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## Cultural conflict and shifting identities in Stephen Black's *The Dorp* (1920)

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This article deals with journalist, dramatist and novelist Stephen Black's *The Dorp* (1920), a novel which I regard as the earliest example of what I have named the small-town novel sub-genre of the South African English novel. Other early examples of the small-town novel are *Willemsdorp* by H.C. Bosman, *The Mask* by C. L. Leipoldt and *Too Late the Phalarope* by Alan Paton. Black satirizes the goings-on in a typical South African town called Unionstad. The name of the town reveals the novel's threefold thematic impulse: an allegorical evocation of the Union Period (1910–48) in South Africa; an ironic-satirical thrust (the Union period was one of increasing political polarization and ultimately, an idealistic vision of cultural-political reconciliation. Unionstad, like the towns in the novels mentioned above, is portrayed as a microcosm of the national macrocosm. *The Dorp* reveals the ill effects of historical events such as the Boer War and the 1914 Rebellion, specifically the animosity that it created between English and Afrikaner townspeople. Black's keen awareness and representation of how the political turmoil in the country impacts on the lives of ordinary people and how town culture reflects key aspects of a bigger problem, are the main strengths of the novel. Black's vision for reconciliation is symbolized by the union in marriage of Anita van Ryn, the mayor's daughter and Ned Oakley, the English shopkeeper's son. **Keywords:** Afrikaner nationalism, small-town novel, South African literature, Stephen Black.

### Stephen Black, literary pioneer

Stephen Black's novel *The Dorp* (1920) is one of a body of fictional works that have unjustifiably suffered critical neglect in South Africa. This is an unfortunate circumstance because a close reading of these texts<sup>1</sup> reveals that they evoke important political and cultural shifts in South African society in a historically revealing and artistically achieved manner. In 1981, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Stephen Black's death, literary historiographer Stephen Gray published articles on his work as well as a selection of his journalistic writings.<sup>2</sup> Another commemorative event saw one of Black's plays, *Helena's Hope Ltd.*, performed by the drama students of the University of the Witwatersrand. The text appeared in print for the first time in 1984 when Gray published a collection titled *Three Plays*, which contained three of Black's plays. It appears that Black's literary legacy is indeed important: that his ruthless exposés of societal ills in South Africa may have inspired South African playwrights such as Athol Fugard and Pieter-Dirk Uys. His influence on the work of his protégé, short story writer Herman Charles Bosman, can be traced with some certainty.

Recognition for Black's novel *The Dorp* is limited to passing comments in literary historiographies, for example in Christopher Heywood's *A History of South African Literature* (114). He regards Black as the leader of a group of writers who satirized the effects of the 1910 Union constitution with increasing severity. The historical backdrop of the majority of Black's work is the momentous early Union period in South Africa. The move towards the union of the four colonies—the two former Boer Republics of the Free State and the Transvaal and the British Colonies of the Cape and Natal—followed the departure of the British High Commissioner Alfred Lord Milner and his entourage of imperial-minded officials, nicknamed 'Milner's Kindergarten.' After having grudgingly washed his hands of the British Liberal government's decision to introduce self-rule within the colony, Milner decided to return home. "It was," he declared, "hopeless from the first to try and make a good job of South Africa for the British people." (Giliomee 274)

Meanwhile, South Africans began to rally around the idea of a home-grown South African identity, an idea which was cautiously explored in the literatures of both official languages, English and Afrikaans. With regard to Stephen Black's plays, Mervyn Woodrow (44) remarks that Black's "intuitive stage technique, and an ability to handle the comic situation in particular," ensured his success as a playwright. Irrespective of genre, Black's liberal humanistic sensibilities unwaveringly responded to societal aberrations such as snobbery, pretence and racial intolerance.

