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HERMAN CHARLES BOSMAN:
THE BIOGRAPHER'S ENIGMA

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the five biographies or memoirs written about the renowned South African writer Herman Charles Bosman. The main aim of the study is to show how different, and often contradictory, the views of him are as presented in the biographies. I also investigate different theories of biography as expounded by Leon Edel, Ira Bruce Nadel and Ray Monk and explore to what extent each of the biographies conforms, or does not conform to the theory. It is the contention of this dissertation that though the existing theories are useful and do shed light on each biographer's approach and practice, they are also limited in accounting fully for the diverse and often discrepant accounts of Bosman's life. The dissertation opens with an explication of several different theories regarding biography, and gives a brief overview of the life story of Herman Charles Bosman. Some of the main elements of biography (including different forms of narration, language and myth) are discussed and how they might be used in biography. The subsequent chapters focus on and offers detailed analyses of the biographies of Bosman, beginning with *Herman Bosman As I Knew Him* by Bernard Sachs and *My Friend Herman Charles Bosman* by Aegidius Jean Blignaut. Thereafter *Sunflower to the Sun* by Valerie Rosenberg and *Life Sentence* by Stephen Gray are analysed. Finally, there is an analysis of several reminiscences of those who knew Bosman, including Lionel Abrahams's important memoir. The strengths and limitations of the various biographies are analysed, thereby shedding light not only on the practice of biography itself, but also on the complex and enigmatic figure of Herman Charles Bosman.

Key words: Herman Charles Bosman, biography, South African literature, Bernard Sachs, Aegidius Jean Blignaut, Valerie Rosenberg, Stephen Gray, Lionel Abrahams

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'There never was a good biography of a good novelist. There couldn't be. He is too many people, if he's any good.'
— F. Scott Fitzgerald (Updike, 2007:3)

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

It is a constant struggle for most writers to reconcile the creation of art with the demands of daily life. Herman Charles Bosman was no exception. In his essay 'Writing', Bosman writes, 'I am trying to write of life and its meaning, if any, and I have reluctantly come to accept a conclusion…that…the practising of the creative art of letters is contrary to the laws and demands of life' (1964:136). His life was marred by his unremitting inability to support himself and his wives financially, but his love for and devotion to writing only grew stronger as times got tougher. George Orwell (1970:29) aptly writes that 'one would never undertake such a thing [as writing] if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand'. Bosman was certainly driven by this irresistible demon, and was writing up until a few hours before his death. Aegidius Jean Blignaut (1980:69), Bosman's friend and colleague, saw this unearthly drive in him to write and called it 'a gift from the gods'. Every experience in his life, good or bad, was fodder for a story, poem or essay. Most notably, Bosman's experiences in prison were used as the basis for his best known non-fictional work, *Cold Stone Jug*, which he described as 'a chronicle: being the unimpassioned record of a somewhat lengthy sojourn in prison' (Bosman, 1971:quoted on dust jacket). His friend and schoolmate Eddie Roux wrote to Lionel Abrahams, Bosman's protégé, that perhaps 'the queer things Bosman did…were done out of sheer cussedness, or from a desire to experience sensations' (cited in Gray, 2005a:60). Whatever his reasons may have been, he managed to transform his experiences into great art that has touched the lives of the generations that have followed.

There has been a great interest in Bosman's life since his death in 1951, particularly because of the 'queer things' he did. Valerie Rosenberg (1976:9) was the first to write a fully-researched biography of the elusive author, called *Sunflower to the Sun*, and in it she tries to make it clear that Bosman's life 'can never be defined within the dusty frontiers of facts'. Bosman himself supports the idea that dull facts must be interwoven with imagination in order for both the facts and the life story to survive through the ages, and for the writing to be interesting and captivating for the readers. He writes in his essay entitled 'Ghosts' that 'it is not the dull fact…that is going to survive. If you wait long enough you will see in the end that historical fact, carefully checked up and audited by the historian, cedes place to the poet's embroidered lie' (Bosman, 1974:66). Perhaps what Bosman is trying to express here is that

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readers of lives, and of literature, do not want to be bombarded with facts because our lives are not lived in that way. Our lives are lived with emotion, personality and nuances unique to ourselves that mere facts cannot adequately express. Biographers, then, have a difficult time because lives cannot be fully defined by means of facts alone, and imagination must play a part in their work. They cannot ever really know their subjects exactly as they were, or how they lived their inner lives. They must also delve deeply into a subject's life to find possible connections between the life and work, while, in the case of more reliable biographies, avoiding sensationalism. It is up to them to try to understand the inner lives of their subjects as best they can. The inner life of the subject is always going to be difficult to express in a biography because the only person who knows the truth is the subject himself or herself. Ray Monk (2007:530) summarises Samuel Johnson's ideas about biography and one of the issues that is central is the idea that it is not possible to know a person's inner life because all we have to rely on is the biographer's conjecture. The biographers will always have their own ideas about the subject's inner life, but the biographer and the reader can never know how close those ideas are to the truth. An important reason for not being able to know the truthful inner life is that 'facts are external and life is essentially internal' (Monk, 2007:542). When we need to use the facts to understand the life we are forced to write something that resembles fiction because what we are writing are our own ideas, and not necessarily the ideas in line with the inner life of the subject. Monk (2007:542) eloquently states that biography is 'doomed to remain forever unsuccessful in its endeavor to capture the "rainbow-like intangibility" of personality through the "granite-like solidity" of external facts'. Since biographers are ultimately writing for an audience—an audience of followers, whether they be admirers of the subject or not—they must present the life as they understand it and be as true to the subject as possible. Readers are frequently more attracted to theatricality and melodrama than to a staid biography, but this does not give the biographers licence to write whatever they want in order to keep their readers interested. The acclaimed biographer Michael Holroyd (2002:12) asserts that 'most readers prefer theatre, prefer melodrama and romance, to a laborious reconstruction of actual life'. What Holroyd does not mention is that our lives are, at some point, melodramatic, romantic and theatrical and it is up to biographers to 'chart illuminating connections between past and present, life and work' (Holroyd, 2002:19), and in doing so they must remain steadfast in their approach and ensure that they present a life in a well-written way, clearly and imaginatively, and in as unbiased a manner as possible.

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But before one can understand the biographer's approach to a life, it must be made clear what exactly is meant by biography and autobiography. Biography, in basic terms, can be described as 'the story of an individual by [another] individual' (Viljoen, 2005:67), and autobiography as the life story of an individual written by the individual. The concepts of biography and autobiography have evolved over many hundreds of years and have come to comprise more than the accounts of lives written by someone else, or by the self, respectively. Roberts (2002:52) states that 'if considered a little more deeply as "life writing" the literary canvass becomes very broad' and what is now used in biographical and autobiographical research includes many more documents, each with its own approach to the subject. The terms or concepts have now been adapted to include not only memoirs or chronological accounts, but also letters, personal reminiscences, essays, and diaries.

It is of great importance, then, to trace briefly the history of biography and autobiography in order to understand what a great task it is to write a life. The history of biography is vast and its beginnings can be traced back to the myths and stories of ancient heroes and central figures in world religions, but the origins of what we know to be biography today can be traced back to Greece and Rome with the biographies of Aristotle and Socrates, despite the authors of these being unknown. Of these early biographers, it is Plutarch, who lived from 46 to 120AD, who is thought to be the most important, the 'father of a main biographical lineage' (Cline & Angier, 2010:48). His aim was to write lives, not histories, and in turn he used these lives to present the ideal Roman citizen: men who were noble, powerful and courageous. He focused on public lives, but did not shy away from character or 'telling a good story' (Cline & Angier, 2010:49). He was criticized for being selective in his accounts of great men's lives, but his belief was that biography should not aim to give 'exhaustive historical reporting' (Cox, 1983: 12). He believed that biography succeeded only in its 'portrayal of character by a careful selection of whatever actions best serve to illustrate it' (Cox, 1983:12). The lives he wrote about were not meant to teach readers about life and its failures, but rather to celebrate the success of his subjects. This particular belief (that biography is meant to illustrate character) is still what drives many modern biographies. Biography is ultimately the interpretation of the subject's character and has kept to this principle since the days of Plutarch.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, there came about what Harold Nicolson called the 'Dark Ages' (Cline & Angier, 2010:49) of biography from the fifth to the fifteenth century. This

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time was not devoid of biographical writing, but writers focused rather on the lives of saints, known as hagiography, wherein the subjects were idealised. From the ninth century chronicles and annals, which gave accounts of the lives of secular rulers, became popular but faded soon after the fifteenth century. It was then during the Renaissance with Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of Artists* in 1550 that biography went through a period of renewal, but it was still far from what we know it to be today. Vasari followed Plutarch's tradition of keeping personal details to a minimum and focussing rather on 'the lessons…for the conduct of professional life' (Cline & Angier, 2010: 50). Vasari was also, importantly, the first biographer to show how an artist's work can relate to his life. Biographies at this time also provided writers with source material for their literature: Plutarch's *Lives* and Holinshed's *Chronicles* provided much of the source material for some of Shakespeare's plays, and Vasari's *Lives* were used as inspiration by Robert Browning.

Puritanism in the first half of the seventeenth century changed the writing of biography somewhat with the belief that love for this world must be replaced with a yearning for the next. Yet, at the same time, with the rise of Renaissance humanism, the subject focus of biography shifted from saints, kings and leaders to the lives of less exalted people (yet still public figures), and more attention was placed on their private lives. Biography made it difficult for subjects to hide, with some biographers choosing not to publish certain details about their subjects in fear of impropriety. This left biographies mostly dry and featureless. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, with the end of Puritan rule, biographers made strides towards the production of vibrant yet accurate portrayals of private lives, especially John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, which contains accounts which are 'famously indiscreet, anecdotal and personal' (Cline & Angier, 2010:53). This marked an important shift in biography, particularly a shift in the biographer's personal interaction with his subject.

The first significant instance of personal interaction in modern biography came with Samuel Johnson's *Life of Savage* in 1744. Virginia Woolf (1939) explains this move towards a more complete biography in her essay 'The Art of Biography' where she explains that 'interest in ourselves and in other people's selves is a late development of the human mind'. Johnson's work was on the opposite end of the spectrum to Plutarch's biographical tradition as Johnson presented Richard Savage, his subject, as a 'bastard and outcast, poet and murderer…the Rejected Son, the Despised Genius' (Cline & Angier, 2010:54). Nothing was hidden from the reader, and there was certainly no attempt made to present the best image of his subject.

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Johnson's work was also far from accurate as he 'accepted all the dubious accounts of Savage, starting with his own, without checking them' (Cline & Angier, 2010:55). But, it was only with James Boswell's *Life of Johnson* that modern biography took the form as we know it today.

As a biographer, James Boswell was different from many of those writing today because he did not write solely from documents but rather from the perspective of someone intimate with his subject. He followed Johnson, recorded conversations and endeavoured not to leave anything out of his account because he was writing 'not his panegyrick, which must be all praise, but his Life' (cited in Cline & Angier, 2010:55). In order for Boswell to write an accurate life of Johnson it was necessary for him to experience Johnson's life by his side because, as Johnson states, 'nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him' (cited in Edel, 1984:49). This statement is, of course, questionable because a biographer who is that close to his or her subject is in danger of not being quite as truthful or impartial or perhaps glossing over details that could be harmful to the subject. In Boswell's case, he used his position to manipulate Johnson carefully in order to 'place his subject in a better position for the biographical camera, [and] improve a little on the accidents of life' (Edel, 1984:49). But Boswell's biography was problematic, as he was too much of a presence in it, and very often the biography becomes more about Boswell than Johnson. This is a pitfall for all biographers, as they must separate themselves from their subjects, yet remain a recognisable voice within the narrative of the biography. Boswell's work is an important leader in modern biography because, as Harold Nicolson states:

> Boswell invented actuality; he discovered and perfected a biographical formula in which the narrative could be fused with the pictorial, in which the pictorial in its turn could be rendered in a series of photographs so vividly, and, above all, so rapidly, projected as to convey an impression of continuity, of progression—in a word, of life. (cited in Edel, 1984:56)

Boswell's *Life* remains one of the greatest biographies for the way in which it captures its subject so uniquely. His biography is a guide for the biographer writing about a subject he has known personally because he did not have to rely solely on facts or the opinions of others to write his life.

After Boswell, in the Victorian Age, there was a tendency to regress to the Plutarchian tradition of presenting moral and commendable lives. During this time biography was

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criticised for its lack of depth and for the lack of resemblance between the subject in reality and the subject presented in the biography. Those most vocal about the reductive approach to presenting a life were Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf. In her essay, 'The Art of Biography', Virginia Woolf (1939) writes that 'the majority of Victorian biographies are like the wax figures now preserved in Westminster Abbey, that were carried in funeral processions through the street—effigies that have only a smooth superficial likeness to the body in the coffin'. There were, of course, biographies being written during this time that did not follow the Plutarchian tradition, like J.A. Froude's *Carlyle* and Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*, which Virginia Woolf described, respectively, as 'by no means a wax mask painted rosy red' and a biography showing that 'his own father was a fallible human being' (1939).

But it was not until the early twentieth century that biography found another leader in Lytton Strachey and his works *Eminent Victorians*, *Queen Victoria* and *Elizabeth and Essex*. His work was important because he showed 'both what biography can do and what biography cannot do' (Woolf, 1939), and it includes what were to become some of the common features of modern biography: candour; irony and satire; techniques of fiction and Freudian psychology; and beauty of language and design (Cline & Angier, 2010:57). But Strachey's technique was different from the traditions of biography at the time (either to know the subject personally or work from documents) because he did not do any research himself, but rather worked from existing biographies and other published sources. He writes in the preface to *Eminent Victorians* that the biographies written before on his subjects were filled with 'indispensable information…[and] an example' (Strachey, 2012) for him to follow in his own work. He used his biographies as a way to transform 'remarkable figures many of whom had been grossly deformed by the effigies that had been plastered over them' (Woolf, 1939) because he believed it was the duty of the biographer to 'lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them…dispassionately, impartially, and without ulterior intentions' (Strachey, 2012). In this transformation he often had to speculate and, at times, invent things about his subjects and in this was able to recreate his subjects as he saw them and understood them. What is so interesting about what Strachey was doing in his biographies was that he was trying to right the so-called wrongs of other biographers. He wanted to make the images of the subjects appear closer to reality, with all their faults and virtues , but he does admit that 'it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as it is to live one' (Strachey, 2012). I think Strachey's main aim was to add his point of view to the many that had already been posited by other biographers. He wanted to illustrate the lives of his subjects, not explain them at

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length or come up with any new theories of biography. In this way Strachey's views of biography are in line with what Monk says biography should be about: something non-theoretical and based on the writer's own point of view.

In 1967, one of the most important figures in modern biography, Michael Holroyd, began to publish his works *Lytton Strachey, Augustus John* and *Bernard Shaw*, which were described as 'both artistic and scholarly, both lively and long' (Cline & Angier, 2010:59). He added sexual candour to his work, and became known for his use of ironic humour. Since Michael Holroyd produced his acclaimed biographies, biography has never really gone into decline. Currently, it is a genre growing in popularity with biographies of celebrities, sports stars, business tycoons and authors increasing in number.

As yet there has not been a definitive theory about biography that can be used as the basis for a study of this sort because as Monk (2007:527) writes, biography is 'profoundly nontheoretical'. Leon Edel writes in *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (1984:23) that biography has not 'developed a freedom of form and structure approximating the novelist's freedoms: and it has not articulated a "methodology"'. He says also that it has 'suffered… from a lack of definition, a laxity of method' (1984:24). Biography, he continues, has many limitations, especially when it comes to bringing the subject to life. An important rule is that biographers 'adhere to fact, so far as fact can be determined…[and] may be judged by the resourcefulness with which [they work] within prescribed conditions' (Edel, 1984:23). Ira Nadel (1984:151) states that because there are so many different styles and lives in biography, it may be impossible to have a 'systemized set of principles regarding the form and composition of the genre'. Paula Backsheider (1999:11) says that writing the life of a literary person can 'provide a good test of narrative skill' because 'the work…must be related to the events and responses to experiences, but the biographer is also expected to point out when and how the life is infused in the work'. In his article 'Life without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding' (2007), Ray Monk combines the ideas of Edel, Nadel and Backsheider and concludes that it is 'fundamentally misguided' to think that biography can have a solid, theoretical and philosophical foundation because no biography is the same as another. The only thing that links biographies are vague 'family resemblances' (Monk, 2007:532) or similarities (in whatever form they may be). No two biographies will ever be written in the exact same way or from the same point of view. In his chapter 'Biography and Theory: Steps towards Poetics', Nadel attempts to expound a theory that

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could aid in the study of biography. He notes that the literary merits of biography are not derived from 'observing a set of rules, [or] from the documentation of a life but from the literary act of composition and the dependence of the biographer on language to express a life-story'. He believes that even though biographers are 'bounded by fact' it is still up to them to invent the form of the biography with the language they use in order to direct the reader's 'impressions, images and interpretation of the subject' (Nadel, 1984:154).

An important aspect of the form of a biography is the stance, or point of view, of the biographer, and this will be one of the main distinguishing factors used in the study of the biographies of Bosman, specifically because each biographer's stance and motives are so different. Point of view is one of the most important aspects of any biography because it allows the reader to understand how the biographer has interpreted a life. When biographers decide on their point of view it is important to remember that it is up to them to decide what they will leave out and what they will include. Brevity, in Monk's, Johnson's and Strachey's views, is very important in order to avoid the subject being buried under a 'mass of material' (Dunn cited in Monk, 2007:536), and in being brief biographers must remove anything redundant and keep whatever is significant in their particular interpretation. Brevity involves making choices and in making those choices biographers make their point of view clear to the reader. Ultimately it will be their point of view that allows the readers to understand the facts that are being presented to them. Without a certain point of view, Strachey believed, a biography could very well become an undigested mass of information that readers would not be able to make sense of (Monk, 2007:539). But giving their point of view and personal interpretation of material does not give the biographers licence to invent truth or decide for readers what was and was not true. A person's point of view does not change a fact from truth to fiction or vice versa. The biographers' point of view can then be understood as a way of seeing the subject and a certain way of understanding the facts with which they are presented. No single point of view will present the whole truth, and therefore all the biographer's point of view will accomplish is persuading us to see the subject in a certain way.

In trying to persuade readers to see the life of the subject as they do, it can be difficult for biographers to know how to present the life in a narrative since biography seems to fall somewhere between fiction and non-fiction. Edel suggests that there are three main types of narrative a biographer may use to structure a biography: the traditional documentary

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biography, a painter's portrait, and a narrative portrait (Edel, 1984:175-176). Ira Nadel (1984:170) suggests a further three categories of narration, namely, the dramatic/expressive, the objective/academic and the interpretative/analytic. Stephen Gray's biography, *Life Sentence*, fits into the narrative structure of the traditional documentary biography or chronicle according to Edel's categorisation, and also with Nadel's objective/academic biography. The chronicle keeps the documents and facts of the life in the foreground and the author tends to quote liberally from them. In the same vein, the objective narrator, according to Nadel (1984:171), is eliminated from the presentation of the life and is not involved in the life because of certain academic 'ideals'. An accumulation of details and facts is important in this type of biography. The biographer will then establish essential background to the subject and documents are presented in a chronological order. But since documents are 'seldom all-revealing' (Edel, 1984:176) it is left up to the biographer to 'endow the work with a certain amount of grandeur' (Edel, 1984:177) in the actual writing of the biography, which must include his or her way of seeing the subject. An attempt to have a purely factual retelling of a life with documentary support could very easily present a lifeless subject. For this type of biography to be a success, or to present a subject that is full of life and relatable, the writer must add a certain amount of artistry to it. What will be explored will be whether Stephen Gray and Bosman work together as a vivid biographer and vivid subject in order to present Bosman as more than just a 'frozen statue' (Edel, 1984: 177).

The second type of narrative, the portrait, describes the biographies of Bosman written by Aegidius Jean Blignaut, Bernard Sachs and Lionel Abrahams in their memoirs *My Friend Herman Charles Bosman*, *Herman Charles Bosman As I Knew Him*, and Abrahams's essay entitled 'Mr Bosman: A Protégé's Memoir'. This type, according to Edel, is similar to a painter's portrait because it 'seeks to catch essential traits, all that will characterize and express the personality and suggest the life *behind* the surface exhibited to the world' (Edel, 1984:177). It is usually a brief account and deals with a certain period in the subject's life, rather than an entire life. To present a successful portrait requires sensitivity in order to bring out what is vivid and essentially human about the subject. This type of biography links with Nadel's idea of a dramatic or expressive narrative. According to Nadel (1984:171), this type of narrator is either a symbolic or an actual presence in the retelling of a life. The biographer usually has had a relationship with the subject, whether romantic or platonic. This allows the biographer to bring in certain unique aspects to a retelling of the life, and perhaps details that

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cannot be drawn from facts and documents. But this makes this type of narration quite a bit more subjective.

Bernard Sachs has been attacked, not only by critics but by Bosman himself,[1] for the inaccuracy of his portrait of Bosman and his lack of sensitivity for his subject. His biography is self-serving and, in defence of Bosman and his work, Mrs M. Rawling Cross wrote that Sachs 'ransacked [Bosman's work] to enable [him] to call himself an author' and that 'Mr Sachs's book does the memory of Herman Bosman no service…it is a piece of assiduous, deliberate, dishonest artiface' (Gray, 2002:33). Stephen Gray (2002:31) writes that 'Sachs tried to push Bosman further into outsidehood' and that he 'had started with the denigratory Bosman gossip during Bosman's lifetime'. Blignaut, too, presents a very one-sided view of the man Bosman was, in a memoir which was written largely in reaction to the biography written by Valerie Rosenberg, *Sunflower to the Sun*. His biography is described by Stephen Gray as an 'erratic memoir' which required a team to 'keep the facts as straight as possible and cut back his rather tricky baroque exuberance and smokescreening' (Gray, 2002:37). This, of course, is where the study of biography becomes interesting: who was Bosman to each of these biographers? And why are their impressions of him so very different? Monk's ideas regarding point of view will be central to answering these questions in the chapters to follow.

