak. As iemand wat self in die bediening eerste-hands met dood en verlies te doen gekry het, weet Wepener al te goed dat die er-

varing van verlies en sy blywende wonde die onvermydelike vertrekpunt van die reis inwaarts is, selfs vir die simpatieke sterwensbegeleiers en -vertroosters: “Die gewonde genesers van hierdie wêreld, die buitestandere wat die stilte omhels en die halflied van die skadu verkies, diegene wat (noodgedwonge) inwaarts reis, word deur Schoeman in sy karakters as beter genesers in die pastorale sin van die woord uitgebeeld wat insgelyks geld vir die wyse waarop hulle liturgies voorgaan.” (197)

Wepener wys tereg daarop dat Schoeman se skryfstyl in soverre dit “inkanterend” (65), ritmies en herhalend is, inderdaad ook skryf-as-liturgie is. Ook dat die landskap met sy seisoenale herhaling self ‘n wesentlike element in Schoeman liturgiese, doodsbeswerende romankuns is. Met verwysing na Augustinus se uitspraak dat die liturgie “die steierwerk is vir die hemelse stad waarop gehoop word,” het Wepener dit soos volg oor Schoeman se hantering van die landskap as liturgiese element: “Só word die moontlikheid geskep dat die klipstapels en grafstene, die geknakte suile, kinderengele en ringmure wat verspreid oor die Vrystaat lê, inderdaad ook deel is van daardie steierwerk. Deel van die steierwerk van die stad waarheen die aardse reis lei, ‘n reis wat inwaarts gaan tot by die stad van God, is die onverbiddelike landskap van die Vrystaat en die Karoo waarin baie saadkorrels lê en waaroor wolke drywe.” (202) Daarom, tereg, is om Schoeman te lees ‘n liturgiese handeling wat ‘n liturgiese ingesteldheid van die leser soos van die erediensganger vra

(214). Wie Schoeman so lees, kan getuig daarvan dat dit reeds 'n reis inwaarts is wat die leser nie onveranderd laat nie, welke verandering dikwels die eintlike verhaal van 'n Schoeman-roman is.

In sy boek doen Wepener heelwat moeite om eerstens 'n deeglike opgaaf te gee van die vertolkingsraamwerk waarbinne hy Schoeman lees. Grimes se opvatting van fiksie as ritueel is hier 'n belangrike verwysing. Deurgaans gee Wepener eweneens deeglike rekenskap van die uitgebreide sekondêre literatuur oor Schoeman – en nie slegs waar dit Wepener se vertolking staaf nie.

Vervolgens word hoofsaaklik drie Schoeman-romans so gelees om aan te dui dat die betrokke buitestander met 'n spesifieke verhouding met hierdie land eerder as die konvensionele geestelike lui dikwels die *ars moriendi* die beste verstaan. Meester van 'n *Lug vol helder wolke*, Pastoor Scheffler van 'n *Ander land*, en ds. Heyns en Danie Steenkamp in *Die uur van die engel* word so deur Wepener gelees, en op heel oortuigende wyse.

So verdienstelik en hoogs leesbaar as wat Wepener se roerende boek is, moet minstens die drie punte van kritiek in die voortgaande gesprek oor Schoeman vermeld word — teologies, takserend en taalkundig.

Wat die teologiese betref: In navolging van Richard Kearney wil Wepener dit hê dat die pasvermelde karakters as onkonvensionele geestelike lui voorbeelde van Kearney se "anateïsme" is: "Anateïsme sluit nou aan by die posteïsme waarin God weer 'n moontlikheid word nadat daar van die God van die

teïsme afskeid geneem is." (75n, 81) Dingemans word met instemming oor die teïsme aangehaal: "In die teïsme word "God als 'persoon' in een hoge hemel, die supernaturalisties ingrijpt in die wêreld (sic)" gesien en ook "als het 'dubbeldekkermodel', waarbij God losstaat van deze wêreld" (81). Wepener et al. is skynbaar onbewus van De Lubac se werk oor hoe "teïsme" die gevolg is van 'n laat-skolastiese skeiding tussen die sferes van die genade (die bonatuurlike) en die natuur (die natuurlike)—'n moderne teologiese groeisel wat afwyk van die patristiese personalisme waarvolgens God as Persoon anderkant die syn deurgaans ten nouste betrokke bly by die skepping, by hierdie wêreld en ook by hierdie land. Mymeringe van sowel Scheffler as Heyns gee ruim blyke hiervan, wat veel oortuigender is as Kearney se postmoderne verbeeldingsvlug.

Takserend: Terwyl Wepener deurgaans dikwels skryf in 'n register wat Schoeman eggo, is hy soms helaas geneig tot wat Schoeman as stilistiese doodsonde geag het, naamlik oorbeklemtone. Die prominentste voorbeeld hiervan is Wepener se Nawoord, waarin hy betoog wat die waarde van sy boek dalk mag wees. Daar is 'n rede waarom simfonieë en kamerkonserterte eindig by die slotbeweging, en vir my het hierdie nawoord lomp en oorbodig aangedoen.

Taalkundig: Wie oor Schoeman wil skryf, behoort dieselfde respek vir taal as hy te openbaar. Slordige taalkundige afronding ondermyn Wepener se boek as liturgiese handeling. Voorbeelde sluit in: "oom Barend" (76) / "Oom Barend" (77);

“verdermeer” pleks van “bowendien”;
“argumenteer” pleks van “betoog”,
“redeneer” of “voer aan”; “Marelene”
pleks van “Marlene”; “lintjie”/ “lyntjie”
(101); “Oom Lammie”/ “Lammies” (160).
En een van die grootste slotsinne in die
Afrikaanse prosa, naamlik dié van ‘n
Ander land, word verkeerd aangehaal:
“Half-verweë” (102) pleks van die kor-
rekte: “Halwerweë op die pad ontdek jy
effens verras dat die reis voltooi is, en die
bestemming reeds bereik.”

Hierdie kritiek ten spyt lewer Cas
Wepener met hierdie boek ‘n meesleur-
ende, dikwels roerende bydrae om
Afrikaans se groot begeleier op die reis
inwaarts liturgies te herhaal.

Johann Rossouw

rossouwjh@ufs.ac.za

Universiteit van die Vrystaat

Bloemfontein