In the light of positive reports such as the above, the descent into obscurity of Stephen Black's contribution to South African literature is a confounding circumstance indeed. Today his name has all but disappeared from the public sphere. It remains only in academia and paper documentation in archives.<sup>3</sup> It would appear, though, that the reason for this lamentable situation is not entirely obscure. During Black's lifetime he was personally able to revive his dramatic scripts intermittently up to 1929 for every new season. He kept audience interest alive by continually updating the contents of these scripts as a result of which no 'master' copy was ever prepared for publication. "The recovery of his art and its meaning," Gray says, "is hampered by these and other factors, not least of which is the prejudice that there could not have been a golden age of South African drama if we never heard of it." (23)

### ***The Dorp* (1920)**

In addition to his satirical dramatic scripts, Black wrote three novels, and these have similarly been relegated to near extinction. Two of these were published in Britain: *The Dorp* in 1920 and *The Golden Calf* in 1925. A third novel, "Limelight," about life in the arts, remains unpublished to this day. Reasons for the literary-historiographical neglect of Black's novels, and notably his first novel *The Dorp*, may only be guessed at. For one thing, satirical prose was not part of a familiar school of writing in South

African English literature. Also, if Black's popular plays had been available in print, his novels may have enjoyed contiguous recognition.

In *The Dorp* Black's dramatization of the goings on in a typical South African town sheds light on, as Christopher Heywood (25) says, "a conflict between classes, exacerbated by the concentration of power, land and wealth in a conglomerate of white races." He goes on to say that this era, the concluding phase of white dominance and literary resistance, found a point of focus in Afrikaner patriotism, which tended to exclude other communities following British aggression in the war of 1899. The generic slant of the novel's title demonstrates Black's intention to emphasize the broader social implications of the South African dorp as microcosm.

In the novel Black expounds the cultural intricacies of post-Boer War society in South Africa. He relates the human story of relations between Afrikaner and English townsmen in a town called Unionstad, a name which reveals the novel's threefold thematic impulse: an allegorical evocation of the Union Period (1910–48) in South Africa; an ironic-satirical thrust (the Union period was one of increasing political polarization); and, ultimately, an idealistic vision of cultural-political reconciliation. The novel's action begins shortly after the establishment of the Union of South Africa. Tension and strife marks the relations between the two political factions in town, the Hertzog supporters (of the National Party—nicknamed the Nats) and the Smuts supporters (the ruling South African Party, nicknamed the Sappers).<sup>4</sup>

Black provides valuable insights into Unionstad's cultural and administrative organization, which form the backdrop for the novel's plot. Unionstad is a typical South African town. It serves as the political, religious and commercial centre of the surrounding rural community. The social and political groupings within the town are equally representative of the national ethno-cultural patterns in the way that they function according to rigid social divisions. These groupings—namely, the imperialist colonials, the imperial-minded Afrikaners, the nationalist Afrikaners and, peripherally, the Jews, Indians and the black community—are fictionally represented by characters who are readily recognizable as stock dorp types. The name of the town (Unionstad), which the newspaperman character O'Flinnigan dubs a "race-ridden" (7) dorp, is aptly ironic in that it foregrounds the portentous ticking of the race time-bomb during the equally ironically misnamed Union period. Although the term 'race,' in the context of the novel's portrayal of the realities of the day, refers to relations between Afrikaner and English townsmen, the reader remains aware of Black's sensitivity to the imbalances of the broader social picture. Interestingly, this particular aspect of the novel is emphasized in a contemporaneous review in the English weekly newspaper *The New Age* (20 May 1920). The anonymous reviewer says:

Dorp politics are what we should call in English "parish pump politics," but they have more significance than our local government scandals because they are complicated by and are representative of the racial problems of South Africa. Against

a background of “the black menace,” which so many South Africans fear without attempting to conciliate, Mr. Black shows the embittered enmity of the Boer and English races [...]. (47)

To return to the novel’s action, Black makes his satirical intention clear from the outset. Growing enmity between the Nats and the Sappers come to a head at a Town Council meeting in the Town Hall. Black skilfully utilizes the Town Council meeting to familiarize the reader with the entire spectrum of small-town social dynamics. Political polarization associated with nascent Nationalism is becoming evident. Patriotic sentiments of townspeople who supported the Boer side during the war are pitted against loyalism. Because strong feelings run high, this sort of gathering brings out the worst in so-called respected citizens of the dorp. Decorum is cast aside and true colours are revealed.