The third type, the narrative portrait, describes the biography written by Valerie Rosenberg, but also fits with Nadel's third type, the interpretative or analytic biography. The interpretative or analytic biographer is not present in the biography, but is a commentator and a guide through the life, and helps the reader to establish meaning in the material presented (Nadel, 1984:171). The narrative portrait is also a middle ground between the detailed and lengthy chronicle and the brief glimpse of the portrait. In it documents are not the central focus, but are refined and condensed in order to allow the subject to emerge. The biography may borrow from fiction, without becoming fiction, by not keeping to a strictly linear timeline, in order to 'illuminate character' (Edel, 1984:181). The biographer is constantly characterising, commenting on and analysing the subject. Lytton Strachey, who is known as

[1] Bosman commented on early drafts of Sachs's biography on him, and wrote a long letter to Sachs detailing his objections regarding the details of his personal life. He wrote that Sachs was telling 'lousy stories' (Gray, 2002:33) about him in order to make himself look better. Bosman was so unimpressed that in one comment he goes so far as to say 'if the law won't take my part in this, my right boot up your backside will' (Gray, 2002:33). The letter was never sent, according to Bosman's widow, Helena Lake.

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the 'father of this type of biography' (Edel, 1984:181), wrote that 'uninterpreted truth is as useless as buried gold' (Cited in Edel, 1984:183) and that interpretation and clarification are essential to the narrative portrait. But interpretation can be taken too far, which is, unfortunately, the case with Rosenberg's biography. There are not endless numbers of possible interpretations of facts, which means that not every interpretation of a life will carry equal weight. Stephen Gray (2005a:36) acknowledges that 'there can be no question that any further researchers of Bosman remain eternally indebted to Rosenberg for her clearing of the decks, her conscientious efforts to come out with the obvious record', but her interpretations were very often too far-reaching and factually flawed. Lionel Abrahams felt that it was 'not adequate to have to rely on no more than Rosenberg's word' (Gray, 2002:36).

In forming the narrative of a biography there are no steadfast rules to follow, but Leon Edel gives four principles that biographers should try to take into account when writing a biography. His first principle is that the biographer should 'learn to understand man's ways of dreaming, thinking and using his fancy' (1984:28) and analyse these in a way that shows how the unconscious is projected in the path the subject has chosen in his or her life. The second is that biographers should guard against being 'taken over by their subjects, or [falling] in love with them' (1984:29), and that the biographer should strive to be a 'participant-observer'. This balance is needed in order for the biographer to be both empathetic and disengaged. The third principle is that biographers should 'analyse [their] materials to discover certain keys to the deeper truths of [their] subject' (1984:29). Edel calls this finding the 'figure under the carpet' (1984:29), which involves investigating the person behind the mask of his or her work or 'public façade' to find 'the private self-concept that guides a given life, the private dreams of the self'. His fourth principle relates to form and structure. He writes that 'every life takes its own form and a biographer must find the ideal and unique literary form that will express it' (1984:30). A biography need not be chronological or littered with dates and facts, because in reality our lives are not lived in that way. We are constantly recalling our past experiences and moving out of the present. Edel states that these four principles show that there is an on-going struggle between 'a biographer and his subject…the concealed and the revealed self, the public and the private. And the task and duty of biographical narrative is to sort out themes and patterns, not dates and mundane calendar events which sort themselves'. Each principle can be applied to the biographies of Bosman: I will attempt to show how each fits, or does not fit with these ideas in a specific way. Furthermore, the principles will be of great use in critically assessing the biographies critically. The theory will also be applied to show

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how each is an 'interpretation of an individual' (Evans, 1999:20), and an attempt, not only by the biographers but by Bosman himself, to present a 'knowable person', someone who can be 'identified and presented to the reading public' (Evans, 1999:23).

Biography, it seems, is an art form which is flawed from the start, especially with regard to theory. Mary Evans writes that:

> the conventional expectation about [biography] is, of course, that in the process of documenting an individual's life, something approaching the truth about that individual will be told. The 'need to know' is a priority in the telling of tales about individuals, and that endless fascination which we all have with the lives of others. From this viewpoint, it is obviously possible to see [biography] as the literary equivalent of gossip…. The difference, of course, is that we tend to view gossip as in some sense partial, while [biography] is generally assumed at least to aspire to some version of absolute and inclusive truth. (1999:3)

Though 'life writing' aspires to present the truth, it is perhaps ultimately doomed to fail in the attempt to uncover that truth. The word 'truth' in the sense that Evans uses it, is problematic. Biography may aspire to present an 'absolute and inclusive truth', but one has to question what is meant by this. One possible answer is that, in this context, it merely means that what the biographer presents is based on facts, which can be proven from written records. What could cause problems for biographers is when the facts they are presenting as truth are based on rumours, opinions or their own inference. What we can know of biography is that 'facts are to biography what character is to the novel – [they are] a fundamental element of composition providing authenticity, reality and information' (Nadel, 1984:4). But, as has been suggested, there is more to finding out about a subject than merely reading the facts of his or her life. Edel's notion of the 'figure under the carpet' (1984:162) involves delving into the subject's psyche to uncover 'hidden dreams' (1984:161) that even he or she may not be aware of. These hidden dreams manifest themselves in the work of the subjects: the poetry or the prose, as well as in remarks they made, or reactions they had in certain situations. Biographers must contend with what Edel calls 'a life-myth' (Edel, 1984:26) where the subject hides the secrets of his or her inner life within his or her work and utterances. It is up to the biographer to 'draw larger conclusions about an inner life, of which the "outer" life is constant expression' (1984:27).

What the biographer must remember is that truth is relative. What is truth to one person may not be truth to another. The biographer can only infer truth, and can never be certain about what truth may have been for the subject. Since biography is concerned with 'the truth of life

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and the truth of experience' (Edel, 1984:34), as far as it can be discerned, what is vitally important is how biographers transform that life and experience. Michael Holroyd (2002:29) suggests that the process of transforming a life into biography must be handled with great care because 'what [subjects] fear is the eclipse in the reader's mind of all their illuminating work by all the drab experience'. But John Updike (2007:4) posits that those who read biographies do so in order to 'prolong and extend [their] intimacy with the author' and thus experience from a new perspective the mind of an author they love. We are, after all, as Samuel Johnson wrote, 'all prompted by the same motives, all deceived by the same fallacies, all animated by hope, obstructed by danger, entangled by desire, and seduced by pleasure' (France & St Clair, 2002:11).

Biographers face many dilemmas when writing the life of a subject. How are they to approach the materials left behind, and how do they resurrect the subject of the biography from the materials and recollections of others? If the subject is still living, their dilemma is then how they remain true to that person and represent him or her in as honest a way as possible. Edel suggests ways of overcoming these dilemmas, one of which is imagination. Biographers must be imaginative in order to present what material they have in an interesting, artistic way, but must not imagine the material. Imagination has a place in fiction, but since lives are not 'novel-shaped' (Holroyd, 2002:8) biographies must be treated with care. Peter Ackroyd, in his biography of Charles Dickens, has Dickens exclaim that 'biographers are simply novelists without imagination!' (Gillies, 2009:42), which is perhaps true to some extent. But imagination certainly plays a role when biographers must choose what to include in the biography. They are given the main character, often from birth to their present, which includes their death if they are deceased, and must manage to piece together a life as accurately and as interestingly as possible. Readers' interpretations of the life of the subject are influenced by what biographers choose to present, but also by what they choose to leave out (Backsheider, 1999:27). It is the biographer's main duty to 'state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may' (Woolf, [1928] 1993:47). In doing this, the lines between fact and fiction can easily become blurred, and can lead to an unreliable biography, but the question of the extent to which biography is ever reliable must also be posed (Evans, 1999:24). Is the search for truth ever truly conclusive, especially if the subject is dead and cannot answer the biographer's questions? Perhaps not. Biography can never be definitive because lives will always be interpreted differently by different people, which is evident in the different approaches to Bosman's life story from Bernard Sachs, the

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first biographer, to Stephen Gray, the latest. These retellings and reinterpretations will be the main focus of this study of the biographies of Bosman. This is also what makes these biographies so fascinating: how many there are (far more than any other South African writer) and the vast discrepancies in outlook and judgement.

Another dilemma faced is the past, the time during which the subject lived. Biographers must engage with the past, but must also bring their subjects into the present to show how they might be relevant to a current readership, and to place them in historical perspective. They must judge the facts available to them, yet remain restrained in their judgements. Most important, perhaps, is that they must 'respect the dead—but…must tell the truth' (Edel, 1984:33). In *Orlando*, Virginia Woolf's mock-biography, she writes that 'we have to admit a thousand disagreeables which is the aim of every good biographer to ignore' (Woolf, [1928] 1993:12). Biographers may want to ignore certain traits, facts or experiences which may cast their subject in a bad light, but they must fight against that urge, and be as objective and respectful as possible.

Herman Charles Bosman had many traits that biographers may want to ignore. He was unpredictable and took on many roles, many of which were 'disagreeable', and which include 'extortionist, blasphemer…abortionist…[and] convict for murder' (Abrahams, 1981:3). Lionel Abrahams, who describes Bosman as his mentor, writes that 'in Bosman's case the works, the mind, the personality and the life-story [are] separately remarkable and in combination so extraordinary that the phenomenon of his existence seems to palpitate with an imperative significance' (Abrahams, 1981:3). It is precisely his work, mind, personality and life-story that make Bosman endlessly fascinating to biographers.

Updike argues against biographies of literary authors and questions why we need them at all. He believes that:

> When an author has devoted his life to expressing himself, and, if a poet or writer of fiction, has used the sensations and critical events of his life as his basic material, what of significance can a biographer add to the record? Most writers lead quiet lives, or even if they don't, are of interest to us because of the words they set down in what had to have been quiet moments. (Updike, 2007:3)

In Bosman's case, he took inspiration from his own life for most of what he wrote, and especially for *Cold Stone Jug*, which was based on his experiences in prison. We cannot ignore his life in part because it was not a quiet one. His work may give us insight into what

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he believed in, but it is his tumultuous life-story that most people will remember, and it is this that biographers focus on.

Herman Charles Bosman's life was not devoid of theatrics and melodrama. He was born in Kuils River in the Western Cape on 3 February, 1905. His parents were Jacobus Abraham Bosman, a mine worker, and Elizabeth (Elisa) Helena Malan, a schoolteacher from the educated and influential Malan family. Stephen Gray describes the Malans as 'a great South African dynasty' (2005a:47). The Bosmans did not stay in the Cape for long, and for the first 13 years of Herman's life they moved from town to town (Krugersdorp, Potchefstroom and Johannesburg), wherever his father could find work. In 1918, they settled in Johannesburg in a small house in Jeppestown. Herman and his younger brother Pierre attended Jeppe High to get a proper education, something their father was adamant about. Even at a young age Herman was passionate about literature and read 'wildly and widely' according to Pierre (Gray, 2005a:61). Herman found great comfort in literature, especially poetry, which relieved him of his stutter when he recited favourite poems. He told Lionel Abrahams that 'when [he] was sixteen [he] had a bad stammer. [He] used to go up a mine dump and recite Spenser's *Prothalamion'* (Gray, 2008:139). His uncle, Charles Malan, was a prominent figure in both politics and print, and helped to shape Herman's literary and political mind. Gray writes that the Malans were 'anything but Nationalist Afrikaans...[they were] Empire-supporters and pro-English-speaking' (2005a:56). He describes the similar beliefs of the Bosman family when sketching a scene in which 'after an evening banquet of roast mutton and bread-and-butter pudding...they read aloud to their next generation from Charles Dickens' (2005a:56). It is understandable then that Herman's literary influences were mainly British and American authors.

Herman's years at Potchefstroom High School for Boys and Jeppe High, two prestigious schools steeped in the British tradition, shaped him as a writer and a joker. It was in the library at Jeppe High School for Boys that he found his teachers and favourites: O. Henry, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, and the classics; and *The Jeppe High School Magazine* was where he first presented his writing and his often misunderstood sense of humour. He wrote two pieces for the magazine, one under the pseudonym 'Ben Eath'. Many of his other pieces were published under the pseudonyms 'Ben Eath', 'Ben Africa', and 'Ben Onion' in Johannesburg's *Sunday Times*, something that was, as Gray (2005a:62) states, 'rather [remarkable] for a sixteen-year-old schoolboy still in short pants'. It would be during these

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prolific years that Herman would have his first taste of the dramatics of life. In his last year at Jeppe High he was supposedly punished with a caning in front of his entire form for being found reading in a classroom during lunch. Afterwards, to protest the injustice of it all, he rushed to the toilets where, according to his classmates, he 'cut his wrist open with a razorblade' (Gray, 2005a:64). The reasons for his attempt at suicide are unclear, because a fellow university student said that Bosman tried to cut his own throat after being forced to take Chemistry. These rumours include a description of his using a pocketknife to attempt to sever his jugular, but they remain rumours. It could also be an example of Bosman's changing facts to make a story more interesting, or perhaps less embarrassing for himself. Another, less dramatic incident was to be his last at Jeppe High, and it showed how passionate and assured Herman was about his talents as a writer. During a geometry exam he chose to write an essay stating why he should be judged on his talent for writing rather than his lack of talent for geometry. He was left to finish his schooling at Houghton College, a 'private cram school' (Gray, 2005a:64). By the time he had finished at Houghton College in 1923 his father had been killed in a mining accident. This was just one of the tragedies which mark what Stephen Gray (2005a:65) describes as a 'very disturbed' upbringing.

Despite this difficult upbringing, Herman did not seem to allow his troubles to affect his writing or his sense of humour adversely. In 1923, he moved on to tertiary education at Normal College and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg. Bosman, in an essay entitled 'Universities', writes:

> I was a student at the Witwatersrand University in the early days, when there was still the smell of wet paint and drying concrete about the buildings at Milner Park, and there was something in my eighteen year old soul that revolted at all this newness.... I had contempt both for the buildings and the professors. I could not reconcile myself to the idea that any really first-class man from Europe would bring himself to apply for so obscure and – as I then thought – Philistine – an appointment as a professorship in a South African mining town university where the reinforced concrete slabs were still wet inside. (Bosman, 1964:112)

Bosman describes himself in his essay entitled 'Wits University' as 'young and inexperienced enough to have illusions about universities being places of learning' (Gray, 2003:45). So, during the three years he spent there he immersed himself in learning, taking English, Latin, Ancient History and Geology. His interest in Latin and Ancient History was certainly no surprise since he had, according to his brother, Pierre, 'translated Ovid and Catullus into English verse for his own amusement' back when he was in high school (Gray, 2005a:61).

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Learning for Bosman did not just include reading books and taking classes; it included learning about life. He writes that he 'learnt some of [his] most valuable lessons...at an educational institution conducted by Adversity (upper case A)' (Gray, 2003:32). His fellow students remember that he spent most of his time with a close group of male friends, and whether in or out of class he would do what he could to make a spectacle of himself. Yet, it was his talent as a storyteller that stands out, especially in a reminiscence of one of his friends, Jan Bosman, no relation. He said that Herman would 'adjust the facts if it made a better story. He'd tell the same story over slightly differently to other people – not lying, as a normal person would do, to get out of trouble. He told lies to get *into* trouble' (Gray, 2005a:69).

He also dabbled in philosophy when he was not entertaining his fellow students, for better or worse, with his oddball sense of humour. In 1924, he became the secretary of the Wits Philosophical Club, an ideal platform for him to showcase his skills as an orator and rhetorician. It was while he was at Wits that he met the woman who was to become the object of his first romance and later his first wife, Vera Sawyer. Two weeks before he turned twenty-one he married Vera at the Johannesburg Magistrates' Courts. In true Bosman style he forged both his name and age in order to avoid the encumbrance needing parental consent to marry. Two days after they married Bosman left his new wife in Johannesburg and set off to take up a teaching post near Groot Marico in the north-western Transvaal, close to the border with Bechuanaland. They never lived together, even upon his return to Johannesburg.

During the July holidays of 1926, after a short time spent as a teacher in the Groot Marico, Bosman returned to Johannesburg and chose to stay with his mother and stepfather. It was here where, after he returned from a night walk, he found his brother and stepbrother fighting in their dark bedroom. He pulled out his rifle and shot into the room, killing his stepbrother. He was put on trial and sentenced to death for murder, spending time on death row, but was later given a sentence of eight years' hard labour, of which he served only four. It was from these four turbulent years, and the short time in the Marico, that he drew the greatest inspiration for his writing, not only for his short stories (which are based on his experiences in the Marico) but for also for his essays and his chronicle of his time spent in prison, *Cold Stone Jug*.

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But it was the 1930s that would really stand out as a 'period of adversity' (Gray, 2005a:164). This was partly due to Bosman himself, who was described by Leon Hugo as being 'a law unto himself, morally speaking, puckish, wayward and unpredictable, and perhaps true to himself only in his vocation of letters' (cited in Gray, 2005a:164). Bosman and writing partner, Aegidius Jean Blignaut, spent a few years together writing for various publications, which failed as quickly as they were conceived. They used these publications as outlets for their own writing and Blignaut mentions in his account of his time with Bosman that he was thankful for these publications because they were the only way to preserve his friend's writing. Bosman's life with his second wife, Ella, was filled with intensity and troubles. They moved to Europe, after a tumultuous time in Johannesburg, in which Bosman angered many of his journalistic colleagues by his writing. He and Blignaut were the first in South Africa to be tried for blasphemy, and once Blignaut took the fall for both of them, Bosman and his wife fled. They returned after life in Europe proved difficult, especially with the onset of the Second World War. Bosman returned to his journalism upon his return and soon moved with Ella to Pietersburg.

It was in Pietersburg that Bosman would meet the woman who would become his third wife, Helena Stegmann. Despite still being married to Ella, he began a relationship with Helena. Needing to leave the intense and damaging relationship with Ella, Bosman made moves to end his marriage to her and to move on to a relationship with a woman who would prove to be an inspiration and great support in the final years of his life. Helena and Bosman did finally marry, and Ella died soon afterwards. Bosman's life with Helena was a productive time and it saw the publication of a major collection of his work, *Mafeking Road*, *Cold Stone Jug*, and two novels, *Jacaranda in the Night* and *Willemsdorp*. Bosman was writing right up until the final moments of his relatively brief life, which, one could argue, is fitting for a man so very passionate about literature.

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CHAPTER TWO

HERMAN BOSMAN AS I KNEW HIM AND MY FRIEND HERMAN CHARLES BOSMAN

'A study of biographies by the dozen, though it often leaves one pretty much in the dark as to the people biographised, ought perhaps to give one some view as to the art of biography.' – Leslie Stephen (Nadel, 1984:151)

Writing a biography involves more than just getting the life of the subject onto the page. The writing of a life takes the biographer on a journey towards understanding both the inner and outer life of the subject, and conveying this to the reader. In order for the biographer to present adequately this journey to the reader there has to be a delicate combination of 'linguistic expression, narrative technique and mythical elements' (Nadel, 1984:151) in the telling of the life story. Though there are no set rules for writing a life, writing an artistic and literary biography involves the biographer's reliance on the act of composition and his or her effective use of language. In this study of the Bosman biographies, there will be a focus on three aspects that theorists, like Nadel and Edel, agree are the generic properties of literary biography: language, narration and myth. Each biographer uses these three properties in order to present the life of Bosman in his or her own way, using his or her own unique point of view.

Herman Charles Bosman affected everyone in his life, in some way or another. Those close to him felt a bond with him that could not easily be broken, even after his death. His friend Bernard Sachs was the first to compile a biography about Bosman, a draft of which he began before Bosman died. His biography is entitled *Herman Bosman As I Knew Him* (1974), a fitting title for what this piece contains. It is not a full-length, birth-to-death account of Bosman but rather a collection of snippets where Sachs was a passing character in Bosman's life story. It is also necessary to include it because it does add Sachs's point of view to the collection of views on Bosman. The second biography to be written was by Valerie Rosenberg, entitled *Sunflower to the Sun* (1976). Since the release of Stephen's Gray's biography in 2005, Rosenberg has released a new edition of her biography, but this study will focus on the first edition as it is the original. She, in her own words, needed to 'prioritise and streamline the material' (Rosenberg, 2005:9). I will make mention of the elements of the biography that were changed, but the study will not focus on these aspects. The third biography written was by Bosman's close friend and colleague, Aegidius Jean Blignaut, entitled *My Friend Herman Charles Bosman* (1980). It is a collection of reminiscences of

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their time as colleagues from 1930 to 1932. But, as mentioned previously, Blignaut's biography, in Stephen Gray's words, is an 'erratic memoir' which required the work of many people to double-check the facts, 'keep the facts as straight as possible and cut back his rather tricky baroque exuberance and smokescreening' (Gray, 2002:37).

Each biography follows a specific narrative structure, as mentioned in the introduction: Sachs and Blignaut have written portraits or dramatic/expressive biographies, while Rosenberg has written a narrative portrait or interpretative/analytic biography. A discussion will follow of how they may be seen as using Edel's four principles for compiling a biography. The first is that the biographer understand the subject's way of dreaming and thinking in order to analyse why he or she followed a certain life path. The second involves the biographer standing back, being disengaged and empathetic, in order to not be overcome by the subject. Next the subject's work is analysed to find a deeper truth to who he or she was. And lastly, the structure must be determined by the biographer and should fit with the subject's life (Edel, 1984:30). A biography does not have to be chronological. Each biography is an interpretation of Bosman and his life, which has produced quite different views of a man who seemed to have been a different person to everyone who knew him. The aim of these biographies should be to present a more intimate portrait of who Bosman was, and bring those who love his work a step closer to understanding the man behind the work.

Nadel presents a different opinion of how a biography can be structured. He notes that in order for a biography to be coherent it can either follow a factual pattern, where the truth of a life is linked with the facts; or it can follow an interpretive pattern, where the relationship between truth and fact is questioned (Nadel, 1984:155). Each biographer has chosen to structure his or her biography of Bosman in a different way. Sachs, for instance, chooses to interpret the facts of Bosman's life and present them in a way that makes himself and his own opinions the focus rather than Bosman, thus breaking down the relationship between fact and truth. Gray uses the facts of Bosman's life and interprets them as he writes, using opinion (his own and of others who knew Bosman) to support his facts. That biographer's attempt to order facts into a coherent whole brings us back to the reliance on language and how each biographer uses this to his or her advantage. But it is important to remember that a biography will never contain all of the facts of someone's life. It is in the choices where much of the meaning is found because 'all biography can hope to do is reanimate its subject through patterns of tropes, narrative technique and form' (Nadel, 1984:178). Ultimately, according to

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Freud (cited in Nadel, 1984:178), 'anyone who writes a biography is committed to lies, concealments, hypocrisy, flattery and even to hiding his own lack of understanding'.

Sachs's biography is structured as a portrait because it seeks 'to catch essential traits, all that will characterize and express the personality and suggest the life *behind* the surface exhibited to the world' (Edel, 1984:177, emphasis in the original). It is also a dramatic/expressive biography because Sachs becomes a clear presence in the life and is a character and commentator throughout the biography. His biography is problematic in this case because his focus tends to be on himself rather than on depicting or interpreting who Bosman was as a person. It is important for Sachs to understand, and thus allow the reader to understand, the ways in which Bosman dreamed, how he thought and how he saw the world. He begins by separating Bosman's life into sections, with rather large gaps. In this way the biography cannot be seen as an in-depth account because for most of the narrative he discusses other people and does not delve into intimate parts of Bosman's life. Underneath what Sachs writes seems to be resentment of Bosman, especially of his tendency to indulge in pranks. He did not appreciate what he saw as Bosman's mean streak, but seemed to forgive him for it in order to remain in his social circle. Nevertheless, his interpretation of Bosman's life is a portrait unique to their friendship in that he often misleads the reader, and develops the embellishments for dramatic effect. What we do get from his biography is his personal point of view of who Bosman was to him, and that certainly is valuable in helping us to understand who Bosman was in general.

In the first chapter, 'Author and Subject', Sachs describes how he and Bosman came to know each other and describes their relationship. He admits in his first paragraph that 'a full study of him presents all manner of difficulties. There are contradictions and complexities which must be fused into a coherent totality, or the parts will add up to less than the whole' (Sachs, 1974:13). This remains true in all of the studies of Bosman's life, but Sachs infers that he was present for a great deal of it, when in fact he saw merely a glimpse. We know this because, though Sachs considered himself a close friend of Bosman's, he was not involved in his publications with Blignaut, he did not travel to the Marico with him, he did not travel to Europe after Bosman married Ella Manson, and there seems to be no evidence in Bosman's writing (or in the other biographies) that Sachs was a significant part of his life. This biography consequently is not a full study, but merely a glimpse into how Bosman had an effect on Sachs's life. Sachs does, however, attempt to analyse Bosman's thinking in order to

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understand how it led him down a particular life path even though his attempts often come to nothing. From the start Bosman is described as being someone who stood apart from those around him, and it is suggested that he possessed a type of madness which was ‘a mysterious force tenanted in the psyche which drives the living person beyond himself’ (Sachs, 1974:15). Standing apart from others was a result of his negative and destructive nature, according to Sachs, and he could often be diabolic. In all of the biographies, Bosman is described as being a prankster, someone who was not much concerned with the consequences of his actions. He liked to get reactions out of people and his friends were often the victims of his jokes and tricks. In this case, it certainly was not a comfortable friendship because Sachs writes that

> it is not so easy to forgive his rude incursions into the world of affairs. Much that was negative and destructive, bordering on the diabolic, then came into play…to omit [his dark side] would be a distortion…. The facts are that Herman was capable of acts of nightmarish delight in the infliction of pain, in the humiliation of friends, in effrontery and reckless ingratitude (1974:15).

Sachs portrays Bosman as someone he was constantly wary of, and as a man who could not be trusted, even by his friends, because he was always planning something sinister or ‘diabolic’. Sachs also had constantly to ‘refine [his] thoughts and be much more circumspect in the choice of words when [he] expressed [himself] to him’ (Sachs, 1974:17). There certainly seems to be an air of inferiority emanating from Sachs in the way he describes his relationship with his friend. Bosman to him was someone superior in every way, but especially in the literary sense, which he admits by saying that ‘not without reason, [Bosman] regarded himself as superior to [him] in matters literary’ (Sachs, 1974:19).

It is understandable then given Sachs’s feelings of inferiority, that he choose a telling metaphor to run through the biography. Sachs compares Bosman to a god who stands apart from the other mortals around him. He describes him as being ‘overendowed’ with genius and thus he had to ‘withdraw from life, its mores and conventions, and enrich human existence with [his] spiritual explorations’ (Sachs, 1974:15). He paints a picture of a man who could be both good and evil, yet he chooses to focus on his darkness, his inner spiritual struggle, because, in his own words, to leave out the darker parts of his personality ‘would be a distortion’ (Sachs, 1974:15). In his analysis of their friendship, particularly the beginning when they were young men at school, Sachs does not manage to describe the close friendship he speaks of when he says that perhaps ‘no one…stood closer to him than I did’ (Sachs,

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1974:19), yet mentions that 'he never opened his heart to me or discussed his projects, plans or evaluations' (Sachs, 1974:19), which clearly points to a friendship that was neither deep nor intimate. The use of the god metaphor creates a distance between biographer and subject, and each instance of Sachs's describing an intimate moment between the two leads to a description of how far below Bosman he felt he stood. Sachs is very close to and emotionally involved in his depiction of Bosman's life, which colours it so that the reader cannot gauge to what extent Sachs is being coloured by his emotions. He tries to cover his lack of objectivity by saying that he is merely giving a complete portrait of who Bosman was but describes him as being 'a most difficult person with whom to associate. Though he did not appear so, in his innermost self he was a snob—arrogant and aristocratic in his bearing. Like all the literary decadents, he regarded himself as being something of a God who could spit on a lesser breed below him' (Sachs, 1974: 18). He infers that it was Bosman who thought himself a god, when in truth it is he who places that metaphor on him. In Sachs's opinion friendship and loyalty were also a 'huge joke' (Sachs, 1974:24) to Bosman, which leads one to question why he continued to hold him in such high regard. Biographers can never be truly objective because their emotions will always be brought into what they write, especially in Sachs's case because he was a friend of Bosman's. His representation of Bosman here is then merely his very subjective interpretation of the man he knew.

In his second chapter, 'Early Years', Sachs describes Bosman as he met him when they were young boys. Nadel's dramatic/expressive narrator comes through particularly effectively in this chapter. Sachs describes moments in his friendship with Bosman that give the reader ideas of how they interacted with each other as well as the type of young person Bosman was. As Sachs had said in the first chapter, he does not want to leave out any detail that might be untrue to Bosman, so his description of him seems rather harsh at times. He mentions that Bosman wore his 'stockings above his knees' (Sachs, 1974:27), which was derogatory, because at the time it implied that he was weak or 'soft', and it formed part of a piece he wrote about Bosman before his death. Bosman slammed Sachs for implying that he was 'some sort of softie' and blatantly stated that 'there never was any special bond between [them]' (Gray, 2005a:31-32). Special bond or not, Sachs did get to see parts of Bosman's life and from his descriptions we can glean some idea of his character and personality. Like Boswell, Sachs uses metonymy, especially when describing parties he and Bosman attended, or in descriptions of Bosman's behaviour at school, of the atmosphere at school and university and the people interacting with Bosman, to create an image of the man. The reader

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gets a sense that Bosman was someone who lived in his own world and wanted to have things done in his own way. For example, Sachs recalls the moment when they first met during cadet parade. The cadet leader tells Bosman that his tie is around his neck. Bosman answers, 'Well, where do you expect it to be?' which gives us our first impression of the type of man Bosman was, and was to become. He was sharp, straightforward, spoke his mind and did not have patience with authority figures. Another instance of metonymy is Sachs's description of a party and the people who were in attendance. Sachs writes that 'the visitors were largely made up of old lags who had been released from prison and found some kind of haven there. Herman received them as if they belonged to a freemasonry. They were not unintelligent and, so far as I was concerned, not much different from anyone else' (1974:59). Bosman welcomed anyone with whom he could have an intelligent conversation, no matter who they were or where they came from. From this description we can tell that Bosman's home and personal space was a place of intellectualism and safety. It was the place he could do what he wanted and speak of whatever he wanted without the fear of being judged.

Sachs turns Bosman into an outsider and describes him as 'a misfit, and essentially an unhappy youth' (Sachs, 1974:33), perhaps to make himself look better because he felt outshone by and inferior to Bosman. His feelings of literary inferiority are clear in this chapter, especially when he describes his time with Bosman at university. One might see this as Sachs's way of illuminating Bosman's tendency to romanticise his surroundings and experiences by describing the university in a very romantic and dream-like way. But the most shocking element in Sachs's descriptions of the University of the Witwatersrand is that they are directly plagiarised from Bosman's essay 'Universities' where he describes the atmosphere of the university. Suddenly, Sachs's plain, unembellished writing becomes fluid and descriptive. He writes:

> Those ancient institutions heavily encrusted with history and tradition, sanctified through the intimacy of its association with a nation's fortune, through the centuries a silent witness of dooms and splendours…no tall trees, through whose branches the sunshine fell dappled on the walks. No dilapidated facades, winding lanes and sequestered nooks. (1974:35-36)

This piece is taken almost word-for-word from Bosman's essay where he writes

> I have seen many a stately pile, heavily encrusted institutions with history, this with dust and tradition, sanctified through the intimacy of its association with a nation's fortunes, through the centuries a silent witness of dooms and splendours…. There must be old trees through whose branches the sunshine falls dappled on the walks. There must be winding lanes and unexpected vistas and

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> sequestered nooks. There must be…dilapidated facades…. (Bosman, 1972:112-114)

This instance of purloining Bosman's work points to a great inferiority complex within Sachs because if he had meant to capture Bosman's personality he would have credited the passage to him. He clearly believed that Bosman was the better writer, and his later evaluation of his friend's work points to feelings of inadequacy and latent jealousy of his talent. It is also rather naïve of Sachs to think that no follower of Bosman's work would recognise these words.

In Sachs's descriptions of himself and his own struggles, he mentions Bosman in passing. In most cases his account highlights parts of Bosman's personality that are never quite explained in detail. He mentions, quite vaguely, how Bosman admired Edgar Allen Poe and from that deduces that Bosman had a 'death-wish' (Sachs, 1974:37), which explains his conduct later in life. His vague mention of this does not give adequate evidence for, or a detailed lead in to, what would happen to Bosman later in his life. He leaves too much to the reader to interpret. As for Sachs's giving his point of view, he seems to be holding back at this point because, in my opinion, he perhaps does not have the confidence to analyse his state of mind or motives more deeply.

Sachs describes the mischief that he and Bosman managed to get up to at university, which sets the stage for Bosman's later tendency to indulge in pranks, brought out by his friend Aegidius Jean Blignaut. What I can glean from their experiences—including joining the Young Communist League and taking part in political parades, causing trouble with their political views, and generally being vocal about their beliefs—is that Bosman did not stand in the background waiting to be seen or heard. He made sure that he was the centre of attention in whatever situation he was placed. Sachs recounts an incident in which Bosman jumped onto a stage to confront a magician whom he felt was a fraud. The result was Bosman's being punched in the jaw. Sachs highlights this to show Bosman's need to be at the centre of whatever was happening, to be the centre point around which all activity revolved. This is indeed a starting point for readers to understand the type of man he was—where there was controversy, he could be found. Yet, Sachs does not shy away from continuing his metaphor of Bosman as a god. He recalls a time when one of Bosman's admirers, of which there were many, according to Sachs (1974:40), took Bosman to a church meeting where he was literally

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placed on a platform to be adored by the churchgoers who were '[worked] up into a frenzy' in admiration of him as a 'Christ figure of grace' (Sachs, 1974:41). Sachs fittingly stands at the back of the room and views all of this from a distance. This instance does make one wonder why people were so in awe of Bosman. What aura did he project that made people fall at his feet as if falling at the feet of Christ?

As mentioned earlier, Sachs neglects to discuss Bosman's time in the Marico district, which was a very crucial aspect of his life. The fact that he says nothing of this time is significant and is presumably because he did not play a big enough role in Bosman's life to comment on this. He moves straight into his coverage of Bosman's murder trial in his chapter 'Trial for Murder'. This chapter does not contain many personal details about Bosman, but Sachs continues his metaphor of him as god-like. It contains a description of the trial, as a journalist would give it, and his attempt to analyse Bosman's motives psychologically is highly problematic. He attempts to understand how Bosman was feeling and what may have led to his shooting his stepbrother, David Russell, one night. His attempts are feeble in that he is not persuasive in his reasoning for why Bosman did it. The reasons he gives involve his reaching for obvious motives, like Bosman not liking his step-family because they were English and feeling threatened by them. Another motive he offers is that Bosman felt he was some kind of Nietzschean superman who was 'beyond good and evil and could therefore take the law into [his] own hands' (Sachs, 1974:48). He comes to a strange conclusion that simultaneously venerates and insults Bosman, which is that he was 'inclined to think that Herman experienced little remorse. A God has no remorse' (Sachs, 1974:49). Sachs's analysis is based purely on his opinion of how Bosman was, and not on anything factual or on information provided by Bosman himself. The truth is thus difficult to discern in Sachs's biography because he cannot support his opinions with anything concrete and factual. He writes as if his opinion is definitive and not to be doubted. In describing Bosman during his trial he writes that

> Herman's carefree attitude in the court was no ordinary clowning on his part, but evidence that he didn't care what happened to him and that, under the unbearable stress of living, nothing would have pleased him more than to drink of the water that quenches all thirst. (Sachs, 1974:51)

That is where his analysis ends. No further explanation is given to understand why Bosman would have been acting this way, no mention of fear or using humour as a coping mechanism, or, as he had previously stated, a 'safety-valve for all kinds of intricate tensions'

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(Sachs, 1974:33). For someone who supposedly knew Bosman well, it seems that he did not know his heart and therefore cannot be an adequate judge of his behaviour. But, from everything Sachs mentions, we do get a sense of who Bosman was from his perspective. He was a joker, an inveterate prankster, who did not take even the direst situation seriously. However, Sachs goes against Edel's first principle of understanding a man's way of dreaming and thinking, and does not attempt to understand Bosman's way of thinking, but rather infers how Bosman felt based on his own opinions. He continues by making the problematic claim that Bosman was unaffected by his time spent in prison and that it had 'no influence whatsoever on his deeper artistic self' (Sachs, 1974:53). In this way, Sachs is painting Bosman to be someone devoid of deeper emotions or the ability to be affected by situations that would ordinarily disturb and adversely affect other people. He goes so far as to call him 'a mighty son [of Cain]' (Sachs, 1974:58), which paints Bosman as a man who possessed more bad qualities than good. He does not give a balanced view of the man, which goes against Edel's second principle of not being overtaken by the subject. He is certainly not disengaged and peppers his biography with his resentment.

Sachs's involvement with Bosman's inner circle, his friends and wives, is presented in the chapter entitled 'Bohemian Nights'. His description of the people he was surrounded by makes Bosman look as if he spent most of his time with ex-convicts and hippies and most of his time quoting poetry and smoking marijuana. From this description of the atmosphere in which Bosman lived, Sachs paints a very specific portrait of the man. Bosman seems to be, behind all the descriptions of the other people, a man who stood apart, who was held in high esteem by those around him. Sachs describes certain nights spent with him and recounts a story he told, but as before in his biography when words failed him, he lifts a piece of writing, verbatim, from Bosman's short story 'Drieka and the Moon', in his collection *Mafeking Road*. He changes the name of the man and implies that the piece is written by him and not by Bosman. He writes:

> Gert van Rensburg [Johannes Oberholzer in 'Drieka and the Moon'] said that the full moon reminded him of one night when he was smuggling cattle over the Bechuanaland border. He never saw the full moon without thinking of the way it shone on the steel wire-cutters that he was holding in his hands. (Sachs, 1974:65)

Perhaps this is Sachs's way of filling in blanks where he had only a vague memory of what happened on those nights with Bosman. We cannot know the truth of what happened on those occasions as Sachs does not present himself as a reliable source of information because so

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much is based on inference and opinion. So, what we do ultimately get is a blurry portrait of a romantic poet, overcome by the beauty and the sadness of the world around him. Sachs's descriptions also seem to depict his friend as someone who was sinister and had something dark and evil lurking beneath the surface. He writes of how Bosman could charm women with his charisma and 'piercing blue eyes' but that the effect of these was 'not unlike the effect Hitler had' (Sachs, 1974:71). In using a comparison like this, especially at the time when World War II was still fresh in the minds of the people, Sachs does not seem to be trying to extend the intimacy between Bosman's followers and the man he was, but rather to break it down. Even if Sachs is referring to Bosman's charisma in this instance, it still seems to seek to create a darker image of the man.

His investigation into Bosman's relationships with women furthers Sachs's idea about Bosman's being emotionless and unable to form loyal and lasting relationships. This idea merely shows that Sachs did not know him and his inner life in any detail. His views of Bosman's relationships are contradicted not only in Bosman's own writing, but in the reminiscences of his friends and colleagues. He uses his own experience as Bosman's friend to analyse how Bosman treated his wives. He makes a sweeping statement that because Bosman admired the decadents, like Baudelaire and Oscar Wilde, and he lived his life in the same way, that he subsequently treated his wives as they did—with casual disregard. His analysis of Bosman's relationship with his second wife, Ella Manson, becomes even more venomous when he says their relationship was 'not sexual' and 'her lesbian love could find full expression in her union with Herman, in spite of his maleness' (Sachs, 1974:72). He uses the poetry of Ella Manson and Bosman in order to attempt a deeper understanding of their relationship, but his conclusions are vague and unsupported by any factual evidence. His interpretation of the relationship between the two is that it was intense and one of 'ultimates' (Sachs, 1974:74) where they were together purely because they shared a passion for the creation of art. Sachs (1974:76) hints at the Bosman-as-a-god metaphor when he mentions that he would have had to be 'much more inhuman for it to have lasted' between him and Ella Manson. He implies that there was already something inhuman about Bosman and that the relationship with Ella, in all its intensity and artistic influence, could thus never have lasted. He further implies that Ella lived for Bosman by stating that after their relationship ended she just 'petered out into death' (Sachs, 1974:76). Sachs's attempt to show how Bosman affected those he came into contact with, whoever they may have been, seems rather exaggerated

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here. He makes an assumption that the only reason there could be for Ella's demise was that Bosman was no longer part of her life and she had nothing to live for.

Sachs's argument regarding his relationship with Bosman begins to lose further credibility when he writes that he 'still maintained contact with him, but did so with little relish' (Sachs, 1974:74) even when in a letter Bosman wrote to Sachs he thanked him for his 'great tenderness and love' and said that it was 'love of [that] description that makes it worthwhile to be alive and a human being' (Sachs, 1974:11). These do not sound like the words of man who felt friendship and loyalty were a joke, but more like a man who felt emotions deeply but shared them with a chosen few. It seems as if it was in fact Sachs who was putting up the front, and wearing a mask in order to project a personality and a friendship that were not true.

In his last two chapters, Sachs begins his literary critique of Bosman. It is clear why Sachs included this in his biography and that is because he was mostly responsible for the publication of a large portion of Bosman's work. Here he no longer analyses Bosman the person, but analyses Bosman the author, the man behind the work. Maynard Solomon (1982:269) writes that gleaning a personality from the artist's work is near impossible because

> [a]rt embodies wishes and strivings as well as actual events and experiences; one usually cannot distinguish between the real and the imagined, between direct representation and sublimated transformation. Thus one cannot formulate any theory which justifies the reading of the life from the work.

Perhaps it is easier, then, for people to read the subject's life from the work if they knew him or her on a personal level, or if they know something more about the subject than what can be gathered from facts and documents. Sachs tries to use the personal information he has at his disposal to piece together Bosman's personality (as he knew him) and shows how it is reflected in the work. This section of the biography is the closest Sachs gets to finding the 'figure under the carpet'. He paints Bosman again as the man who stood apart from those around him, a view which has some merit in the sense that he was unlike the South African writers of the time, and even though he drew from the work of European and American writers, he added something essentially South African to his work. Sachs vaguely links Bosman's life with his work, and tries to illuminate a knowable personality beneath what Bosman wrote and how he expressed his personality in his writing. He writes that 'for Herman it was the heart that counted' (Sachs, 1974:82) and in his heart he was South African,

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which is why he could write so deeply and honestly about South Africans in his stories. When discussing his portrayal of the Boers in his Oom Schalk Lourens stories he writes:

> …he not only acquired form and discipline from the great English prose-writers, and style of approach from the American humourists but…he was able to assimilate it artistically and then transmute it into something essentially South African (Sachs, 1974:83).

What we can take from this description is that Bosman was an intelligent man who understood how people behaved and felt, despite not being fond of being around people. Sachs then speaks about how Bosman's stories contain humanity and 'lightness of touch' (Sachs, 1974:84) but then writes about how Bosman disliked humanity and being around people. Perhaps this describes a contradictory part of Bosman's personality. When he wrote he could be sensitive to others and their feelings, but in reality, if we are to follow Sachs's descriptions, Bosman was quite the opposite. He equates Bosman with other great artists, like Beethoven, in this aspect of his personality in that he 'did not like human beings but he loved humanity in the abstract, a schizophrenic phenomenon common to artists' (Sachs, 1974:84). So, what others would see as a contradictory element of his personality was, in fact, according to Sachs, what linked him to the greater artistic world.

Sachs neglects to analyse fully Bosman's short stories but does mention how they were more poetic than realistic. What I take from this is that Bosman was a dreamer, someone who used his writing to escape from his own reality and immerse himself in the lives of others. Because of this, Sachs focuses his analysis on Bosman's poetry rather than on his short stories, which was what he was most famous for. Bosman considered himself to be a poet, one of the greatest poets, more than a short story writer. But his poetry did not ever become what he was chiefly known for. Despite this, by analysing his poetry Sachs highlights some aspects of Bosman's personality that can be gleaned from it. In Bosman's focus on 'death, ruin and waste', Sachs (1974:91) writes that he can see 'much of the tragedy of Herman's life in the images he uses'. In most of his poetry Sachs sees a fear of death and almost a 'death-wish', as with Poe, one that Bosman could only escape from through his sense of humour. This sense of humour, though, does not come through in the poetry as much as it does in his short story and essay writing. Perhaps, if Sachs's understanding is to be followed, Bosman found an outlet for his fear of death in his poetry, and an outlet for that same fear in his short stories which manifested through his use of humour. It should be pointed out, however, that many of the short stories have a Gothic element and thus deal with themes of death, corpses and

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internment. But his sense of humour and deep feeling always manage to creep in, despite the darkness of the subject. One thing is for certain from Sachs's descriptions—Bosman was a great lover of literature and a great admirer of those who came before him, especially Shakespeare, Keats and Poe. Literature was his life, and the clearest way he knew to express himself.