The Town Council meeting offers a revealing glimpse of exactly how life operates in a typical post-Boer War South African town. The character Barend Oosthuisen and his friend Johannes van Ryn, the Mayor of Unionstad, make no bones about their contempt for the jingoists amongst the Afrikaans-speaking community. Barend finds himself in a predicament when he is compelled to greet Koos Ferreira, his brother-in-law. He tries to explain himself to the mayor, who feels that familial sentiments should not be considered. According to the latter, Koos and his cronies are “*smeerlappe* (filth) with King George and the Union Jack stuck all over them” (Black 5). The pro-British members of the community (Koenraad Du Plessis, P. Son and Jacobus (Koos) Ferreira) are equally insulting about their opponents, whom they in turn suspect of “plotting against the Empire and the Flag” (6). Black points out the irony of the situation when the latter group, who “pride[d] themselves as being leaders of progress and enlightenment in Unionstad” (6), display exactly the same kind of prejudice as their adversaries.

In this respect J. A. Kearney (36) proposes that the chief basis of Black’s satire is that opposing parties are only superficially different and that, “[l]ike almost all the white inhabitants in general, both sides are guilty of meanness, hypocrisy, double standards, economic greed, pretensions and ignorance.”

Following the mud-slinging incident just before the commencement of the Town Council meeting, a succinct description of the atmosphere in the Town hall emphasises the novel’s message regarding the possible broader implications of town politics: “A strained feeling of expectancy, almost a hush, was in the air—one felt that some profound sensation was on the *tapis*; that this meeting of the Unionstad Town Council would have an important bearing on the political future of South Africa, and not improbably modify or even alter the Constitution” (12). The statement suggests that, as chaotic and ludicrous as they are, political activities in the typical South African dorp are small-scale barometers, even determinants, of wider political trends.

The black community's 'privileges' (black location residential areas on the outskirts of South African dorps were the most obvious symbol of racial separatism) is the next point on the Town Council agenda. It is introduced by the Unionstad Mayor as follows:

"[...] to consider an application (styled 'a petition') from 800 coloured people in the location who want the Council's permission to play cricket, football and lawn tennis—lawn tennis, if you please!—on the Town Lands. The General Purposes Committee advised against it."

"*Allemach*," remarked a Councillor, "these niggers are getting more insolent every day."

"I move," said Du Plessis, "that permission be refused *nem. con.*"

"Hear, hear," cried Ferreira.

But Councillor Willem Achteruit, long-haired and sleepy-looking, angrily rose to his feet and said,

"Mr. Mayor, why is Councillor Du Plessis talking about military matters again?"

"Mr. Mayor, I said nothing of a military nature."

"You did," shouted his opponent; "You talked about sending 'non-coms' to the Kafirs!"

Every one roared with laughter while the Town Clerk explained to the interrupter what *nemine contradicente* meant. (19)

In this passage Black tacitly draws a parallel between the unkempt, illiterate councillor, Achteruit (literally meaning 'backward') and the Coloured location people who have managed to 'style' a petition.

As a matter of fact, the native question is raised on many occasions in the novel. This makes Black one of the few white writers of the time to reveal insight into racial discrimination and the possible future implications of avoiding the real issues pertaining to it. Whilst it is true that Black focuses mainly on relations between Afrikaners and British in the novel, he makes his stance regarding racial prejudice sufficiently clear throughout.

### **Representative and shifting identities**

During the Town Council meeting the mayor makes mention of "those who dislike the Dutch language"—an observation that rings true in relation to the sentiments of British immigrants such as the town shopkeeper, Tom Oakley. Oakley is as openly intolerant of the Dutch as they are of him. He still thinks of England as 'home' and dislikes the weather and the customs of his adopted country. Ironically, he calls the Boers "a narrowminded (sic) lot of brutes" (32). Black is at pains elsewhere in the novel to point out similar ironies regarding small-minded attitudes on all sides. When

it comes to bias and prejudice there is, he proposes, very little difference between Boers and Englishmen—such as, for example, the mayor and Old Oakley.