In his final chapter, Sachs makes mention of the 'colour question'—how Bosman represented his feelings towards other races in his short stories. One thing that Sachs tries to make clear is that Bosman was sympathetic to all races, even if it often came across that he was mocking them. In his stories there are no heroes or villains because they are 'all victims of Fate' (Sachs, 1974:100) and none of them is immune to the destructiveness of war or the pain and loss they suffer in life. Although Bosman does use derogatory language in his stories, especially the word *kaffir*, which he uses most often, his stories are instruments to show racial myths in South Africa for what they are by ridiculing them. This ridicule is often misunderstood by readers because Bosman is not viewed as a satirist but is immediately seen as being a racist for using this offensive word. Salome Snyman (2003:47), who did a study of Bosman's use of the word *kaffir* in his stories (particularly in his story 'Unto Dust'), quotes a teacher who taught the story in English classes as saying 'I have generally found South African authors protesting against racism to be bitter and cynical in their works. Bosman, by contrast, is a breath of fresh air…. [*Unto Dust*] is the ideal vehicle to demonstrate the difference between author and narrator – how an author with a non-racist message reveals his sentiments by using a racist narrator'. This describes Bosman very succinctly. His focus was on presenting the truth rather than pleasing people because, as Sachs (1974:99) writes, 'truth is truth for the artist—or he is no artist'. Bosman presented Afrikaners in a way they were not pleased about because they felt they were being made out to be small-minded and provincial. What they did not realise was that Bosman was ridiculing everyone, not just the Afrikaners. He could move from poking fun at Afrikaners to making fun of the British in one story. Snyman (2003:48) makes the point that in his stories about the Boer wars he certainly does use satire in order to 'critique Afrikaner racism'. The mistake that some readers and critics make is to associate Bosman with his narrator, Oom Schalk, and to see their views as one and the same. Bosman saw the word *kaffir* as a cultural tag rather than a racial slur. He writes, 'If I were a Native, and I had acquired a certain amount of culture…I would demand to be recognised and accepted as a plain kaffir…. I would never allow them to take away from me a name so rich in legend, sorrow, and so heavy with the drama of Africa' (Bosman, cited in

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Snyman, 2003:64). He uses it not only to show the 'authentic diction' of the time but also to use satire in order to open people's eyes to the realities around them. Unfortunately, no matter how much Bosman tried to romanticise the word or remove its negative connotations, it remains a sensitive, politically-charged word, which will continue to offend. If we can look past the use of this word and rather focus on the irony and satire in his work and how these are so masterfully presented through humour his stories begin to take on a whole new meaning. Medalie (1994:87) makes an interesting point that though he may not be a racist himself there is very little attempt at making the lives of black people in his stories realistic. He uses many stock figures for his black characters, which 'exposes white pretensions' and highlights the fact that his stories are written from a definite white perspective. This is unavoidable for Bosman, being a white man himself and having no experience of another way of life. His focus was on the white people of the Marico and how he experienced life among them. It makes sense then that he would write from their perspectives and present their points of view. His stories give me a sense of him as a great romantic, a scintillating humourist and someone willing to escape from the ugliness of reality for just a moment in his writing, and through that writing take his readers on a similar journey. Sachs understands Bosman's intentions in his stories to bring the Afrikaans 'racial credo' and the 'truths of life' (Sachs, 1974:102) to the fore and use satire to show how unnecessary racism is. In Sachs's view Bosman's stories were a great way for him to expound the 'truths of life' (Sachs, 1974:102).

Aegidius Jean Blignaut's biography, *My Friend Herman Charles Bosman*, is close to Leon Edel's definition of what a portrait should be. It also follows Nadel's dramatic or expressive narration because Blignaut is a part of the action and is at Bosman's side in most of the anecdotes. It was Samuel Johnson (cited in Monk, 2007:529) who said that writers were not the best subjects because their lives were led in their minds and thoughts rather than in their actions. Bosman is different, if we look at how Blignaut portrays him to us. His life was a life of action *and* thought, which makes it interesting to the reader. He did not sit back and merely write about what others were doing, he caused trouble and lived a life of action. The Blignaut biography, as suggested earlier, has been described as an 'erratic memoir' by Stephen Gray (2002:37) but on the dust jacket Lionel Abrahams describes it by saying that his 'unique collection of anecdotes and romantic reflections must immediately be seen as the major record of the truth of Bosman to date, outside of his own writings' (quoted on the dust jacket). He does substantiate this by also calling it 'solidly circumstantial'. But despite its

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being seen as 'circumstantial' in that the stories he tells cannot be factually proven and were usually intimate moments between him and Bosman, it paints for us a portrait of a man Blignaut knew intimately. His point of view in the presentation of Bosman's life is essential is highlighting the man Bosman was to him. As a biography, it is not the typical birth-to-death type. His biography brings only a brief part of Bosman's life to the reader, yet it is a vital part of his life. Once this part of Bosman's life can be understood, then we can be a step closer to understanding who he was to Blignaut. Blignaut was not one to avoid controversy and he and Bosman made for quite a trouble-stirring team. One of the main things that he and Bosman shared was their love of humour, both in daily life and in writing. They, according to Leon Hugo, 'turned what they were doing into a game in which humour and laughter were absolute pre-requisites' (Hugo, cited in Blignaut, 1980:10). Blignaut's biography is described in the foreword, by Leon Hugo, as 'a record of one of the most important associations in South African literary history' and he adds that they came together 'to work with words, to write, to make something of themselves in the literary world' (Hugo, cited in Blignaut, 1980:7). This biography is indeed a record of that journey they took together, and it is peppered with their characteristic sense of humour and subterfuge. Though the biography is about Bosman, it is also about Blignaut and how, in his own words, he was merely 'a foothill next to the Himalaya of Herman's talent' (Blignaut, 1980:8). Blignaut, unlike Sachs, seemed to be inspired by Bosman's talent, rather than intimidated by it. He was instrumental in introducing Bosman to the literary world and helped him to share his writing with a much larger portion of the reading world. Their association was brief, lasting only about three years, but Blignaut's influence on Bosman's life and writing is undeniable.

The biography is a collection of reminiscences of their time together, and it is also a clear portrait of two men immersed in literature and '[consorting] with the great spirits of the literary past…to create their own living images in words' (Hugo, cited in Blignaut, 1980:11). It was Blignaut who inspired Bosman's greatest works, his short stories, and it was during their time together that he wrote his stories with relish and passion to be published in the periodicals they edited together. Their friendship was close and Hugo writes that 'there were probably only two people who came to know him really well and to whom he in turn gave as much of himself as he could' (Hugo, cited in Blignaut, 1980:13), Blignaut being one, and his third wife Helena the other. This biography serves to '[illuminate] an essential chapter of Herman Bosman's life and [restore] a genius for our consideration…[and build] a lambent memorial to this friend' (Blignaut, 1980:13). This biography captures who Bosman was,

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briefly, and catches 'the essential traits, all that will characterize and express the personality and suggest the life *behind* the surface exhibited to the world' (Edel, 1984:177, emphasis in the original). It is not possible to know what people are thinking and feeling, and all we can know is what they choose to tell us, or how they express their feelings and thoughts in their work. Blignaut attempts to help us to understand how Bosman thought and felt at certain points in his life, and even though it is merely conjecture, because we can never truly know how someone feels or what they think, it does give us a sense of who Bosman was to him.

The structure of Blignaut's biography is interesting, as it reflects the type of person Bosman was. As mentioned above, it is written in a series of anecdotes, which reflect how Bosman was remembered by many—as someone who could grab the attention of an audience at a party or gathering and keep them enthralled with his animated way of telling stories. Blignaut and Bosman's time together seems to have been made up of a selection of moments of excitement, sadness, adventure, humour, pranks and introspection, and from the moment they met there seems to have been an immediate bond between them. Blignaut's admiration for Bosman had begun years earlier with a piece Bosman had written at university. He describes Bosman's writing as '[making] a lasting impression on [him] that years later [he] could still hear Herman's words, beautiful as evensong…[he] had seen before [him] a great essay, behind it a genius' (Blignaut, 1980:20).

Blignaut's focus is on Bosman the artist, and everything that this description would entail. In the chapter 'Mine Dumps', he describes their first meeting, which was at what he calls 'a literary *soirée*' (Blignaut, 1980:17), and one immediately notes an air of respect from his first impression, but there is also a sense of immediate ease. Bosman won a prize for a poem at the party, and after Blignaut praises the poem he immediately moves to 'ragging him' about how he accepted his prize from the young woman (Blignaut, 1980:17), which was with humility and a touch of shyness. Bosman reacts to the ragging with biting humour by saying 'that her voice was rotund…but that was the only thing round about her once she had discarded her lenses and they were oblong anyhow' (Blignaut, 1980:17) and leaves the party. Bosman's odd statement and quick exit highlight his shyness in social situations and also his leaning towards obscure humour. But it seems from Blignaut's urgency in his pursuit of Bosman after their second meeting that he saw something of a kindred spirit in him, but also someone he wanted to impress. Bosman, that night, had won the short essay competition in the literary gathering while Blignaut had come second. Blignaut writes that Bosman wrote two essays

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that night (showing his passion for Johannesburg and his sense of humour), one about the mine dumps and another that poked fun at the party guests. His essay about the guests was ripped up and discarded but, in true Bosman fashion, he owned up to his prank and declared with a 'karate chop in the air… "I want no truck with the mob that do not see that a goddess stood on her head is a goddess still"…. Then he made a gesture indicative of his disgust at an affront to art' (Blignaut, 1980:18). This incident shows not only Bosman's passion for literature but also his reverence for art in general. He seems to me to be someone who never wasted an opportunity to make his voice heard through his work and was greatly offended by those who did not understand it. Through this Blignaut highlights Bosman's intense passion for literature and his immediate attraction to those who shared that passion.

Blignaut and Bosman's acquaintance was brief before, as Blignaut (1980:20) writes, 'he was to stumble into an abyss in the depths of which groped souls as hard as stones he cracked in prison, through a tumulus of bitter days, the jagged splinters of years'. Blignaut's poetic and eloquent description leads us into the next stage of Bosman's life, following his stint as a teacher and his imprisonment for murder. In this way, Blignaut stays true to the dramatic or expressive narrator who captures the personality of the subject by highlighting only certain parts of his life, those that are deemed the most telling. He hints at the fact that Bosman would be a changed man after his experience in prison, something Sachs did not believe to be true. But what remained in Bosman was his sense of humour and love for writing.

Their time working together was adventurous, to say the least, and both men were ready to stir up trouble wherever they went. Bosman's tendency to be a prankster was nurtured by Blignaut, who was also prone to jokes and ribbing others. He describes their time together as editors for their periodicals *The Touleier*, *The New LSD* and *The New Sjambok* (among others) as a rather turbulent time. Mostly, it involved trying to get the three journals printed in order to give the two of them a vehicle for literary expression. Blignaut (1980:25) writes that their dreams could not quite match what happened in reality and the publications 'bore little resemblance to the dummy [he and Herman] had prepared; several stories had been crowded out to let interlopers in'. These publications could never be an outlet for the two of them alone, and they soon became something neither of them recognised. But they persevered and with every failure they dived into their next project with relish. Blignaut's descriptions of how he and Bosman 'did not receive salaries, nor payment for [their] contributions' (Blignaut, 1980:26) shows how passionate they were about writing and literature since they

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wrote for no compensation. Their contemporaries also did not seem to appreciate what they were doing, which often included publishing controversial material, and they were eventually referred to as 'Gutter Press' (Blignaut, 1980:34). Bosman is described as being hopeful and optimistic that despite the controversy around them that passion for literature and writing would triumph. This highlights a part of Bosman's personality that is clear throughout Blignaut's work, and that is his belief that art could triumph over any kind of adversity. But as soon as their publication became popular their enemies tried to shut them down and said that 'ribaldry and blasphemy disgraced it. They also said it would stew in its juice, spiced with its erotica. I replied that it was not bawdry they objected to but fearless criticism' (Blignaut, 1980:28). And this is what Bosman became known for—his fearless criticism and Blignaut helped to nurture it in him. And, as Blignaut (1980:32) explains, had it not been for those three failed publications, they could not have produced one of Bosman's great works of poetry, *The Blue Princess*, because his poetry was published and preserved in their publications before it could be discarded by him. This was the point where Bosman's expression of his talent found a beginning.

Blignaut (1980:34) explains that '[they] were largely responsible for the prejudice against [them] because [they] also poked fun at the editors of many newspapers and some of their subordinates' (Blignaut, 1980:34). Despite their poking fun at their fellow journalists, there is a strong sense of fun and enjoyment in the power writing had to make people laugh, but also in its power to anger people. Blignaut makes Bosman's power to do this central to many of his anecdotes, but keeps his literary genius in focus at the same time. Bosman's life as a journalist seems to have done nothing other than to make people laugh or make them angry and because of this ability to anger people through his writing, he was largely ignored by other journalists (Blignaut, 1980:36). Journalism was left to be his only way to make his living. According to Blignaut (1980:36)

> it must be admitted he enjoyed [journalism] because it was in the spirit of his intransigent and antinomian outlook. But he was to say that all he ever asked for was to write the things that were clamouring in him for expression.

Blignaut investigates this in his chapter 'Culture under the Milky Way'. In Bosman's writing his humour was something so intrinsic that Blignaut (1980:36) argues that if he were to change that part of himself, something that was second-nature to him, it would be like 'asking him to remove the built-in smile from his face'. Blignaut clearly shows Bosman's way of thinking, and how he made his way through the world. Humour was his vehicle and the only

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way he knew how to express his deepest feelings. But, he understood too that humour, if used in excess, could cause the public not to take them and their arguments seriously. Bosman had written two apt essays which mention the subject of humour, one entitled 'Humour and Wit' and the other 'My Life'. In both of these he gives his opinion regarding what humour is to him, and it is a definition that is offbeat and unconventional (Snyman, 2003:54). In 'Humour and Wit' he describes humour as a 'wayward and mysterious and outcast thing…that is forever a pillar-to-post fugitive from the stern laws of reality, and yet forms so intimate a part of…all truth about which there is an eternal ring' (Bosman, in Gray, 2003:160). His definitions give us a very clear idea of how he approached humour in his stories. In 'My Life' he writes:

> A vein of humour is supposed to run through a good deal of my writings. The worst thing about a joke is that it can as easily as not fall flat. It is also no novel experience for me to have people laughing themselves sick over something that I've been genuinely earnest about. What all this is leading up to is that I wish to express it as my conviction that, contrary to popular opinion on the subject, about the most insuperable social, financial and cultural handicap there is in life is for a person to have a sense of humour. (Bosman, in Gray, 2003:31)

This shows that he knew humour was a powerful tool in writing, but that it had to be used in an intelligent way, with irony and satire, in order for it to be truly effective. Readers have responded to Bosman's humour both positively and negatively, and this supports his idea that humour has two roles: to entertain, but also to unsettle the reader and cause some degree of discomfort. Medalie (1994) argues that Bosman's approach to humour is discussed, which shows its complexity. He does not use humour in an obvious, slapstick manner, but rather in ways that make the readers think more deeply about what they are reading. Bosman expresses his humour most often through bathos, where realism and romanticism '[chafe] against each other' (Medalie, 1994:80-81). He uses his narrator to express the realism of a situation, without embellishment or magical elements, while his characters often express the romanticism they experience in the Marico. This leads to a more cynical, biting type of humour. In other instances he uses laughter that is 'bitter and dark' and this is in order to make his readers question their understanding of humour and also to 'confound the safety and complacency of the pie-in-your-face type of laughter' (Medalie, 1994:89). This is what makes Bosman's stories so intensely intriguing: they never allow you to stop contemplating your own reactions to what you are reading. You are constantly being brought into the story to question your own beliefs and approaches to subjects like humour.

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In several of the chapters of the biography, Blignaut highlights instances where they made trouble either by standing up for something they believed in, or purely for entertainment purposes. One thing that one can be sure of is that Bosman and Blignaut encouraged troublemaker behaviour in each other. They would poke fun at the people who worked for them, for instance where they convinced a young black man who worked for them that there were ghosts in the nearby cemetery and that they were haunting him. Other times, their indulging in pranks had to do with gaining the attention of those in the publishing and literary circles of Johannesburg. In his chapter 'Blasphemy', Blignaut describes how both he and Bosman were arrested for using the name of Jesus in a poem. Bosman did not see anything offensive in his poetry that needed to be defended or removed, and said that 'No matter how unfortunate a man may be to have his dream smitten with fairy gold and blue allurements, genius needs no defence' (Blignaut, 1980:107). Bosman certainly thought highly of himself, as did Blignaut, which is probably what gave them the idea that they could cause trouble and mislead people because they were of higher intelligence than almost everybody else. Blignaut also uses the metaphor of Bosman as a god but in a different way from Sachs. It recurs throughout the biography, especially in anecdotes about their troublemaking because Bosman felt he was above those who were the victims of his mischief. In the chapter 'A Weird Sarcophagus', Bosman tries to outdo Ghandi's acts of martyrdom in a prank where he placed himself in a cylinder in order to show that he was a greater humanitarian and martyr than Ghandi. During the prank, Bosman smoked so much he nearly ended up suffocating himself and had to be taken out of the cylinder. He brushed off incidents like this by saying that Ghandi 'didn't play the game – he went into training cunningly' (Blignaut, 1980:120) and moved on to his next prank. Yet, even when Blignaut was not around, as he recounts in 'A Pale Wind in a Tall Tree', Bosman was the same prankster Blignaut knew, without his influence. Blignaut describes a time when he travelled to England to find out more about Bosman's time there. He found that not only was he the man who 'decorated [a public lobby] with photographs of Herr Hitler' in retaliation for something that was said against Ella Manson's piano playing, but also was described by one of his housemates as 'a little mad' (Blignaut, 1980:134). No one quite understood Bosman's reactions to certain situations, and for most people his actions did seem rash and not quite thought through logically. In this sense, Bosman was seen as an impulsive man, one whose actions were based on emotional responses rather than considered, reasonable responses. This aspect of Bosman's personality comes out in Sachs's biography as well, which shows that this was a part of himself that no one close to him could ignore. His impulsiveness was not quelled by anyone he was with.

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Blignaut finds it difficult to remain disengaged from Bosman and the time he shared with him, simply because he was so close to him. Edel's principle of remaining disengaged does not apply to Blignaut, because without his engagement, Bosman would not come to life as vividly as he does on the pages of his biography. In order for us to understand their relationship and who Bosman was to him, it is important that Blignaut get involved in what Bosman was doing and feeling. In order to be the expressive or dramatic narrator he must engage with Bosman and be a part of the action rather than just reporting it as an outside observer. In one instance, in the chapter 'Only the Afternoons' Blignaut mentions the dedication Bosman had written for him on his poem 'Ellaleen' that read 'To Aegidius Jean Blignaut who recognised me ten years ago, in spite of what the mob thought' (Blignaut, 1980:141). This dedication is very telling because it shows that Bosman had a great respect for Blignaut's being able to see past what the public thought of him, and see the man behind the mask. Their friendship was close because of this and in one particularly poignant moment recounted in 'In the Lists with Chance', Bosman sells all of his furniture save a bed and a piano in order to make Blignaut's bail. Blignaut (1980:160) writes that this moment meant so much to him that he was at a loss for words to describe it and that even canonising Bosman in his memory would not be enough. This incident made him feel 'truly humble…before the unique token of friendship, and sad that [his] need should have made [Bosman] give it'. It is clear to me that Bosman was willing to do a great deal for those close to him, but he never did anything in a predictable manner, which made his moments of compassion all the more moving. There was indeed more to their friendship than Bosman's bailing Blignaut out of jail. There was a moment, described in 'Elegiac Whispers', where Bosman was misdiagnosed with cancer. Blignaut (1980:188) describes the news as having a 'jumbling effect' on him, as it would on anyone who hears terrible news about their close friend's health, but Bosman calmly replies that if he were to die he would 'go into the bush to die like an elephant' to which Blignaut replies that 'if it ever came to that [he] would go with him'. This moment of self-sacrifice for their friendship is moving for Bosman and Blignaut (1980:188) describes him as having a 'catch in his voice' because of it. But it was the news of his rumoured death in 1937 that shows not only how Blignaut deified his friend, but also how others who knew him were affected by him in some way. Blignaut (1980:237) writes:

> The news of Herman's rumoured death in 1937 made me, grieving, seek out somebody who loved him. We talked about our friend's invincible spirit resurgent from a traumatic charring in a death cell, confiding to each other what he had meant to us. And then this man, an advocate who had been a

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> schoolmaster, spoke a touching obituary. 'Herman changed my life,' he said. And I whispered sadly, with King David: 'His praise shall be continually in my mouth.'

Bosman's presence seemed to have had an effect on everyone who knew him, whether it was good or bad, and the few words – 'Herman changed my life' – say so much. Blignaut writes about his friend as someone god-like, troubled and touched by some kind of greatness, but Bosman lived his life separated from everyday reality and immersed in all things literary.

This use of the dramatic or expressive narrator is particularly useful for Blignaut, who knew Bosman so intimately. In knowing Bosman the man, he was also involved in many of his creative moments when he wrote some of his greatest stories and poems. Blignaut analyses Bosman's poetry, which is what he was writing when they first met, in order to understand his ways of thinking and to find the man beneath the work. But Bosman's poetry was too difficult for the general public, in his own opinion, and in the preface to his collection he wrote that 'the public will not understand these verses. It would be an insult to me if they pretended they did' (Blignaut, 1980:40). He felt that his writing, particularly his poetry, could only touch 'those whom God [had] purposefully made different' (Blignaut, 1980:40), so finding who he was beneath his poetry could be quite difficult. Blignaut admits that not many people understood the lines Bosman wrote and that the public would never understand the poetry that was 'as terse as a bare tree in silhouette touching the edge of nimbus clouds charged with thunder' (Blignaut, 1980:40). He admits to not knowing fully who Bosman was and states that the only reason their friendship lasted was because they did not pry into each other's lives. Even if Blignaut could not fully understand the man behind the poetry, he believed that he was a gifted writer with hands from which 'genius flowed', but in whom there was also 'a little madness' (Blignaut, 1980:40). He uses a similar metaphor to Sachs when describing Bosman's poetry where he presents Bosman as something akin to a god. He writes of Bosman that 'there was a benediction in the hands he stretched out over the veld and its people. In the beauty of their country he saw their inspiration and, with closed eyes, their ennobling dreams' (Blignaut, 1980:40).