Ned Oakley, one of the main characters in the novel, stands in stark contrast to his father, shopkeeper Tom Oakley. It is mainly Ned's character who exemplifies Black's vision of an 'ideal' society from which a new South African identity may emerge. Black juxtaposes the latter part of his narrative in which an ideal situation develops—symbolized by the romance between Ned and Anita, the mayor's daughter—with the strife and discord in the dorp in the first part of the novel.

Ned Oakley works in his father's general dealer's store purchased some years before. Despite his father's personal prejudices, Ned somehow manages to be well liked by the Boers, who sell their produce to the store and then buy back supplies such as groceries and hardware. Black recounts how business concerns such as the Oakleys' are negatively affected by the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). Tom Oakley, however, privately feels that "[he] was more than repaid by loss of business for those feelings of race-pride which he enjoyed at the apparent subjugation of the Boers" (28). After the peace negotiations and the formation of the Union of South Africa, when "the Lion had lain down with the Springbok" (as Black [28] mischievously adapts from the Bible), business returns to normal.

As mentioned, Ned Oakley's views are more moderate than his father's: "Born and brought up in South Africa, he spoke Dutch fluently, and was able to understand the Boer point of view, almost to the point of sympathising with it. Pride of race, however, kept him English. It was a sentiment stronger than his reason [...]" (31). Ned's English sentiments compel him to take sides when the Boer Rebellion (1914) breaks out and he goes off to join the British forces, which subsequently crush the revolt.

Meanwhile, as Afrikaner Nationalism in the country is on the upsurge, Tom Oakley's barely concealed, uncompromising attitudes towards the Boers become increasingly intolerable and the latter start to withdraw their business in favour of the Indian shopkeeper, Mahomet, who opens his *winkel* "at the opportune moment that [generals] Hertzog and Botha's political differences were beginning to split the Boers into two bitter factions." (34)

Mahomet is a member of the fringe communities of the dorp. So is the Jew, Schlimowitz. Black reveals how they (do not) fit into the rigid social order of dorp culture. The townspeople regard Jews and Indians as impostors and place them just above the Blacks and Coloureds on the rungs of the societal ladder. They are tolerated merely for their business acumen. Black, however, demonstrates how, when Boer and Briton quarrel, the Jew and the Indian walk off with the spoils: Mahomet ingratiates himself with the townspeople by handing out chocolate to their children and by supporting *all* his customers' political views. Black satirically expounds Mahomet's 'business philosophy' when dealing with black location customers:

For not only were the inhabitants of the location increasing far more rapidly than the white population, but they were acquiring new and expensive tastes which had to be gratified. No matter how hot it was, imitation of the white man and his cold-country clothing compelled the blacks to wear full and expensive suits, hats, boots, ties, collars and the other useless foppery of civilization. Mahomet supplied it all. He treated his black customers as deferentially as his white—when the latter were not there—and like the parliamentary candidate's wife, he never neglected the babies. (45)

The Jew's name, Schlimowitz, which plays on the Afrikaans word *slim* ('clever / cunning'), is significant in the context of Black's critique of the townspeople's attitude towards aliens. A strong emotional bias prevails when it comes to dealing with Jews. This is confirmed when the Town Council deals with the application for the use of the Town Hall by one Horace Hashem's travelling dramatic company (here Black, presumably, draws on his own dramatic troupe's experience). The glaring hypocrisy of blaming the Jew for providing 'ungodly' entertainment is Black's cue to take a stab at the selective morality and double standards pervading town culture. Town Council member Kaspar van Koeker protests as follows:

"Mr Chairman, what guarantees have we got that a wholesome and godly form of entertainment will be provided? Have we the right to risk corrupting our children by allowing these licentious actors with their Reviews in our Town Hall? In this show, 'East Lynne,' a Minister of God is held up to ridicule ..."

Here he was interrupted by the Mayor: "It's not a minister, it's a policeman and another villain."

"I saw this play in Johannesburg," persisted the Councillor. "It was a minister they made fun of ... if he hadn't been Church of England I'd have walked out." (22)

However, when advance payment—a cheque for five guineas—is presented, all objections are withdrawn! Black allows the reader to draw his/her own conclusions about the councillor's claims to 'understanding theatre.' He thus portrays—as a foil and to expose the folly of townspeople's prejudices—outsider characters who are automatically pushed to the margin of dorp society for no other reason than their difference.