Bosman lived his life in stories, and Blignaut highlights this part of his character at the beginning of his chapter entitled 'When Wolves eat Wind… *(Villon)*'. He writes:

> When fate's cadaver fingers occult the light of reason, men slay themselves—or others. In such a moment, Herman shot a man dead in a dark room; and from the

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> instant the rifle cracked, the flash putting intruding moonbeams to flight at the window, he has cast himself for the main role in a drama about murder. (1980:42)

Unlike Sachs's description of Bosman's time in prison for killing his stepbrother, David, Blignaut delves into how Bosman was affected by the incident with a few words that paint a more vivid picture. The sense I get from this description is the inference that literature was always central in his life because there is an implied separation from reality in the comment that he was cast in a 'main role in a drama about murder'. This part of his personality is clear from what Blignaut writes and he paints a clear picture of a man deeply involved in a world of imagination and fantasy. He (1980:42) writes 'I respected his reticences…and later I was glad I had done so when he spoke sadly about the poison of introspection, and wanted me to assure him of his sanity'. In these few words we get a sense of someone who was obviously affected by what had happened and was hesitant to analyse it himself in case he were to find that he was indeed touched with madness. Actual madness (incapacitating and overwhelming madness) is, presumably, more terrifying than madness explained as feeling different from others because of an opposing view of and approach to the world. Aside from the obvious, Bosman's time in prison was damaging to him because in prison

> [a]ll correspondence was strictly censored. In any case he wrote little, destroying what he did write as soon as he had set it down. Nothing more condemnatory could be said about the atmosphere he found himself in than that it inhibited his urge to write, something as necessary to him as dreaming at night. (1980:43)

Bosman found certain things amusing about his trial, like the prosecution bringing in a witch-doctor in order to describe the moon on the night of the murder, and also how the prosecution tried to use his notebooks of murder stories to prove his guilt. Blignaut's focus in his description of Bosman's time in prison is on how he was mentally and emotionally affected by what he was going through, and especially how he was affected by the long stretches of time he had to think and contemplate life. It was a time that 'seeped poison into his mind' (Blignaut, 1980:45) and was to forever change the man he was.

Another aspect that brings Bosman to life is how Blignaut describes his use of language. He knew from listening to Bosman speak with his 'arrogant command of language' (Blignaut, 1980:46) that he would be valuable in a literary partnership. He also predicts that Bosman's personality, described as 'an egoism that is genius' (Blignaut, 1980:46), and his way of negotiating the world, with confidence and pride, would lead him into the literary world and

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into a life of greatness. Blignaut is a trustworthy source for understanding why Bosman chose the route he did because, as he describes it, their 'outlook on life was similar and [their] taste in literature, too. Moreover, [they] liked each other's work, as good a basis for friendship as any' (Blignaut, 1980:46). This, similarly, makes him an untrustworthy source since he and Bosman were renowned for their embellishments and avoidance of truth. Later, in his chapter 'The Blackchat Club', he reiterates this thought when he writes that Bosman was attracted by his humour and poetry and fittingly adds that 'no one who lacked it could hope to become really friendly with him' (Blignaut, 1980:234). These were two essential aspects to Bosman's life and having a common understanding of these was sure to draw the two men together.

Blignaut is also perhaps the best source for finding Edel's 'figure under the carpet' because he was present during the beginning of what was to be Bosman's most prolific time, and when he began writing his Oom Schalk stories. He is well placed to analyse Bosman's work to find the deeper truth to the enigma that Bosman was. He (1980:50) writes:

> In Nature's work we see the wood because of the trees and the undergrowth and the tumbling monkey in the tree-tops, and in the green leaves we see her faith in God: in Herman's work we see the phases of life in rich patterns and because of the sombre patches, we see his humour and his abiding belief in humanity.

This is an eloquent description of how Bosman approached his work, which Blignaut investigates in his chapter 'A Treasure Hunt: *Schalk Lourens is Born*'. He speaks of finding Bosman's 'figure under the carpet' when he and Bosman were sharing living quarters soon after his release from prison. Bosman had begun writing a novel and Blignaut (1980:46) mentions that he 'thought the diction rather than the characters would reveal the state of his mind', but by that point he had already begun returning to his usual, cheerful self. Blignaut did not pry. From this we can tell that Bosman was most certainly a man who felt the need to work through his emotional troubles in his writing, both poetry and prose. This is where the true Bosman can be found. But even though writing was where he found an outlet for his deepest feelings, he was rather careless with his manuscripts. He had a disregard for possessions and societal etiquette, and his manuscripts tended to be given the same treatment. As long as the story was put on paper, he was happy. In an amusing anecdote, Blignaut tells of how Bosman's Oom Schalk stories were born: Bosman had left his manuscript in a place he had stayed for the night, and the landlady's son, it was found, was using the pages to line his drawers. In an exchange with the landlady she asked if the pages were for a recipe book to which Blignaut replied 'Yes, madam…a recipe for a masterpiece' (Blignaut, 1980:53).

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Bosman's comment about the story was merely that 'the love letters lay softly on it – it will never be put to better use' (Blignaut, 1980:53). Blignaut highlights elements of Bosman's personality that reflect him to be a romantic at heart, who merely wanted to get his passion for writing onto the page. In his writing Blignaut recognised 'something of value to our culture; [he] also knew it had no monetary value at the time, not having ladies and lords among its characters – only black and white aristocrats of the veld'. But in the story, 'Makapan's Caves', and in all of Bosman's stories to follow, there can be found 'a brooding rhythm: a sombre cadence that is composed of half-notes. It is the voice of Africa' (Blignaut, 1980:54).

The part of Bosman that is the most knowable, and that would lead us to a greater understanding of who he was as a man, is his passion for literature. He did not expect to get rich from his work. There seemed to have been a part of him that simply wished to share stories and poetry with the world. Blignaut mentions an incident where Bosman had given a small notebook of his poetry to a friend, who subsequently left for Scotland, and he had no way of ever getting the notebook back from him. Bosman seemed perfectly at ease with having lost his work, as long as someone was enjoying it and appreciating it. Blignaut greatly valued Bosman's poetry and says that the collection was 'the first abode for Herman's thoughts, which had with chaste words inculcated beauty upon [him] at bay to ennui' (Blignaut, 1980:58). When Bosman's collection of poetry was published, entitled *The Blue Princess*, Blignaut was relieved because it meant at least those poems were preserved and could not be blithely discarded. Later, another loss that would haunt him was when Bosman left England and left many of his possessions behind, including manuscripts. He (1980:137-138) writes:

> In a life well-stocked with melancholy things, deep shadows, deeper than the black of night, I regret most that I did not rescue the manuscripts Herman abandoned there. When I heard about the poems and stories which awaited the incinerator, the chance had gone….If I had suspected that Herman had vacated the flat, I would have taken the risk of imprisonment to preserve the treasure for posterity.

His use of the word 'treasure' is a telling description of how much he valued Bosman's writing. There was nothing more distressing to him than the loss of some part of his friend, especially his literary work.

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Blignaut highlights throughout the biography that Bosman was not recognised in his own time, and often his work was rejected—not based on the merit of the work but on his reputation that generally preceded him. Most people were not keen on publishing, or reading, his work because of the many cases of libel against him and Blignaut and often because of his reputation as a prankster. Yet, he was published quite prolifically despite this. South Africans particularly did not appreciate Bosman because, as Blignaut (1980:111) writes, 'the nation tripped over moral criteria in their literary judgement of Herman's work. They averted their eyes from the proof of his genius in his incomparable stories'. Blignaut explains that this was because they 'could not see his splendour for the flashing of the handcuffs which had once bound his wrists—... they could not strike from themselves the gyves of the past'. But despite the lack of understanding, he (1980:77) writes that he was 'a prolific writer of fine nervous prose, a master of style that uses the reader's attention sparingly, then richly rewards him for it'. This shows the artistry that went into Bosman's stories and suggests that the readers were his main focus, even though he was not aware of who his readers were. Blignaut mentions Bosman's almost other-worldly need to write, as if inspiration came from somewhere other than within himself, in suggesting that 'his mind teemed with original ideas…[and] he was so fluent that the time he spent on a manuscript was regulated only by the top speed at which he could write; it was as though he were taking down dictation' (Blignaut, 1980:77). This is reminiscent of W.B. Yeats and 'automatic writing' where the writer is taken over by some spiritual force without any input from his or her consciousness. Later, in 'Only the Afternoons' Blignaut suggests that Bosman's need to write haunted him deeply and 'disturbed him so much that he lay awake most of the night' (Blignaut, 1980:139). He writes that he recalls Bosman implying that 'because the events rushed along so fast, carrying him with them, ... any diversion to slow them down short of the buffer of destiny would have been an artistic sin' (Blignaut, 1980:139). Here the metaphor of writing being a holy act links with Blignaut's metaphor of Bosman as a god-like man who was destined to be a great writer. Yet writing, according to Blignaut, was also something of an addiction for Bosman: he likens him to a drug addict and describes how after writing 'his craving usually abated soon after his idea had been immured in the discipline of life and shape. But the act of creation drained off some energy, because he would walk away or lounge untidily when he had finished a story' (Blignaut, 1980:140). It seems, if most of Blignaut's anecdotes are believed, that for Bosman it was the act of getting the story onto the page that was what was most important to him. What happened to the stories afterwards was of less significance. He enjoyed seeing how

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people reacted to his stories, but once he saw that it was almost as if his need for recognition was sated.

This need for Bosman to be recognised for his work is presented in the use of a very apt metaphor: a magician. Blignaut tends towards describing Bosman as some sort of literary magician, capable of weaving words together to enchant and hypnotise his audience, but also as a great literary genius. In one particular instance, Blignaut describes his first reading of 'The Rooinek'. He read it in front of Bosman because Bosman enjoyed seeing the reactions of his reader. The scene unfolds as follows:

> I started to read the story. The first few sentences engaged my interest; the first few paragraphs began my captivation; the first page completed my enslavement. The felicity of diction enchanted me. I paused to re-read choice touches of the humour; he approved my selection with a smile…. Then I fell suddenly quiet. The compliment of savouring a period a second time had to be deferred, the pleasure foregone. Nobody interrupts the Seventh Symphony. I would not, could not, stay the movement of the wonderful story towards its climax in the sun…. Tears stood in my eyes when I came to the end and my heart was grateful…. I had just finished reading one of the great stories in literature (Blignaut, 1980:78-80).

From this we see just how much importance Blignaut placed on Bosman's talent and genius. His reference to the Seventh Symphony gives further weight to Bosman's being compared to a musical genius like Beethoven. He was desperate for people to appreciate his friend's work as much as he did, and this biography is perhaps his way of persuading readers to give the talented writer unknown to most people a chance at winning them over with his magical stories. This piece also shows how poignant Bosman's stories could be and his ability to transport his readers to places they had never been and to experience the lives of people completely separate from themselves.

Bosman was a different person in social situations. Blignaut describes how he was always telling jokes and stories to lighten the mood at parties. In one instance, Blignaut describes how he and Bosman went to meet the parents of Ellie Beemer, a young woman they both admired and who wrote for *The Touleier*. In this tense and uncomfortable situation, Bosman is described as 'uttering hardly a word' and he mentions that 'never before has Herman failed to illumine a dark impasse with wit' (Blignaut, 1980:68). But Blignaut often lapses into moments of hero-worship, which Edel describes as problematic when writing a biography. In Monk's view, which is opposed to Edel's in this case, hero-worship is permitted in biography because this is written from a certain point of view with a certain result in mind. In this case,

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Blignaut wants to highlight how brilliant and captivating Bosman was and in order to do that he emphasises his intense admiration for his friend. Blignaut (1980:69) felt that he and Ellie were experiencing something spiritual by being in Bosman's presence and wrote to her that '[they] should in time be envied for having had the privilege of Herman's affection, which [they] had humbly tried to requite. It was a gift from the gods, [their] awareness that an immortal had walked beside [them]'. Despite the obvious lack of objectivity, Blignaut manages to paint the portrait of a man who lived in a world apart from everyday reality, and from there enriched the lives of those around him, both in person and through his writing. Everything Bosman did and felt was expressed in his writing, and this includes his love affairs. From what I can tell he expressed his happiness and worked through his heartache in his writing, especially in poetry. Blignaut's (1980:72) description of how his artistic mind worked shows how deeply he felt both happiness and sadness: 'when love was awakened in Herman's heart he wove ecstasy and the wonder of dreams into draperies for it; and when it was slain he wrought for it a pall, studded with the black diamonds of pathos'. Even though Bosman fancied himself a poet at heart, Blignaut insists that his treasures were his short stories. He read and was moved by Bosman's poetry, but when he describes the emotions he felt when reading the short stories, and how Bosman painted with words in such a way that brought his stories to life, one can assume that Blignaut preferred his short stories – as, indeed, have most subsequent readers, which suggests that Blignaut's literary judgements were astute. There are many instances, too, in which he laments the loss of some of Bosman's work and in which he makes it clear that the short stories were most important to him. Bosman would write a story and wait eagerly to hear whether Blignaut liked it and, more importantly, whether he laughed in the right places. This shows him to be, like most writers, someone who wanted his writing to be appreciated by others, but also that he wished to know that his stories were humorous and effectively so. Yet, his love for words is what takes over everything. Blignaut felt that no matter what words he was using he 'made them different with bold affection' (Blignaut, 1980:176). In his love for words, Bosman was also able to see beauty in simplicity and take joy in most things that people simply overlooked. Blignaut (1980:177) explains that he 'was amused by [oddities]; he laughed at them in the grotesque, in caricatures; he escaped to them into the sideshows of life from inartistic brazenness' and in this he was able to appreciate the artist's 'embroidered lie'. He borrows this phrase from Bosman's famous essay, 'Ghosts' where he discusses the idea of the 'embroidered lie'. This lie, for Bosman, was where literary creation stemmed from and without it you were left with 'stark truth [which] smacked of statistics' (Blignaut, 1980:177). Words had the power to

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create beauty for Bosman and if he were merely to look at the truth of the situation, his stories would perhaps not come to life as well as they did. He saw the truth and wove into it his own unique thread of beauty.

This unique way of seeing the world was what made Bosman the man he was. He was open with his close friends about how he saw himself and how he saw the world. It was in the moments where he did not explain himself that Blignaut delves more deeply into who his friend was and what his motivations were. In these interpretations Blignaut creates his own myth of the man, as Sachs did in his account. This act of creating the myth of Bosman from his own perspective is very important to Blignaut's biography, because he feels the need to try and set straight the previous biographical facts about Bosman, as presented by Sachs and Rosenberg (to be discussed in the following chapter), since he was much closer to Bosman than either of them. When he describes an instance where Bosman's genius is most in evidence (a time at school when Bosman translated an entire Latin setwork for his class and then sold it to his classmates) he, in passing, mentions that one of the beneficiaries of Bosman's hard work was someone who made a 'ridiculous claim that he was Herman's mental equal' (Blignaut, 1980:78). This could be referring to Bernard Sachs, especially since he claimed that he and Bosman often were intellectual rivals, but at times spoke of how Bosman was superior to him in all matters intellectual. Blignaut mentions it in passing, but there is bitterness beneath what he says, which highlights his need to protect Bosman's reputation from those who made false claims against him.

Blignaut uses his personal anecdotes to create an intimate portrait of the man Bosman was by discussing Bosman's feelings about himself, his writing and his experiences in life. He also brings in Bosman's romantic life and the way in which people around him responded to him. In describing the romantic exploits he highlights important aspects of Bosman's personality. For instance, in the chapter 'Kidnap', Bosman is shown to be a romantic, even in a serious situation. He tells a young girl involved in a custody battle between her parents, who calls Bosman and Blignaut hooligans, that she should have seen for herself that her parents' 'motive was love' (Blignaut, 1980:181). He preferred to look at the romantic side of a situation, even if that were not how the situation was in reality. In his account of Bosman's relationship with his first wife, Vera, Blignaut, in 'Dead Love Herman and Vera', describes a scene where the two young lovers, spurred on by Bosman, decide to rush off and get married:

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> He had met her one morning where they had had trysts before. 'Have you got five pounds?' he asked. She opened her handbag and nodded. 'All right,' he said; 'let's go and get married.' After the ceremony, he missed a tutorial in his favourite subject as an earnest of his love. The trip to the court and a cup of tea comprised the honeymoon; moreover, it was about the longest time they spent together. She went home to her mother and he to his and soon he was off to teach at a farm school in the Marico district (Blignaut, 1980:185).

This scene shows not only Bosman's impulsiveness, but also his romantic ideas about life. He did not tend to think further than the moment he was in and did not always consider the consequences of his actions. This was certainly the part of his personality that would get him into the most trouble. Even though he comes across as impulsive in love he always seemed to be striving for some deeper connection with the women he chose to associate with. Blignaut (1980:191) writes that most of his relationships seemed to have been 'mere spiritual philandering by a poet for whom love was a mystic rite', which, in Blignaut's view, shows how these relationships were not based on something real, but rather on what Bosman could take from them. This shows Bosman to be someone focused on the Romantic ideas of love, which superseded the love object. He wanted to experience love above all else. Blignaut, in describing the high standards Bosman set for the women he chose, uses the metaphor of Bosman, again, as a magician, but this time as a magician of the heart. The women who held his attention were of high intellect, according to Blignaut, and those who fell short were usually women who had 'an earthy conception of love' (Blignaut, 1980:192). His lovers are described as victims who 'were awoken by mothers who did not believe in love potions that did not come in a bottle from an apothecary', which suggests perhaps that Bosman's women had no choice in their feelings for him—almost as if they were under a spell. But these women were probably so enraptured by Bosman's charm that it seemed as if they were under a spell. For Blignaut to assume that none of the women involved with Bosman had a choice in the matter becomes problematic because it denies the women agency. They must have been so enraptured by who he was and the romance he exuded that they wanted to experience the feelings he was articulating . He lived in his own fantasy world and perhaps made it look so attractive to those he met that they wanted to be immersed in it for as long as they could. Bosman's relationship with Ella Manson was no different because Bosman chose to keep her 'within the magic circle by inducing her to live with him' and soon he described her as being 'fanatic' about him (Blignaut, 1980:192). Their love is described as 'fun and poetry with life the zany' but there was also an element of control from Bosman's side over the relationship. Blignaut (1980:199) writes that Ella 'would gladly have sacrificed anything for him' and 'in bringing her love to him she acted as a devotee might have done with a short-weight tithe

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before her god'. This seems to me to be the way in which most women reacted to Bosman and he accepted it as the way things were to be. In all descriptions of his romantic entanglements there seems to be a hint that the women were so enraptured that they had no choice but to go along with whatever he wanted. This is true for both Vera and Ella. Bosman admitted to Blignaut that he did not want to make it easy for people to love him and perhaps having them see him as a god was his way of keeping this true. He also 'exerted extraordinary power over people' (Blignaut, 1980:199), which created an unbalanced relationship that could not last. Blignaut contradicts himself to an extent where he writes 'how ruthless the means were that Ella used to exert influence on him in the otherwise serene harbourage she provided for him' (Blignaut, 1980:200). The upset in power could have been why their love consequently did not last. Their problems also had to do with Bosman's not wanting children because he felt that 'he could not reproduce himself' (Blignaut, 1980:202) and that what Bosman 'loved must have been beauty' where beauty was the reflection of a peaceful, happy, fantastical relationship without strain. When this beauty in their relationship seemingly faded, Bosman then moved on to his next conquest, perhaps the truest of the three, Helena Stegmann. Blignaut does not focus on their relationship at all, except for a vague mention, perhaps because he did not experience their relationship first-hand. In his recreation of the man he knew he focused purely on the elements he was familiar with. This familiarity is what makes Blignaut's representation of the man possible. His familiarity with Bosman's heart and soul makes this representation seem convincing as a representation of Blignaut's ideas and points of view of the man he was.

Bosman's life is pieced together by Blignaut, as it was by Sachs before him, but he knows that in writing a biography there is always a part of oneself that is brought into how it is written. Sachs, who is perhaps the raconteur Blignaut speaks of, brings himself into his biography in order to show his ability to write as well as Bosman. Blignaut, on the other hand, mentions that he too is tied to writing within a self-imposed boundary of anecdotes, but that he is not trying to hide behind his anecdotes, or obscure Bosman in any way. In this way, Blignaut and Sachs are aware of their use of what we may see as Nadel's dramatic or expressive narrator. In a fitting end to his attempt at capturing Bosman and the man he was, Blignaut (1980:179) explains that there are far more interesting stories that he cannot yet recall. His 'discursive anecdotes…have made [him] rummage through dusty attics in [his]

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memory [but they] have not ended [his] quest for a true vignette of Herman Charles Bosman', if that is indeed possible.

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CHAPTER THREE
SUNFLOWER TO THE SUN

'Novelists have omniscience. Biographers never do. The personages exist; the documents exist; they are the "givens" to a writer of lives. They may not be altered. To alter is to disfigure.' – Leon Edel (1984:15)

Leon Edel (1980:17) writes that a biographer can only truly succeed in the endeavour to write a life, firstly, 'if a distinct literary form can be found for a particular life' and, according to Monk (2007:540), if the writer can present a point of view, which is a 'way of understanding the facts, [and] a way of seeing the biographical subject' he or she will be a step closer to presenting a knowable subject. The question of form, including how the biographer uses language, narration and myth, will be discussed in chapters three and four, respectively, in relation to the biographies by Valerie Rosenberg, *Sunflower to the Sun*, and Stephen Gray, *Life Sentence,* along with how they present their interpretation of a life and their point of view. Each biography represents a different approach to narration, language and myth. Regarding narration, I shall show that Rosenberg has written a narrative portrait or interpretative/ analytic biography, whereas Gray's can be categorised as a traditional documentary biography, or chronicle, or an 'objective'/academic biography. These two biographies are grouped together because they, unlike those by Sachs and Blignaut, were written by people who did not know Bosman personally and had to rely on documents, recollections of others, and their own assumptions and interpretations of the facts. It is in these two types of biography that there is more interpretation needed, not only about the author's work, but about his character and motivations. According to Kronick (1984: 102) the biographer must be a 'surrogate for the consciousness' of the author whose life is being written, and which has been preserved in documents. Language becomes the instrument that mediates 'between the two consciousnesses—the consciousness hidden within the documents is translated by the biographer into a text that makes the inner life of the subject transparent to all', from the point of view of the biographer. It is up to the biographers to interpret what they read and hear about the subject, thus making the biography their view of the life that was lived by the subject.