Meanwhile, the Oakleys realize that their financial predicament needs to be addressed. Ned suggests to his father that a buyer should be found for their business in order to prevent imminent liquidation. He approaches the local attorney, Johannes van Ryn, who holds several mortgages on farms whose owners owe the shop large sums of money, and asks him to make an offer for the shop.<sup>5</sup> During a visit to Van Ryn Ned renews his childhood acquaintance with Van Ryn's daughter, Anita, and is immediately attracted to her. Van Ryn, if only to curb the Indian's financial greed,

takes over the General Dealer's Store from Tom Oakley on the condition that Ned stays on as manager in order to secure the patronage of the English clientele.

Stephen Black thus skilfully depicts various scenarios typifying post-war society in the Union of South Africa. Black's fictional dorp locale is not only distinctively South African (as the title suggests) but accurately registers, on a microcosmic scale, societal shifts and broader political developments. National history is in fact played out on the stage of the dorp microcosm. Black's story closely traces momentous historical landmarks: the Boer War, the formation of the Union of South Africa, the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism (the split between Hertzog and Botha is often referred to) and the 1914 Boer Rebellion (which broke out in protest to the Botha government's support for the British war effort in World War I in German South West Africa) and how these events impact on the lives of ordinary townspeople. Black further dramatizes his vision that better times may be in store. His hope that an ideal society may be possible after all is embodied in the romance that develops between Ned Oakley and Anita van Ryn.<sup>6</sup>

The "miserable business of the Rebellion", as Anita laments (52), creates yet a deeper rift among the ranks of Unionstad's white inhabitants. Black, however, is careful not to pass judgement. Instead, he shifts his focus to the newspaperman O'Flinnigan, who may be regarded as Black's alter ego in the story. Through the newspaper editor's character the fragility of the political situation in the dorp becomes apparent. O'Flinnigan's grappling with a personal predicament that may compromise his professional neutrality is an effective narrative device that reveals both sides of the politically polarized situation in the dorp. O'Flinnigan is painfully aware that the Boer Rebellion is a sensitive issue requiring him to tread carefully in order not to disturb the precarious balance in which his position in the town hangs.

O'Flinnigan's reportage on the war in Europe, nevertheless, reveals a leaning towards 'King and Country' and, when he discovers his *faux pas*, he decides to take temporary leave of his duties. Realizing that this step may confirm suspicions about his real reasons he writes, on his return, the following article in which he cunningly manipulates the situation in his favour:

To create discord, dissension and strife between the people of Unionstad is neither our aim nor our function. On the contrary, we desire to see everybody living in concord, harmony and peace, so that the glorious inheritance of our forefathers, this Land of Hope and Glory, may become our Destiny, a Promised Land indeed, overflowing with milk and honey. For this reason no news or comments concerning the recent lamentable occurrences in the Free State and Transvaal will appear in the *Unionstad News*. If any of our readers would regard this as an omission, we beg him to remember our intention to offend none, but to heal instead the wounds of strife and discord. (49)



In contrast to O'Flinnigan, Ned Oakley's conflicting emotions regarding the Rebellion are real and heartfelt. Although he is a pacifist at heart, his British allegiance compels him to join the British forces, which subsequently quell the nationalist uprisings in the Free State. Anita, too, is torn between her growing affection for the gallant Englishmen and her Boer sentiments. She consoles herself with the hope that all will be over soon.

Black does not dwell further on the matter of the Rebellion save to mention that "a sense of dull pain and sorrow" (60) was felt and that he was loath to speak about it, even in conversation with inquisitive loyalists who wanted to know more about the fighting. Only to Anita does he reveal how the Boers were humiliated in spite of their courage.