Interpretation is particularly important in the interpretative/analytic biography such as Rosenberg's, because though the biographer is not present in the biography he or she comments on and acts as a guide through the life, which helps the reader to establish meaning

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in the material (Nadel, 1984:171). This narrative portrait is also a middle ground between the detailed and lengthy chronicle (for example, by Gray) and the brief glimpse of the portrait (such as Sachs's and Blignaut's). In it documents are not the central focus, but are refined and condensed in order to allow the subject to emerge. The biography may borrow elements from fiction, like vivid descriptions of scenes and emotions, without becoming fiction. The biographer also can choose to not keep to a strictly linear timeline in order to 'illuminate character' (Edel, 1984:181). He or she is constantly characterising, commenting on and analysing the subject. Rosenberg uses fictional techniques, like narrating a scene, which we have to take as merely the backdrop for a portrait (as in painting) and not as steadfast fact. Therefore, even though Rosenberg's voice can be heard throughout, she is never a character in the life story she is presenting.

In the documentary biography, or 'objective'/academic narrative, such as Gray's, the approach is slightly different. Here, too, the biographer is not a character in the action yet he or she keeps the documents and facts of the life in the foreground and quotes liberally from them. As we see in Gray's biography, he is then eliminated from the presentation of the life and attempts to not be involved in order to remain objective – in as much as objectivity is possible. Gray gives essential background to Bosman's life and he presents documents in a chronological order. Documents are 'seldom all-revealing' (Edel, 1984:176), however, it is therefore left up to the biographer to 'endow the work with a certain amount of grandeur' (Edel, 1984:177) in the actual writing of the biography. A purely factual retelling of Bosman's life could very easily present him as lifeless. In order for this type of biography to be a success—to present a subject that is full of life and relatable—Gray must endeavour to add a certain amount of artistry to it. This artistry lies in his use of language, like metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony.

Sunflower to the Sun departs slightly from the conventions of a narrative portrait or interpretative biography in that it does follow a linear timeline. Rosenberg begins with where Bosman was born and ends with his death. Her use of metaphor begins with her description of Bosman's life as a 'flashing stream' that '[leaped] its banks and [left] in its wake sometimes the bounty of his own particular vision, and sometimes a havoc that engulfed him and those close to him until finally the wild elements to which he had never really ceased to belong claimed him for their own' (Rosenberg, 1976:11). This is a particularly fitting metaphor because from what we know of Bosman's life is that it was certainly not calm,

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either because of his own actions or those of others. Words like 'havoc' and 'wild' show the reader just what kind of life story awaits them. Rosenberg's use of metonymy in describing Bosman's parents and the events leading up to his birth gives us a sense of what kind of life was in store for him. Rosenberg (1976:15) writes that Bosman's mother, Elisa, was behaving erratically when she left her family for Kuils River, near Cape Town, where she would give birth to Bosman in early 1905. Rosenberg assumes that the reason for her behaviour was that she was carrying a 'love child' and that she was searching for a legitimate father for her unborn son. This assumption is based on unsubstantiated rumour, but she attempts to support the use of it by writing that 'there is enough mystery in Herman, his life and genius, for some to choose to give credence to this theory' (Rosenberg, 1976:15). She tries to give the theory more weight at the end of the chapter by stating that Bosman's mother had confided three clues to her friend about Bosman's origins: 'firstly, that Herman was the "dead spit" of his father; secondly, that his father was a brilliant man who was unable to marry her; and thirdly, that Herman's middle name, Charles, had been given after his real father' (Rosenberg, 1976:18). These 'clues' all point to Elisa's brother, Charles, as Bosman's father, basically stating that Bosman was a product of incest. Bosman's mysterious life and his odd, inexplicable behaviour become the excuse for Rosenberg to use the many rumours and stories about his origins and present them as fact. This wildly unsubstantiated rumour that she tried to pass off as fact in her biography caused a lot of controversy when her biography was published. Gray (2005a:37) addresses the controversy in his biography stating that most of what she wrote became fantasy rather than fact, which led to her biography being rejected by readers and critics far more than it was accepted. She tried, then, to drum up more publicity for herself by not only refusing to apologise for her assertions, but taking them further by publishing a piece called 'Secret Sex Life of Herman Charles Bosman', which enraged people even more (Gray, 2005a:37). Bosman's last wife, Helena, then was forced to disassociate herself with Rosenberg and anything further she had to say about Bosman. Therefore, since much of what Rosenberg says is based on information from Helena, it is quite a difficult task to differentiate between fact and fiction in Rosenberg's biography. Bosman's origin story does give us somewhat of a glimpse into what would shape his life story later—rumours and his trying to set them straight. Bosman's family were deeply interested in the intellect and literature, and instilled in him a passion for them from very early on in his life. Rosenberg attributes an anonymous proverb to Bettie Malan, saying she 'coined a family maxim' (Rosenberg, 1976:16), which was '[s]mall minds discuss people, mediocre minds discuss things and great minds discuss ideas'. Though these were most likely

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not Bettie's words (since they have been attributed to two American First Ladies, Eleanor Roosevelt and Jackie Kennedy), they do reflect the life that Bosman chose to lead: one filled with intellectual pursuits.

In her second chapter, 'Jeppe', Rosenberg borrows from fiction in her many descriptions of the vivid street life in Jeppestown, where the Bosman family lived. She writes:

> Often, on a hot, bee-buzzing afternoon, a cart driven by a white man would appear and the stillness would be rent by a tantalising call: "Hokey-Pokey ice creams! Suckers and Eskimo pies!" On lucky days the Bosman and other Jeppestown youngsters would emerge as if at the first bars of the Pied Piper's tune, and set their sun-burnt legs pumping after the cart before it disappeared with its promise of bliss (Rosenberg, 1976:20).

She does this in order to paint a picture for the reader of what life would have been like for Bosman and his family during those early years. It is not clear where Rosenberg gets her information from, but we can accept that she is borrowing from fiction here to give us an impression of Bosman's young life. The impression we get is that he was a carefree young man, no different from anyone else, but she then moves quickly into descriptions of his time at school where his love of pranks and disdain for authority are highlighted, especially during drill practice at school. The same scene that Sachs recounts is mentioned here, where Bosman was asked where his tie was and he cheekily replied to his section corporal that it was around his neck (Rosenberg, 1976:21). He was the bane of his teachers' existence and caused trouble in the class because he felt he was far more intelligent than his teachers. From what Rosenberg writes, we can deduce that Bosman's personality at its core did not change, despite his many hardships and bizarre life experiences. One instance that Rosenberg recounts is particularly interesting in a discussion of his personality as it brings to the fore his impulsive nature and his tendency to do things without thinking in order to avoid an uncomfortable situation. It happened one day in high school during a science lesson when Bosman, who hated doing drill practice, wanted to do anything he could to get out of it. Rosenberg (1976:21) writes:

> Suddenly one of his fellow pupils announced: "Look, Sir, Bosman's bleeding." And indeed he was – from a self-inflicted wound on his throat. As he was led away for first aid, he muttered under his breath to his chum Harry Rajak: "No pack-drill for me today!"

Along with his impulsiveness, another aspect of his personality that he carried through to adulthood was his tendency to cheat and play pranks on people. He and his friend played a joke where they sent out letters to people, telling them to send a shilling in order to find out

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the secret of saving money. Bosman happily collected the money with a friend of his and sent back a list of insurance companies to each person. They were soon caught out, but were given a warning and he got off without much of a problem. This would be Bosman's first of many appearances in court.

The picture one gets of Bosman in the first two chapters is that he was a young man with a wide range of interests. During his final year in high school and his years as a student at Wits University he developed many interests, including writing, politics and art. It seems that getting a teaching diploma was almost a side-lined activity with everything else he was doing. His sense of humour was never quite reined in, and Rosenberg describes how soon it became 'clear that nothing was sacred if it provided [him] with a scope for his sense of humour' (Rosenberg, 1976:26). He poked fun at anyone and anything he could think of, not letting his friends, family or authority figures get off lightly in any way. Rosenberg's description gives the reader a picture of Bosman as someone vindictive and vulgar in his sense of humour, and suggests that it was humour used to entertain himself, rather than others. According to this reading of his character, Bosman's comedy show was put on purely for his own enjoyment, and if others enjoyed it and laughed it was an added bonus. Rosenberg (1976:26-27) writes that his humour operated

> on every possible level – from rapier wit to corn-ball slapstick, from the sly ambiguity to the vulgar belly laugh, even plumbing the depths of the unorthodox and macabre, where few had ever found cause for laughter before. Sometimes the joke was against himself; but often it was at the expense of others, even those vulnerable in their inability to defend themselves. Herman's sense of the ridiculous was ruthless but utterly impartial. Laughter at any price had become the central doctrine by which he had chosen to live.

This sense of humour is what seems to get him into trouble more often than not. He used it in any situation, whether it was in class to ridicule his teacher or at meetings with the Young Communist League to '[take] the mickey out of things' rather than to take their cause seriously. This seems to be an essential and central part of Bosman's character as painted by Rosenberg: he lived his life to have fun, not to take any part of it seriously. He is painted as a joker, someone living life as if his actions had no consequences. Rosenberg (1976:30) tends to look at Bosman's tendency to indulge in pranks as perfectly normal and often uses words like 'legendary' to describe his exploits. Yet, despite their 'legendary' nature, Bosman's pranks led his life down a very particular path. He entered a poetry competition at university and instead of writing a poem himself decided to show up the adjudicators and entered a

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poem by Shelley under a different name. The poem was awarded first prize and once his prank was found out, it found its way into local newspapers. This embarrassed not only the adjudicators but the university as well, which shone a very unflattering light on Bosman. He was, because of this prank and many others, notorious at the university. Rosenberg again borrows a famous quotation, this time from Oscar Wilde, where she describes how Bosman lived his life, which was by the credo 'If you can't be famous, be notorious' (Rosenberg, 1976:31). This notoriety would change his life in many ways.

Rosenberg does not tend to use metaphor with regard to Bosman's character, or other images in her biography, but chooses instead to focus her attention on what we could see as Edel's principle of understanding the way the subject thinks and dreams in order to ascertain why his or her life followed a certain path. Rosenberg's main concern seems to be to highlight Bosman's sense of humour (and its tendency to get him into trouble) in order to show that without it his life would not have followed the path it did. In Rosenberg's view, without his sense of humour he would never have made the university angry enough to send him out to the remote Marico area to teach, and had he never been sent there we might not have the short stories that make him so famous today. Her focus when discussing his romantic life runs along the same lines. Vera Sawyer was Bosman's first wife, and their relationship began with a lie, which permeated the rest of their relationship. Bosman's tendency to embellish and be impulsive was a central part of his relationship with Vera. When he first met her he introduced himself to her as 'Herbert Charles Boswell, twenty-six' (Rosenberg, 1976:34) because Vera had very specific ideas about what she wanted from her life. She would not marry an Afrikaner or someone younger than herself, and Bosman simply embellished the facts in order to get what he wanted, according to Rosenberg. His impulsive nature comes through when he was sent to the remote Marico area but did not want to leave without Vera and so he

> dismissed the compromise of an engagement as too impermanent and insisted she marry him forthwith. On Friday, 21 January 1926, little over a year after he had first met her, Herman met Vera outside the Magistrate's Court, borrowed £5 from her and married her by special licence (Rosenberg, 1976:33).

Rosenberg highlights the fact that he did not marry her thinking of the consequences and his responsibilities as a husband. For him 'marriage did not really change anything' and since he was young and could not support her, their marriage became merely 'a romantic gesture in which he sought an emotional anchorage' (Rosenberg, 1976:43). For Bosman, as Blignaut

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wrote in his biography, emotional anchorage was necessary, since he felt things very deeply. Anchorage to the city during his time in the Marico was also necessary because he went there 'with such reluctance' and Vera, who remained in the Johannesburg with her mother, kept their connection until he returned.

Rosenberg uses all the elements of fiction to paint a vibrant portrait of Bosman's surroundings in the Marico, but also uses excerpts from his work in order to find the deeper truth of his feelings for his time that he spent there. Through describing the landscape and people of the Marico, we get a sense of Bosman from the surroundings and the types of people with whom he would have been in contact. The most important description is of the types of people he met, those who told stories that

> teemed with images that set Herman Bosman alight. They told of a world of reckless violence and deep compassion, of strong fidelities and shattering betrayals. And there were other images and dreams which haunted Herman Bosman wherever he was – the rain-washed gravestones with half obliterated names, the love he felt doomed to pursue in the certain knowledge that he would never find her, and, above all, the theme of death that held him in thrall through a lifetime twisted by its presence (Rosenberg, 1976:36-37).

This description gives the reader a good sense of the man Bosman was—someone striving to experience the world, the Romantic elements of it, and the darker side . He would use all of this experience in his writing.

Rosenberg is the first of the biographers to delve into Bosman's life in the Marico, and into the reactions from the people he wrote about. But she was not the first person to find out about how the people of the Marico felt about Bosman. David Goldblatt was the first to investigate the lives of the Marico Afrikaners, through photography, and found out that the people Bosman wrote about actually existed and, importantly, that he was not well-liked among them. The main reason he was not liked was because they believed that life was 'black and white' with regard to what was right and what was wrong and because they worked very hard in what Rosenberg (1976:37) calls 'a struggle for survival'. They did not feel that there was much in life to laugh about. Unfortunately, his stories hit a nerve since they called for blurred lines between right and wrong and, most importantly, a sense of humour, especially the ability to laugh at oneself. Rosenberg, in mentioning what the Marico people disliked about the stories, brings Bosman's genius to the fore in suggesting how he captured the attention of a later generation who read his stories. She places focus on the

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artistry that went into his clever use of the Afrikaans idiom in the English language, which presents quite vividly the picture of a man whose passion in life was painting portraits with words. Unlike Blignaut and Sachs, Rosenberg uses Bosman's work to a great extent in order to give further weight to the point of view she posits. Her point of view here, particularly how she sees Bosman, shows the reader just how far he was affected by his time in the Marico. She quotes liberally from his essay 'A Teacher in the Bushveld' in order to show how his life was infused in his work, and in his autobiographical work in particular. Despite his love for the city, Bosman felt closeness with the veld, an emotional connection to the stories he felt it had to tell him, which is evident in this essay. Bosman writes:

> For sometimes, at night, when the world is very still, a soft wind comes sweeping across the veld. Then, if you are outside and listen very carefully, you can hear the story it has to tell. It is thoughtful, this little wind, and the tale it tells, as old as the world and as timeworn, has about it something that is yet new and sweet and strangely stirring. And this story is one we all love to hear for, steeped as it is in the fragrance of some romance of long ago, it awakens memories of far off things…[and] the ending must be sad. All these old tales are that way, and the little wind, knowing it perhaps, and heaving a tired sigh, sinks quietly to rest (Gray, 2003:51).

From this brief description of the night air in a small town where he spent only a few months, I get a sense that he felt a profound connection with nature and its beauty. It is also apparent what kind of man Rosenberg is projecting to her readers: someone who sees the romantic side of nature and hears stories and the potential for stories, in everything that surrounds him. Despite Bosman's personal affinity with the bushveld he was not welcomed there very warmly, by the people or by the bushveld. There are instances where Rosenberg describes how the family he was staying with would hear him move around and before long would have to go and search for him out in the veld. When he was found he would be 'unnerved and dazed, so that he had to be soothed and led gently back to bed' (Rosenberg, 1976:43). This occurrence points to a curiosity within him to find out whatever he could about something he was not familiar with, like the haunting nature of the veld

Rosenberg points out a particular aspect of Bosman's personality that arises many times in his life, and many times over in the other biographies: his impulsive nature. She recounts a story from his time in the Marico where he was flirting with a young girl, the daughter of the couple he was staying with, and asked her to sit on a bench with him. She instead pinched his shoulder playfully and walked away. He impulsively picked up a penknife, flung it at her and it lodged in her back. His reaction to this was to beg for forgiveness and Rosenberg writes that he was more in need of comfort than the wounded girl. Rosenberg (1976:43) describes

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him as being 'in a state of shock', which shows that he had not thought his actions through to their logical conclusion. In most instances where he does something rash, there is a definite sense of disbelief in him. Yet, there is something quite interesting in the way Rosenberg decides to present this chapter. She barely mentions Bosman at all but rather describes the people and the surroundings he would have been in contact with. In this way she paints the picture of a man who 'absorbed whatever the veld would yield and, while he may not have become part of it, it became a deeply ingrained part of him' (Rosenberg, 1976:44). It is an important description for the man who would then take this spirit and express it through his stories. He decides to take one memento back to Johannesburg when he leaves the Marico and Rosenberg uses the passing mention of his gun to lead us into the next phase of his life, in order to keep us in suspense for what will come next. Those familiar with his life story would understand the significance of the gun, and it is a good use of suspense on Rosenberg's part.

In her chapter 'The Bellevue Tragedy', one could easily mistake her description of what occurred for one from any crime thriller written today. Her chapter title, too, lends itself to melodrama and intrigue. Rosenberg keeps to the facts of the incident of his killing his stepbrother, but imbues her descriptions with vivid accounts of the house, the family and the emotions that flood the house before and after the shooting, as well as later at the trial. There are mentions of tensions in the newly formed family after Bosman's mother had remarried and his stepfather had brought his family to live in their small house in Isipingo Street with 'the pattern of discord already manifest during the Easter holidays [which] erupted into a disaster in July that was to change the entire direction of his life' (Rosenberg, 1976:48). But, Bosman remains almost aloof to it all until the night before he is meant to return to the Marico. Rosenberg's use of words like 'discord' and 'disaster' set the stage for the 'tragedy' she speaks of in the title. The reader can expect nothing but a dramatic ending in this phase of his life. Nobody knows what happened that night and Rosenberg (1976:49) does not attempt to make assumptions about it and instead refers to where her information came from by writing that the sequence of events can 'never be reconstructed in an entirely logical order. Theories have been advanced and partially accepted or partially rejected. Despite many speculations by news-hungry reporters and the deliberate considerations of a judge and his assessors, no one could pinpoint precisely where the truth lay – Herman Bosman probably least of all'. Despite all of this, she gives a rather detailed account of what was said and what happened, based on what she has researched. What is often problematic with this biography is

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that Rosenberg does not reveal her sources or provide notes regarding where certain information was gleaned. We have to accept what we read as truth and not question the sources of the information. This is Rosenberg's point of view, her interpretation of the facts presented to her, and therefore this is the truth of the situation as she understands it. Whether this is exactly what happened that night is arguable.

In order to express the severity of the situation and his intense reaction to it, Rosenberg (1976:49) compares Bosman to a volcano that could erupt with 'frightening unpredictability'. She mentions that his impulsiveness is something that rears itself many times throughout his life and that his reaction was always to fall into a trance where he was 'bewildered, confused and emotionally disturbed' (Rosenberg, 1976:50). Her treatment of this part of his personality is quite vague and she does not quite give her opinion about why he reacts this way. I find that Rosenberg gives many reasons for what it was not (it was not epilepsy or a 'brain event') and is vague about what she believed it could have been. She (1976:50) writes that it could have been a 'mind event', but leaves it at that. A statement without an explanation does not help readers to understand Bosman's way of thinking or his behaviour in these situations. We are left to make up our own minds about what could lead him to react this way. Perhaps it was fear or a sudden realisation of the consequences to his actions that led him to faint repeatedly after such terrible occurrences. The narration of the court proceedings is similar to what one would find in a courtroom drama, with Bosman as the main character. This is fitting because it seems to me that he lived most of his life as if he were the hero of an epic story and in a world separate from the real world. A final word on the trial from Rosenberg is that afterwards in a local newspaper, *Rand Daily Mail*, there was only a vague mention of what had transpired and that it hardly took precedence over coverage in the publication of a dance competition. I find this ending of the chapter particularly interesting because it is almost as if Rosenberg wants to evoke sympathy in the reader because of the fact that a huge incident in Bosman's life was hardly taken notice of. I feel that perhaps this is her way of foreshadowing how he would be received throughout his lifetime, both in literary and journalistic circles.

Rosenberg's biography, though detailed and thorough, tends to be rather naïve in that the source she chooses to rely on most heavily for the descriptions of his life in jail is Bosman's semi-autobiographical novel *Cold Stone Jug*. She takes what he writes in his novel to be fact, whereas, if she were to recall the type of person and writer Bosman was, she would realise that he preferred embellishment to pure fact, the 'embroidered lie' to the plain truth. But if we

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see Rosenberg's biography as painting a portrait of Bosman's experiences in prison with all the emotional embellishments, rather than an accurate or factual description, then this chapter allows us to see Bosman's time in prison as one of anguish and deep contemplation, but also of education and growth. Even if what we read in this chapter is not bound to provable fact, it is composed of his own words and feelings that he expressed to readers, as well as the remembrances of a man who spent some time with him in prison. Being on death row was a time for Bosman to reflect on what he had done. There are moments when Rosenberg highlights just how he felt by quoting from *Cold Stone Jug,* where he wrote that there was no need for him to be distinguished in any way from the other prisoners because on his forehead 'Cain's mark is there for all to read. Murder is a doomed sign to wear on your brow' (Bosman, 1971:14). She writes that no one ever really knew precisely how he felt being labelled a 'murderer' but I do get a sense that guilt would separate him from everyone else for the rest of his life. Rosenberg highlights how, despite the anguish and the guilt that he felt, when he was kept on death row, he remained steadfast in his humour and his ability to make others laugh. He and his cellmate, whose real name remains unknown, spent many nights making fun of their warder and pulling pranks on him. They would laugh and joke and when they got reprimanded Bosman would wonder to himself 'what more serious trouble [could we] get into than we were already in' (Bosman, 1971:20). Even though there is a sense that he was not taking his imprisonment seriously, once his cellmate is executed reality hits and he is left alone in the death cells. Rosenberg does not attempt to convey how he must have felt in those moments, surrounded by a fate that might soon be his own. This is where her point of view is unclear because she does not try to explain her view of what Bosman was possibly thinking or feeling, and therefore we are left rather in the dark about his emotional state.

Another instance where Rosenberg's explanation of Bosman's thoughts and feelings is rather thin and vague is where she quotes the words of Lago Clifford, a man who knew Bosman in prison. She (1976:60) writes that his words, or 'Bosmanisms', and his 'tone of heart-rending melodrama' are too close to the style Bosman used when he became a journalist after his release from prison. She assumes that what is written by Clifford was in fact written by Bosman himself. Her only evidence for this is that he gives commentary about the murder and she feels that it is far too informed to have been written by him. This kind of assumption is, indeed, her own opinion of what she reads but it is too far-reaching and underestimates the writing talent of Clifford himself. She seems to want to believe this and tries to persuade

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readers that this was another of Bosman's tricks, and indeed a good one if he was writing about himself and his own experiences through the eyes of someone else. She also seems to ignore the fact that Clifford could very possibly have been inspired by Bosman when they were in prison together, but never quite gives a rounded view of the situation. Her focus is on persuading the reader that Bosman wrote these pieces himself without doing adequate research into the matter. She (1976:62) writes that 'there were further observations on death row that suggest a certain intimacy which is usually the private experience of a condemned man', but fails to bring in the possibility that Bosman could have shared this experience with Clifford, or that he could have imagined this experience based on conversations with Bosman. Her opinion in this case is rather one-sided and does not give readers enough evidence to make up their own minds.

There is a section towards the end of the chapter where Rosenberg finally brings in the emotional and mental effects prison had on Bosman by analysing his work. This poignant description of what was happening in his mind brings the reader a step closer to understanding the type of man Rosenberg wishes to present. According to this account, he was a sensitive man, with far too much time to contemplate life and its complications. She quotes Bosman from *Cold Stone Jug*:

> During this time I found of what insanity was…. I realised that insanity has nothing to do with the brain…. Because my brain was working reasonably and logically, and I could think clearly. But that purple lunacy, that was like a handful of some slippery substance, was coming out of my stomach. That is where I was going mad…. I could feel all this madness oozing up out of my belly. It was stomach insanity. All chaos had been let loose in my belly, and was seeping through into my brain…. Horrible black feelings working their way up into my consciousness. I wanted to scream. I knew I was going to scream. But what was the use of screaming? It was very late at night. Nobody would hear me. (Bosman, 1971:184-185)

There is no doubt from this excerpt that Bosman was mentally and emotionally affected by his time on death row. Yet, here it is not Rosenberg who expresses this to us, but Bosman himself. From his words we can deduce that his life would be forever changed by these experiences. But, that change would bring about great creativity and understanding of the hardships of others. Rosenberg closes the chapter with his release from prison and the time he spent with his uncle, aunt and cousin Zita. He leaves prison a changed man, and from what Rosenberg writes he becomes a man who, though he liked time alone to write, did need the company of others. What drives him from his uncle's farm is his wanting to introduce himself to the other farmers in the area, much to his uncle's annoyance. They wanted him to keep to

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himself and keep his past a secret. But, this is not the type of person he was and soon his 'growing restlessness had indicated that the bridgeway [to a new life] had been completed. For him to have tarried on the farm when new horizons were opening would have been almost as frustrating as the lost brown-walled years that he was trying to put behind him' (Rosenberg, 1976:68). Rosenberg's opinion of Bosman at this point in his life is that he was a man who was looking forward, and particularly forward to a life of creativity and freedom.

The first six chapters of Rosenberg's biography are a vivid description of how she imagines the first twenty-one years of his life could have transpired. The point of view she presents to us is that the first part of his life was lived very much like a work of fiction, and that later it resembles a murder mystery novel. The remaining chapters focus quite closely on his relationships with key figures in his life, firstly his friendship and writing career with Aegidius Jean Blignaut, then with his second wife, Ella, and lastly with his third wife, Helena. Her delving into these relationships is essential for the reader to understand the type of man Bosman was to the people closest to him after he was released from prison. These three people could arguably be the three people in the world who knew him the most intimately. Blignaut was the closest to him in a literary sense in that they shared everything with each other: literary endeavours (like journals and periodicals that came and went) and even ideas for short stories. Rosenberg shows the reader in this context that Bosman enjoyed collaboration and perhaps if it had not been for Blignaut, his stories might never have seen the light of day. He admired Blignaut's writing and especially admired his use of a unique and relatable narrator. Bosman writes:

> It is not enough to say that Ruiter is typical of the Hottentot nation. He is also typical of the human race…Ruiter is not only the primitive son of an African tribe…He is also the son of Adam and the son of God. And this is the character whom the author has created as a medium for relating the stories…Perhaps the most striking feature is [the stories'] humour…This is genuine humour. It is great humour. It is that humour that lies to very close to tears. (Rosenberg, 1976:75)

What is important to note here is that Rosenberg chooses to highlight the fact that those who surrounded him were artists, as he was, and that he placed a great importance on the creation of art and the beauty of words. He and Blignaut shared many ideas and believed that their ideas were there to be shared and used as they pleased. This is the reason for Blignaut's allowing Bosman to use a similar narrator to his 'Ruiter' in the creation of 'Oom Schalk Lourens'.

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In her presentation of the relationship between Bosman and Blignaut, Rosenberg (1976:75) makes an attempt to understand Bosman's way of thinking and states that 'he believed a person's acts – even acts of creation that could be called poetry – are significant only in that they are an integral part of their creator's existence' and through this way of thinking he measured his own values. Her use of metaphor in her descriptions of his creative process are particularly poignant because she describes him as being 'entranced' with poetry where the poems became 'delicate' and 'more fragile than a blossom' (Rosenberg, 1976:76). Blignaut knew the value of his work and knew how important it was to preserve it for future generations as a valuable part of an African literary tradition. But, for Bosman the act of creation was more important than the preservation of the product and this is where Blignaut became an important part of his friend's life—he acted, in a large part, as Bosman's historian, the preserver and rescuer of his work. The publications they worked on together were the main outlets for the Oom Schalk stories to be published. Rosenberg (1976: 92) describes the volume of their output where they were producing two weekly papers and many pamphlets, but despite the pressure of production Bosman was able to write 'any of the "Schalk Lourens" stories in a couple of hours, his speed being governed only by his mechanical ability to record his thought'. In between the writing of short stories and journalistic pieces, Bosman and Blignaut also wrote reviews of each other's work, which Rosenberg (1976:94) describes as 'mutual back-scratching'. But because their reviews were so extravagant they became humorous and were not taken quite as seriously. Humour became a focus for much of what Bosman wrote for the publications and even though he did write a fair number of serious pieces the rest were opportunities for him to 'exercise his rapier wit' (Rosenberg, 1976:97) and in this way his seriousness was balanced with humour in order to show his diversity as a writer. This diversity would soon get him and Blignaut into trouble with authorities and on many occasions they found themselves in court for what they had written or done in the vein of humour. Rosenberg's description of their relationship does not highlight just how close these two men were, but it also shows how they were influential on each other as writers and crusaders for shared beliefs.

Bosman's second wife, Ella, is introduced to readers as someone who, along with a man named George Howard, would be influential and enriching in his life. Howard's description of Bosman is, according to Rosenberg (1976:110), one of the most graphic physical descriptions of the man – as 'tallish, broad, blue-eyed, with a high forehead and thinning, wild fair hair, knitted tie and wide black leather belt, high merry laugh, large actor's hands

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and a wide-brimmed hat worn like a ship with a heavy list'. Howard spent a lot of time with Bosman, mostly walking the streets of Johannesburg at night and discussing writers and life in general. He was similar in disposition to Bosman, and one day impulsively left Johannesburg for 'a long walk through the Karoo' (Rosenberg, 1976:113). When he returned and needed a room to stay, Bosman and Blignaut offered to put him up. Since they did not have a bed for him to sleep in, they sewed two sugar sacks together to make a bed. Apparently, Bosman was envious of Howard's sleeping conditions because he imagined they were 'more poetic' than his 'conventional bedclothes' (Rosenberg, 1976:113). Rosenberg (1976:110) mentions that he was one of the few who was 'permitted to understand Bosman's poetry' but does not quite capture this influence or the close relationship they apparently shared. Instead her focus moves to his first encounter with and subsequent marriage to Ellaleen Manson.

There are two accounts of how Bosman and Ella met, and both accounts were given by Bosman. Rosenberg, in giving both accounts of the same event, shows Bosman's tendency to embellish stories and never quite remain steadfast in the truth of certain events. In the first version of the story, which he recounted to his third wife much later in life, he heard Ella, who was a librarian at the time, utter a statement that was so peculiar that he had to meet the person who had a mind that functioned in such a way. The second story fits with what they actually ended up doing over the following six years, in that they met, found that they had a shared love for the poetry of Baudelaire, got married, moved to Brussels and lived in the house where Baudelaire lived. Rosenberg (1976:114) mentions that though these events happened over six years and were not quite as impulsive as Bosman made them out to be, in his mind they were poetic and impulsive, which was closer to the artistic truth he wanted to believe in. This relates closely to Bosman's wanting to believe the poet's 'embroidered lie' rather than in the dreary facts of life. Rosenberg further explains her point of view of their relationship when she writes:

> There is a massive body of such half-truths in the Bosman saga. Since he could seldom resist the urge to romanticise, one should perhaps pay close attention to those half-truths of which he himself was the author. And since we owe much of what is said of Ella to Bosman's own view of her, I would place *his* fantasy of *her* above the amazingly few facts I have managed to accumulate. (Rosenberg, 1976:115, emphasis in the original)

The way in which Rosenberg describes their relationship shows that they had a very deep emotional and intellectual understanding of each other, yet she makes quite outlandish claims

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regarding why the two did not have children. She explains that when Bosman wrote his play, *Mara*, which was about incest, that he was writing from Ella's experience and from his own. She writes that Bosman was terrified of having children because he feared that there were 'monsters lurking in his semen' (Rosenberg, 1976:119). This leads to what would be a repeated experience in his life with Ella and his next wife, Helena—abortion. Rosenberg's view in this regard is that Bosman did not want to have children and was impotent for the later years of their marriage. She finally posits that 'something in his own life or in that of his parents must have made him decide never to have a child at any price' (Rosenberg, 1976:120). This related directly to Rosenberg's unsubstantiated claim that Bosman was a product of incest. If Bosman believed he was the product of an incestuous relationship, then his not wanting to have children would make sense. But, there are many other reasons for why he did not want to reproduce and Rosenberg purposefully focuses on his not wanting to have children in order to give her wildly unsupported claim some weight. Whatever the reason, the couple never had children and the next few years of their marriage were spent in Europe away from everything familiar to them.

Unfortunately, their six years in Europe are largely forgotten and Rosenberg's frustration is clear when she (1976:121) writes, 'astonishingly few traces remain. There are periods and episodes that remain quite irritatingly incomplete, as even the most expensive jig-saw puzzles from which two or three pieces are sometimes missing'. Her reconstruction of this period in his life is based on the recollections and opinions of three people: John Webb, a friend who knew Bosman in London; George Howard, who had a chance meeting with him in London; and a few letters written to Blignaut. There were stories and essays written during this time, but most of them were written under pseudonyms that remain untraceable and were lost. Therefore, her understanding of this period in his life is largely based on opinion and conjecture. There are a few essays he wrote during this time that also give us some insight into his state of mind. Interestingly, Bosman, through John Webb, met leading authors of the time, like H.G. Wells and Aldous Huxley, but because of a lack of records it is difficult to know whether meeting them had any influence on him (Rosenberg, 1976:122). His time in London was certainly productive because when Sachs started up the *South African Opinion*, Bosman contributed many of his 'Oom Schalk Lourens' stories and many essays about his time in London, like 'Royal Processions' and 'This is London'. The stories may not tell us very much about how he felt about his time in Europe, but his essays give us a glimpse of what he was thinking and feeling during his time there. There is a missing element to

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Rosenberg's presentation of this time in Bosman's life—interpretation. She does not attempt to interpret how Bosman was feeling from what he wrote during then. If we look into the essays 'Royal Processions' and 'This is London'—as Rosenberg should have in order to interpret something of what Bosman was feeling —it is clear that there is a sense of his attempting to understand the British way of life, and also his fascination with the cultural way of life of people in the city. In his essay 'So this is London' he writes:

> They accept life simply here. They feel no things deeply. You may call it civilisation, if you like; more probably you will call it decadence. And yet I think it is better so. I think it is better when the hearts of men are free from the turmoil of aspirations; from wayward dreams, and old and far off longings, and wistful things, and they seek no more. It is as though hope has cast away her burden, in the way that a prisoner, summoned for release from a weary sentence, flings down his hammer by the stone-pile. (Gray, 2003:89)

There seems to be a longing in Bosman to stop thinking about things deeply in order not to let past experiences weigh down on him so heavily. There is a definite sense of envy for the way the Londoners live what he sees as a very simple life. In his essay 'Royal Processions' his fascination with royalty is clear, but longings for Africa come through in parts, especially when he mentions the British winter:

> This is one of the major difficulties which the English winter presents to a man who is used to blue skies. It is always a problem to distinguish between the king of darkness that they call night-time, and the other kind that they call day-time. To the uninitiated, all darkness looked about the same. (Gray, 2003:91)

When the *South African Opinion* shut down a rumour reached Bosman's family that he had died. Rosenberg, again, does not attempt to give her opinion about what the reason could have been for this rumour. She mentions in passing that Bosman's mother sent money to Ella in London, but does not put it together that it could have been, as Bernard Sachs said at the time, one of 'Bozzie's jokes' (Rosenberg, 1976:128), perhaps in an attempt to get money from his family without having to ask for it. George Howard later ran into Bosman in London, where he and Ella had started their own publishing house, which Bosman himself had described as 'highly successful', but Rosenberg is sceptical about this description and brushes it off by saying that 'it seems that one must regard all Bosman's statements about those years away as *Bosman* truth, which is neither a literal nor artistic truth, but a kind of generic truth involving components of both' (Rosenberg, 1976:131, emphasis in the original).

Life in Johannesburg, after living down and out in London, could not have been easy when Bosman and Ella returned. George Howard uses the metaphor of Bosman's 'mirth' having a

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'flint-like quality…as if he were desperate for every spark he could ignite to stave off the dark' (Rosenberg, 1976:134). During this time, where not much is known even of their time in South Africa, no one knew what he and Ella did for a living. Bosman made contributions to the *South African Spectator* and Rosenberg highlights certain elements in these pieces that reflect his possible state of mind at the time. In an article entitled 'Art notes on Charlie Chaplin' he writes about artists and the artistic life and Rosenberg suggests that he is referring to himself in many parts, especially where he writes 'art is the glory and the disaster of the human race. And the life-pattern of the artist is but an expression of this deathless sublimity, and of this drunkenness ill-starred' (Rosenberg, 1981:27). This speaks very much of what biography is about, in that biographers follow the life-pattern in order to uncover the 'sublimity' of the subject. For Bosman, 'deathless sublimity' in art meant that the artist would live on in his or her art and life was merely an expression of what the artist was creating. Art always comes first. Living meant living in art. The sublimity in this case is how art, for Bosman, was something that brought him both happiness and intense sadness, especially when he went through a period of writer's block. Yet, once he had created his art, his stories, he would live on in them. He also knew that through his art he could live on, beyond the difficulties of everyday life. But Bosman had heavier things on his mind at the time than his value as an artist. A few years after his return to South Africa his uncle Charles had died, and his mother would follow in 1941. He had not been on good terms with his mother before her death, mostly because of his wife, Ella, according to Rosenberg (1976:136). In this section of the biography, a knowable Bosman does not come through in Rosenberg's description of the time. There is not enough interpretation of the material to discern the 'figure under the carpet'.

Bosman moved to Pietersburg to become the editor of the *Zoutpansberg Review and Mining Journal*. Rosenberg (1976:146-147) does not focus much on his work at the journal and mentions that during this time

> Pietersburg was a watershed in Bosman's career as a writer. It was there that the frustrating impotence of the years away was finally exorcised and the fruitless hunt for words finally came to an end. The material was there. But, at least in the beginning, the catalyst was missing, the spark sadly elusive.

George Howard had said that he had seen in his friend 'a feeling of "lostness" that his sense of humour barely cloaked' (Rosenberg, 1976:148), which gives us an explanation for why this period between living in Europe and moving to Pietersburg was so dry. His time in the

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small town was different from what he experienced in the Marico because he was now older and no longer stood apart from the generation he wanted to write about. Rosenberg (1976:147) describes his study of the people as being as if he were looking into a mirror rather than looking under a microscope. This implies that he was not studying them, as he did the people in the Marico, but he was now a part of a community that he felt reflected the person he had become. It was here that he was to meet the person who would become the inspiration for his next burst of work: Helena Stegmann.

Rosenberg chooses to place her focus for the final parts of her biography on the breakdown of the relationship between Bosman and Ella, the relationship between him and Helena and the work that he created in the final years of his life. Firstly, his relationship with Ella is presented to us as having 'started out optimistically enough with a series of meteoric flights among the stars, but by this time it had left them marooned in a lunar landscape yawning with craters' (Rosenberg, 1976:149). The impression we get of Bosman here is that he was exhausted by the intensity of their relationship, and was desperately searching for meaning in Pietersburg. He is remembered by a friend as saying that 'he had forgotten how to write' (Rosenberg, 1976:149), which, for someone who felt that it was his divine destiny to write, must have been deeply distressing. Rosenberg (1976:150) moves again into her novelistic descriptions of the day Bosman and Helena met where she paints a picture of what the day must have been like in that 'the wind bit deep and whipped up the dust, laying it on one's skin like the frost that coated the ground'. Helena then found out that Bosman was married, and in true romance-novel fashion Rosenberg (1976:151) recounts how Helena's 'heart sank' but that night 'she dreamed he said he came back to take her away from her sadness'.

Rosenberg is definitely setting readers up for a great romance to follow, yet the impression we are given from Helena's point of view of Bosman is that he was a man whose 'hurtful humour she hated' but she felt sympathy for him. These are not really good bases for a great romance. Yet they both made a deep impact on each other and Helena was instrumental in bringing Bosman closer to his Afrikaans roots. At this point he was still married to Ella, but Rosenberg describes how they were growing closer intellectually, especially with Bosman's wanting Helena to understand who he was as a writer. Rosenberg (1976:154) describes how Helena 'ran all the way from the hostel to the offices of the *Zoutpansberg Review*' because she was so impressed with what she had read. In this description alone we can tell how much of an impression Bosman had on Helena. Their relationship was certainly built on more than

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a passing attraction. Their connection was intellectual. But their connection did turn physical because, as Rosenberg writes, Bosman believed that his inability to write was because he had lost his manhood (in other words, he and Ella had not had sexual intercourse). The way she presents this beginning to their relationship reads like a soap opera or a dramatic opening for a complicated love story in that they endured troubles like having a love that they could not express, because Bosman was not a free man, and an even worse suffering for Helena—abortion. Bosman is then arrested for performing the abortion on Helena, but narrowly avoids going to jail because the instrument he used (a syringe) was never found. Rosenberg, at the end of the retelling of these dramatic events, quotes a letter that a friend of Bosman's, Gordon Vorster, wrote to Helena:

> The two of us must have formed a team strong enough to con you into opening up those long-rusted locks on the cupboard of your spirit. What you've told us is sacred, a trust, and you gave it to us because you knew that we would use it as objectively, as kindly, as lovingly as we could…. Gently, you won him to the world of men until he was able to take a woman. Quietly you shrouded his fears, never allowing one of them to establish an ascendency, soothing him to the world he was searching for. It was seed-time, but the twin crops could not be harvested. This gleaning was not for him, the reaping was out of bounds. While he ploughed this land, it was forcibly barren. Then he deserted you, but he would come back to you, in another chapter. (Rosenberg, 1976:158-159)

This letter encapsulates what Rosenberg has attempted to express as the intense relationship between the two of them. Bosman was bound to come back to Helena because, from what we can understand from this description, she gave him back his ability to write by inspiring him deeply, and he gave her a reason to open herself up emotionally. Again, Rosenberg does not interpret what is said in the letter or how it could link to Bosman's feelings or motivations for leaving and then returning to Helena. In this case, she leaves the interpretation up to the reader, which negates her role as the interpretive biographer. She is meant to analyse her facts in order to guide us through his life in order to present a knowable person, which she fails to do, especially when it comes to Bosman's relationship with Helena.

Following the dramatic start to their relationship, there was, as indicated above, a time of separation, a time during which Ella met another man, Hugh Hayes, who nearly immediately took Bosman's place in Ella's life. This section of the biography is quite problematic because yet again Rosenberg comes to certain conclusions but does not mention where her information was found. Since the account of Bosman's relationship with Helena is mostly told from Helena's point of view, it is possible that the information came from Helena

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herself. Rosenberg narrates this part of their life differently from the rest in that her narration is dramatic and focused not on Bosman but on Helena and her suffering before and after her marriage to Bosman. Through this we get a strong sense of who Bosman was to Helena, and what comes through clearly again is that he was impulsive, yet he felt very deeply for the people close to him. Despite the breakdown of his marriage to Ella, he still felt for her and allowed her to live with him and Helena, in the same house, when they lived in Johannesburg. His divorce from Ella was impulsive and was done so quickly in order for him to marry Helena straight away. Helena seems to be the one in this situation who loses out the most. Rosenberg dedicates this biography to Helena, so it seems logical that she would focus more on her plight. Her descriptions push Bosman into the background and bring Helena to the fore especially where she writes of their everyday lives (1976:164):

> Helena, who had gone back to teaching to help Herman make ends meet, was suddenly presented with a grown family, so to speak, for whom she was expected to cook and provide. What made matters worse was that the door between the interleading rooms was left open day and night. For Helena it gradually took on the aspect of a malevolent sentry, spectral reminder of the Pietersburg triangle…. Helena shrank from the abhorrent situation and, without realising it, from Herman as well.