As expected, the Rebellion causes a bitter rift between the political factions in Unionstad. The Sappers (General Smuts's supporters of the South African Party) and Hertzogites (supporters of General Hertzog's National party) are openly contemptuous of each other. This situation, which leads to a proliferation of propagandistic rhetoric, is commented on when Ned and Anita discuss current affairs. Prevailing political indoctrination is evident when Anita, who is otherwise portrayed as a sensible and equable girl, reveals a somewhat uncharacteristic preoccupation with empty sentimentality as regards the Boer cause when she says: "The future of the Afrikaners lies in their spirit of justice and independence—in Faith, Hope and Charity" (61). Ned's retort is sobering: "Faith in all *but* themselves, Hope of nothing *but* themselves; Charity to all *but* themselves" (61).

Anita's proposed solution to the problem echoes Black's own vision for an ideal society based on mutual respect and harmony between Boer and Brit. The Messianic overtones of her message foreground the question of leadership, in other words that this ideal could be achieved only by leaders with integrity, maturity and foresight: "A great Afrikaner will one day rise with a genius for peace instead of politics or war—another Kruger, but half Dutch, half English, with modern ideas advanced and as broad as the world" (61). Black's visionary ideas are, therefore, voiced through his mouthpieces, Anita and Ned, who are fictional representations of liberal, new-generation members of the Afrikaner and English communities in South Africa. However, one is continually aware of a sense of despondency when hopes are weighed against realities. A desperate tone prevails when the narrator describes Ned's state of mind. Ned, he says, feels that: "For the moment [...] there was hope for South Africa; that Nature, by one of its miracles of melodrama, would avert the tragedy that brooded inevitably over them; and at the eleventh hour save this *insignificant white civilisation*, just as the hero is saved from certain death in an improbable play." (64; my emphasis)

### **Conclusion: the ideal**

At the climax of Stephen Black's story about the strife-torn town, Unionstad, Ned Oakley finds it impossible to deal with a situation where political fanaticism dominates

every sphere of town life. His altercation with the town's Dutch Reformed minister confirms in his mind that all hope is lost that common sense will prevail in a community where politics have unnaturally divided everyone into seemingly irreconcilable camps—a situation which, according to O'Flinnigan's reportage, reflects the national situation. Ned is convinced that a community where fellow men may live side by side in peace and harmony has become an impossible ideal and he decides to leave the town.

At this point it may be useful to turn to Kearney's discussion of what he dubs the 'actual/ideal' dichotomy in historical novels. He holds the view that fiction concerned with the "ordinary life of the people" is privileged over history (xv). With regard to the liberating power of the imagination in novels that attempt to re-create historical events, it would appear that what I have called the small-town sub-genre of the South African novel is an interesting case in point.<sup>7</sup> According to Kearney, the literary value of historical novels such as *The Dorp* lies in their capacity to recreate historical incidents and thereby give rise to an awareness of the gap between the actual and the ideal society.

The final chapter of Stephen Black's *The Dorp* presents a vision for an ideal South Africa. Ned returns to Unionstad after his service in General Botha's army in German South West Africa. So does the widow Viljoen's son, who, to the Van Ryns' ire, fought on the Khaki side. Hendrik Viljoen, who is on temporary leave from his military duties, is lawfully obliged to wear his military uniform to his mother and Van Ryn's wedding ceremony. His decision to set aside his sense of duty out of respect for his future father-in-law is one of a series of conciliatory gestures symbolizing hope for South Africa.

During Ned's absence the Cape politician Jan Huysmans visits the town. The community encourages a relationship between Anita and the formidable politician, who is an intelligent gentleman with an academic background. Anita, however, chooses to moderate society's attitudes in her very important choice not to pursue a relationship with the Nationalist Huysmans. When Ned proposes marriage to Anita, Jan Huysmans's reaction as, on the one hand, Anita's suitor and, on the other, a government representative, is furthermore emblematic of the setting aside of personal issues for the sake of national harmony. From Van Ryn's house he looks on a scene which is described as follows:

[f]ar out beyond the dorp, [where] browsing on the stunted bushes, the sheep and cattle were lifting their heads and grazing towards home; farther north Huysmans saw the shapeless and sinister outlines of the location—foul, mysterious and menacing; then his eyes caught the glint of the railway track, running from south to north like a silver thread, symbolic of the civilization that had been implanted at the southern end of the Dark Continent by the sturdy Dutch and from there on carried on by the British; and then finally he turned to the east and fixed his gaze on the horizon where to-morrow the sun would shine for them all. Looking out

across the little houses of the dorp, clinging together as if for safety and companionship, he said: [...] "You are wrong, old friend, [...] when you say an Afrikaner should give his daughters only to Afrikaners. [...] Oakley is a fine young man, Jan, we should be proud of him ... and Anita's task will not be a difficult one, for she ... loves him. (301–02)

This is an interesting passage in terms of Black's awareness of the daunting realities lurking under the surface of idealized perceptions of a united country. The elements of Black's landscape scene evoke the character of the colonial civilization that was established in southern Africa from agricultural beginnings to town settlement. They also are powerful symbolic allusions to the challenges that face future generations in the country: Black refers to the "menacing" location, suggesting the long-term unresolved issue of the blacks, and the whites' fears in this regard. The railway track suggests the contribution of the whites to progress and prosperity in South Africa, while the sun shines for them all, suggesting the claims of all groups to the right to benefit and prosper in this country and, ultimately, the ideal suggested in the forging of a new identity, a new South African people, from the two white 'races' in the country. Black's ideal, however, is always qualified by his awareness of the unresolved black issue.

Black thus relativizes the main thesis of his novel when he indicates that, in spite of reconciliation between whites, the land actually belongs to the 'natives,' and will continue to do so. Elsewhere in *The Dorp* Black's perspective on the 'native question' is rather startling. For instance, Ned Oakley, in conversation with Anita van Ryn, raises the reality of the increasing black population majority in the country and the inherent volatility of a situation where the black man's labour is economically exploited whilst his political aspirations are ignored. Ned, of course, cannot realize how prophetic his admonition is: "In twenty years' time they will be at least seven or eight to our one, strong and prosperous with one idea. Give them a Chaka with modern ideas, or a Moshesh [...] and where shall we be?" (62)

#### Notes

1. A discussion of other historically neglected texts such as C. Louis Leipoldt's *The Mask* (1930; manuscript, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town), Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) and Herman Charles Bosman's *Willemsdorp* (Anniversary Edition, 1998) form part of my doctoral thesis "The Small-town Novel in South African English Literature 1910–1948."
2. A selection of Stephen Black's journalistic writings was collected and published by Stephen Gray in 1981.
3. A miscellany of personal papers as well as complete and incomplete manuscripts is kept in the Strange Collection of the Johannesburg Public Library and the Grey and Dessinian Collections of the Cape Town Public Library.
4. Black's fictional representation of political turmoil during this period is historically accurate. According to reliable historical sources the majority of National Party supporters were indeed

strongly opposed to the political assimilation of Afrikaner and British citizens in a commonwealth of nations. As a result they tirelessly applied themselves to the re-establishment of an exclusive pre-Boer War Afrikaner identity.

5. In this regard Hermann Giliomee (379) states: "By the beginning of 1914 the high economic expectations of unification had been dashed. Three to four years of drought had devastated farms [...] and, by 1912, as many as three-quarters of the farms in some districts were bonded. [...] Bills were falling due, cattle were dying, and food prices were rising."
6. Olive Schreiner (in Giliomee 278) formulated what she regarded as the real challenge for South Africa: "How, from our political states and our discordant races, can a great, a healthy, a united and an organized nation be formed?" Giliomee points out that the 'race question,' by which she meant the relationship between the two white communities, "was complicated by a question of color, which presented itself to us in a form more virulent and intense than that in which it has met any modern people." For her, the way in which the South African races had mixed with each other was the real bond that united them. The challenge was to build on that unity 'so that in years to come a foreign foe should land upon her shores, and but six were left to defend her, two English, two Dutch and two of native extraction [...] would stand shoulder to shoulder fighting for a land that was their own, in which each felt that it had a stake."
7. The microcosmic aspect of the dorp milieu makes the latter a particularly appropriate fictional setting for the representation of, as Michael Chapman (188) posits, "the small oppressive localities of Afrikaner Calvinism."

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