What is evident in this piece is that Bosman felt so deeply for Ella that Helena's feelings were not taken into account. What comes through clearly in this too is that Bosman seems to have been someone who could not quite see how his actions affected others. This resurfaces a while later when he goes to a prostitute who had 'reassured him that physically there was nothing wrong with him' (Rosenberg, 1976:166). Helena never spoke of his going to a prostitute again, and the rest of their marriage continued with her taking her place as his companion and inspiration for his writing.

Writing was not lucrative for Bosman until the very end of his life, and the little he earned was not enough to live on, so he moved between being a teacher and journalist for most of his life. After his stint as a teacher in the bushveld, he was a journalist for the *South African Opinion*, which was re-established after its demise in the 1930s. When he was writing for them his focus was mainly on explaining to South African writers that they needed to be proud of their heritage and embrace it, rather than 'aiming for acceptance overseas' (Rosenberg, 1976:168). This tells us quite a bit about the man that Bosman had become after his travels around South Africa and the world. He never lost his love for his country or his roots, and would continue to focus on writing about the people and the culture of the country he loved so much. In her chapter 'Editor once more' Rosenberg shifts her narration back to

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painting a portrait of the man Bosman was, especially regarding his beliefs on art and literature. He believed that South African literature was promising, particularly Afrikaans literature, and encouraged people through his columns to appreciate it and embrace it. He did not believe, though, that just because a piece was in Afrikaans that it was automatically a good piece of literature. Rosenberg quotes many of his articles on art and literature where he states these beliefs clearly. He writes with passion and enthusiasm, as is evident in an essay Rosenberg fails to give the title of[2], for example, in his comment that 'We have got the life. The living soul of a culture in its first primitive vigour, naked in its fragrance. Strong in the very fragility of its loveliness. The era of the synthetic quasi-European culture has ended' (Bosman, in Rosenberg, 1976:168). The man portrayed here is one who is deeply passionate about writing and about bringing his own culture into world view. In Bosman there also seemed to be a genuine joy in the act of writing, which Rosenberg skims over instead of analysing it in adequate detail. She quotes an article, again unnamed, where he writes:

> I am talking of that divine joy in creation that is also fun. I have come across that spirit here and there among the very youngest of our present-day writers. And I know they are going to produce something worthwhile someday. Joy is a quality fraught with a gaudy peril. It is so near to love, for one thing. When you come into the presence of beauty in a gaiety of spirit, let the foolish stars beware. (Bosman, in Rosenberg, 1976:172)

Here Bosman comes through as a man who wants to see young writers thriving and enjoying the same fun and happiness that he experiences in writing. His views of poetry are particularly telling where he states, 'poetry is anything the poet does. And a poet is nothing more or less than a divinely inspired madman' (Bosman, in Rosenberg, 1976:175). Rosenberg, again, ignores this very significant point made by Bosman himself about his own state of mind. It was discussed in both previous biographies where Bosman was characterised as one who felt himself both mad and divinely inspired to write. It seems an obvious oversight for Rosenberg to overlook it. It is not simply the case of putting the words on the page, but it is the biographer's job to interpret the words, which Rosenberg does not attempt. It, of course, is not necessary for the biographer to discuss everything written by the subject, but Bosman's state of mind and feeling that he was mad for most of his life are important aspects and should not be brushed over.

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[2] This is one of the many instances when Rosenberg quotes from Bosman's essays but does not reference them. Many of the essays are not in collections and could not be found.

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What followed his time as an editor was another stint as a teacher at Damelin College in Johannesburg. This time in his life was significant for him as a teacher because he found that the children were unruly and 'difficult to control' and Rosenberg (1976:180) describes his lessons as being 'abysmally ineffective'. These words do not describe the man we have come to know, but one thing that he did take from the experience was meeting Lionel Abrahams, a young, handicapped man who wanted to learn the art of short story writing. This connection between the men is presented to us as mutually respectful and Bosman wanted to impress on him the importance for a writer to be humble in his ventures. This, as Rosenberg (1976:181) points out, was quite odd 'considering his own arrogance in the 1930s' but it is possible that 'in his maturing during the intervening years he may have cultivated an aspect of humility'. What Bosman taught Abrahams tells us important things about his character, for instance, he taught 'the necessity of writing only what he knew of life. If the writer's material is life, he should open himself up to his experience of life. It was never enough…to observe clinically. He had to commit himself to a deep involvement with humanity' (Rosenberg, 1976:182). This is precisely how Bosman chose to live, if we are to accept what has been written in the biographies. He wanted to experience life and everything it had to offer him in order to write about it genuinely. Abrahams took what he told him to heart and after Bosman's death he remained faithful to his mentor in that he became the first to edit posthumously Bosman's work. Gordon Vorster was another of Bosman's 'disciples' in the last few years of his life. He speaks of Bosman as a man who 'accepted people unreservedly, with all the muck' (Rosenberg, 1976:183). From how Rosenberg presents both Abrahams and Vorster we get the sense that Bosman wanted to nurture young writing talent and preserve it for future generations.

1947 was the year Bosman saw not only his novel *Jacaranda in the Night* published, but also his collection of short stories, *Mafeking Road*. After a glowing review by Mary Morrison Webster in the *Sunday Times*, which stated that he had made a 'valuable addition to our literature' he wrote a reply thanking the writer for putting him 'on Olympus among the immortal' (Rosenberg, 1976:196). Once these two works were published he finally delved into his time in prison to write *Cold Stone Jug*, which he hammered out on an old typewriter in the Sydney Hotel. These final years of life were filled with creation—of short stories, essays, articles, pencil sketches and paintings. Rosenberg also paints this time as one of bonding between Bosman and Helena, which included a period in which they spent time at Plettenberg Bay together for a peaceful break from Johannesburg. The most important aspect

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of this last year, in particular, is that Bosman spent a great deal of time with close friends, like Gordon Vorster, George Howard and, of course, his wife Helena. During this time friends remember him saying that 'the writer's true environment was *in* the world amongst the people, in whatever capacity he or she had to work. This, rather than the ivory tower, was the treasure house of experience from which a writer should draw' (Rosenberg, 1976:217, emphasis in the original). And Bosman certainly made a point, throughout his life, of drawing from the experiences of people in all walks of life. He learned from the people around him, and in the last few years of his life those close to him learned a great deal about him in turn. Rosenberg (1976:219) states that he became humbler and treated everything he wrote with respect as if he knew that everything he wrote in those last years needed to be preserved. Many of his friends seemed to know that he was going to die, as did he, according to Rosenberg (1976:232) and when he eventually did die of a heart attack there was no delay in the outpouring of grief and love for the man. Rosenberg puts it aptly when she sums up Bosman's contribution to literature. It was no small contribution in that

> [t]he writer had to relate to life and humanity. His development in life *was* his development as a writer. The gift of the writer was a trust, and he owed it to that gift to endure whatever hardship came with it. In the end, his fundamental gift as a writer was his self' (Rosenberg, 1976:217, emphasis in the original).

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CHAPTER FOUR
LIFE SENTENCE AND REMEMBERING BOSMAN

'Biography attempts to preserve what it can of human greatness or humbleness; to describe a pilgrimage from childhood to maturity and finally to the grave, and in this process the labors, errors, passions and actions that lead to accomplishment. Few "ordinary" lives are written. One supposes that reader to not want to read about the ordinary but the extraordinary.' – Leon Edel (1984:14)

Stephen Gray's biography, *Life Sentence*, follows a different pattern from all of the biographies about Bosman that precede it. Gray (2005a:331) writes that 'it must be the mere biographer's adjunctive role, by way of compressing and selecting, to strip off the accretions of fantasy with which the figure of this Herman Charles Bosman has become encrusted'. He is fulfilling one of the roles of the biographer, which is to try to set straight the mythology of the subject where he or she feels the subject has been betrayed. He is attempting to 'make an attempt upon the man, leaving aside the myth' (Gray, 2005a:331). It is a documentary of Bosman's life told from an academic and more objective point of view than the previous three. Objectivity, one must remember, is never fully possible when writing a life because interpretation involves a good deal of subjectivity. Gray's biography also begins in a different way from the rest: he begins with a description of the time following Bosman's death where those closest to him needed to organise his papers and the rights to all of his work. There was a great deal of movement back and forth between those who felt they had the right to his body of work and the royalties from it, namely his brother Pierre, who was adamant that he should receive a share of what he felt was owed to him. In the end it was Helena who received the rights to his stories and a life insurance policy. Gray also gives an overview of the biographies that came before his, judging them on their content and how they contributed to Bosman's reputation.

In an article for the *English Academy Review* about the process of writing this biography, he (2005b:125) writes 'To date several attempts have been made on Bosman's life, putting the mosaic of bits and pieces together in order to make some sense of him. Some have made valiant efforts, but failed, principally because he himself was routinely self-protective, even evasive about himself'. He claims that the biography by Sachs was 'praising his friend's character, [while] venting some old grudge, intending to assassinate him' (Gray, 2005a:34). In relation to Rosenberg's biography he mentions that 'further researchers of Bosman remain eternally indebted to [her]' because of the amount of research she did and for presenting an

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'obvious record' of Bosman's life (Gray, 2005a:36). But, due to the fact that a large amount of what she writes cannot be substantiated, and that later she 'went too far to drum up publicity for herself and fell into baseless fantasies' (Gray, 2005a:37) the biography she wrote was questioned more than it was accepted. He (2005a:125-126) writes that

> pinning down this bad-boy early Bosman has led to some peculiar results, too, more the products of credulous falsification than any responsible quest for verisimilitude. But during the course of my research informant after informant has sworn blind to my face that the following slanders have to be factual: that he was a product of incest, for example, or was illegitimate, mentally unstable and even a cannibal! He was none of those things and – sorry to be such a spoilsport – that is that. Nor is it wholesome, in professional circles, without a shred of documentary evidence, to adduce any such peekaboo defamations as have become a commonplace part of the legend.

Gray (2005a:37) writes that Blignaut's biography, or collection of anecdotes, *My Friend Herman Charles Bosman*, was written in a reaction to Rosenberg's biography. He collected what he called 'all the juicy bits he had held back from Rosenberg' and wrote his own 'erratic memoir'. Therefore, Gray's biography can be seen as a summing up of what was written before and a correction of the portrait of Bosman which was presented to the world.

His first chapter is entitled 'Now for the truth', which places it immediately as *the* authoritative text on Bosman's life. He opens with Bosman's upbringing, as one would expect of a chronicle, and uses many extracts from Bosman's own writing and the writing of family members, like his cousin Zita, to support what he says. As said before, one cannot ever truly be objective, but Gray tries to remain as true to the facts as possible. He (2005:50) writes that 'as far as we can reconstruct, that childhood of his…must have been pretty idyllic'. He bases his assertion on Bosman's article about growing up in the Cape where he explains to his readers that it had imbued in him 'a love for the living beauty of our indigenous wild flowers' (Gray, 2005a:50). But, aside from admiring wild flowers, Bosman had to compete with a large number of cousins, which according to Zita (Gray, 2005a:50), had an 'insistence to outshine the next: a competitive strife without any but a practical goal ahead and that surely does not make for happiness in the end'. Gray's biography differs from Rosenberg's in an important way in that every time he quotes from one of Bosman's stories or articles he interprets what Bosman wrote and how it reflects who he was at the time. In this first chapter he establishes the type of young boy Bosman was, which is clear in his essay 'Witpoortjie Falls' where he describes going to a waterfall with his family and trying to draw the waterfall, while the adults went about talking, fighting and dropping whiskey into the nearby water. Gray explains that in this essay we 'have a glimpse of the attentive young one,

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disturbed in his application to his artwork, already trying to figure out the gist of the grown-up dialogue, noting their every gesture' (Gray, 2005a:52). Gray's ability to analyse what he reads and interpret it for the reader is important for us, at this early stage, to understand Bosman at a young age.

When reconstructing Bosman's time at school in Johannesburg, Gray is very careful to explain that this time of his life 'may reliably be reconstructed in patches' (Gray, 2005a:57), which shows readers that what will be read will not be a complete retelling of a life in detail, and that it will be up to them to try to put the pieces together where the biographer cannot. Of this time in his life, Gray (2005a:57) quotes Bosman:

> [it is] that period between boyhood and early adolescence that is a very queer time in each person's life because you awaken to life very suddenly during that time and you feel that inside you there is all knowledge and all power, and you believe that with your left hand you can take up the whole world and reshape it.

This shows Bosman to be a young man very sure of himself and wanting to change the world in any way that he could. But he did not have an easy time of it. His classmate, Stanley Jackson, remembers that Bosman did not make many friends at school but was very good in the classroom. One morning in winter he was late for class and explained that he had to chop firewood before class. Other recollections from friends and those who were at school with him describe him as a clownish young man, and one who did not respect authority. This view of him emerged in the preceding biographies too. Besides all this, he is described by his friend Eddie Roux as 'a mad genius and already a brilliant writer and talker' (Gray, 2005a:59). From this we can see that Bosman was already the person he would remain for most of his life. Gray (2005a:60) mentions that, even at this young age, 'literature, really, was the Bosman boys' passion' and this would last throughout their lifetimes'. Gray (2005a:61) makes mention of the fact that 'much is usually made of his discovery of certain works in the new school library. He himself often referred to the impact of finding the haunted daguerreotype of Edgar Allan Poe in the Masters of Literature section'. This is an important moment in his life that is not ignored by the biographers of Bosman. He discovered many authors that would become influences for both his life and his art. Here Bosman found one of the writers who would later be a crucial influence his short story writing—O. Henry. It was at school where Bosman would make his first contributions to magazines and periodicals to start off his writing career. Bosman brought his humour into what he wrote from the very beginning and Gray (2005a:62) describes the pieces he wrote as 'squibs done with rattling

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good humour [which] were the taste of the Twenties'. Bosman was already well on his way to becoming the memorable writer he is remembered as. But among all of the writing, humour and wit there were many troubles in his life academically and personally, which Gray (2005a:65) describes as being 'very disturbed' and he quotes Bosman calling himself 'just one of the "rats" after all'.

Stephen Gray opens his next chapter about Bosman's university career with a sober examination of the man by stating 'lest the story of our wide boy – a minor villain dabbling in various schemes to get rich quick – become too fanciful, let us begin with his student record' (Gray, 2005a:66). This section shows, for one thing, that Bosman thought deeply about everything he did, including a seemingly thoughtless exercise in cardboard modelling. Gray (2005a:66) quotes Bosman as writing 'it makes for cynicism at too tender an age: it teaches the child that life is all just lath and plaster, sawdust and cardboard'. Those who knew him at university all describe him at courteous, and good-looking, but also as someone who kept to himself and spent time only with his close friends. A fellow student, Jan Bosman (no relation), wrote in a reminiscence that Bosman stood out in classes with his strange antics. The first incident was when he was late for class one day and decided rather to carve up a pencil and bits of his desk and make a small fire in class, for the fun of it. Another time, he was also late for class and told Jan about the time when he and a friend conned random people out of money by asking them if they wanted to hear something advantageous. People sent money and he sent back the name of an insurance company (Gray, 2005a:69). Jan wrote further, 'I won't say Bosman was lying, but he was one of those types – a bit like Shakespeare – who'd adjust the facts if it made a better story' (Gray, 2005a:69). This remains true for what many people have said of Bosman in previous biographies and reminiscences. It seems to have been a part of his make-up—to prefer the poet's 'embroidered lie'.

Bosman's university years were not quiet years, mostly because of his mother's remarrying a Scotsman, Mr Russell, and bringing three more siblings into the Bosman family. According to the reminiscences of a friend of the family, Reg Fleming, 'the Bosman boys came in from the outside and never really joined the swing of things' (Gray, 2005a:76). Neither of them got on with their new siblings, mostly because both David, the eldest Russell son, and Herman Bosman were used to being the senior sons in the family. According to Gray (2005a:77) their mother had her work cut out for her when it came to keeping order in the house. When Bosman met Vera Sawyer a year later he would propose marriage to her in order to 'get them

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both out of their respective home entrapments' (Gray, 2005a:79). As discussed earlier, once they were married, Bosman was soon sent off to the bushveld to teach, without his wife, whose mother refused to let her daughter accompany her new husband. Gray quotes a letter written by Vera stating that he must be 'dreadfully lonely in such an awful place' and that she 'was very sorry' he had to be there (Gray, 2005a:80), while Bosman wrote poems and letters stating his distress in having to be so far removed from city life. But no one knew of their marriage, except for a select few and later even Bosman's third wife, Helena, had no idea of her husband's first wife. This shows us as readers that Bosman was someone who kept very much to himself and did not feel the need to share intimate details about himself if he felt they were not relevant.

Gray gets a large amount of his information about Bosman's time in the bushveld from the letters and essays he wrote during that time. When he first arrived he wrote a letter to William Waldman, whom he knew from university, stating

> [m]y new environment, when I got to it, was somewhat strange. For one thing, there was so much of it. When the ox-wagon which had brought me thus far had gone back again, leaving my luggage and myself in the middle of a young forest, I stood for a few moments, looking first at the scenery stretching on the right side of the road and then taking a gaze at what was spread on the left side, trying to make up my mind as to which of the two views I detested most. (Gray, 2005a:83)

These are not the words of a man happy to be where he is. He also had no one to learn from regarding teaching but, as Gray (2005a:84) states, 'thus – or at least so the mythology goes – he learnt about his surroundings at first hand from the very cattle ranchers he characterised as having not much else to do but be great storytellers'. Bosman learned a lot from the people he lived with for those few months and wrote about them in his Marico stories later. Gray mentions how David Goldblatt (in Gray, 2005a:84), when he followed the Bosman trail to the Marico, found that 'not only had Bosman used real place names in his fiction, but, in blissful disregard of the conventions, the real names of people too'. It is logical then that the people of the Marico were not too pleased with Bosman and his antics, and are quoted by Goldblatt as saying that 'Bosman will end in the gallows' and that he was a 'friendless young man' (Gray, 2005a:85). This is reinforced by another view of Bosman: Gray (2005a:85) quotes a man from the Marico who described him as having

> an aristocratic nature, someone who found it difficult to shed his mask of aloofness – a person who gave the impression that he intensely disliked the people he was forced to associate with, both in his work as well as socially; one who was above all a keen listener but very seldom talked.

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These descriptions allow us to see Bosman from a new perspective, yet not too far from the man he was in Johannesburg. He was not one who could adapt well to a new situation or make friends with people very easily. He listened and learned what he could, and what he took from the people he would turn into work that would make him remembered by future generations. But the Marico he represented, though it was based on the real people who lived there, was his own creation. Gray (2005a:89) takes the readers forward in time to when Bosman and his wife, Helena, travelled back to the Marico to visit the place where he had spent a few months and where the inspiration for his stories had come from. There, Bosman realised something important in that he understood that he had got the local colour in his stories from the people's stories and listening to the old people talk (Gray, 2005a:89). He looked back at himself too, and the teacher he presented in his stories, and Gray (2005a:91) writes that this was perhaps Bosman's way of showing that he had 'developed a marked self-hatred later on, finding his younger persona a silly braggart'. This shows us how Bosman matured over the course of his lifetime and managed to see the immature, perhaps slightly naïve man he was when he was in the Marico. His naivety was perhaps what made the people of the Marico drive him out on the day he left. Gray (2005a:98) recounts the story of how he left most of his belongings in the Marico after speaking disparagingly about a man's wife. They got into a fight and Bosman was sent off on the train never to return to be a teacher in the Marico. This was only one reason he would not return, the other being that he would soon find himself in prison for murder.

Gray's account of Bosman's murder trial reads like a newspaper report, unlike the murder mystery narration of Rosenberg. Gray uses newspaper, witness and court reports to build his chapter about this incident in the life of Bosman, 'On Trial'. He explains how, at first, the details of what had happened were unknown and therefore many of the newspaper headlines that were printed consisted merely of conjecture and assumptions. What they did know was that a brother had shot another brother in the middle of the night, and the likely source of the information was David Russell's father. Witnesses report that Bosman, when he was on trial, showed no signs of terror or fright and 'entered the courtroom indifferently, munching a sandwich' (Gray, 2005a, 101). Gray continues his description of the trial in a journalistic way, remaining quite focused on keeping close to the facts of what transpired. He quotes extensively from the court reports of what was witnessed, mostly by Pierre Bosman and then by William Russell, David's father. He takes pains to let the facts he presents speak for

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themselves and adds at the end of the quotations that 'there the recorded story peters out' and moves on to the grand trial, which was to be held four months later. The reason for the petering out of records is because not all the trial records at that time were kept (Gray, 2005a:107). Gray (2005a:108) explains that his facts are taken from the court reporter for *The Daily Mail*. Near the end of the trial, he begins to focus on how Bosman was feeling, or rather what was reported of how he was feeling, based on the facts presented by *The Daily Mail*. There is not very much interpretation on Gray's part, and he leaves the readers to make of the descriptions what they like. The reporter wrote that Bosman 'sat with his head on one side, the nerves flickering in his cheek. His face was flushing and, when in the forenoon he gave his evidence in turn, he became flustered and confused, even incoherent' (Gray, 2005a:114). This is an adequate description for us to know that Bosman was certainly not as indifferent as he had seemed a few months earlier. Reality had perhaps hit him and he now knew that he would, in fact, be sent to prison, or worse, be put to death. When he was questioned by the court, he was quite open about what had transpired the night he shot his stepbrother, and even mentioned that he was not looking forward to returning to the bushveld. But there was nothing he could say that could prevent what was to happen to him. He was sentenced to death and Gray quotes his final speech to the courtroom, which is a clear indication of his personality and how we have come to know him in the previous biographies. He (2005a:121) quotes Bosman as saying 'In that tragic minute, the happenings of which are still unclear to me, I was impelled by some wild and chaotic impulse in which there was no suggestion of malice or premeditation'.

Gray opens his chapter 'A Prison Record' with a poignant quotation by Helena Lake, 'The shock of David Russell's death did alter Herman's personality for a number of years, changing him from an extrovert tease into a beaten creature' (Gray, 2005a:122). This opening allows us to see that the time in prison affected him deeply. There is not much information regarding how he felt or what he did while he was in prison, except for the reminiscences of fellow inmates and, of course, his account of his time in prison, *Cold Stone Jug*. But as Gray (2005a:125) aptly states, it was 'written twenty years later, [and] concentrates more on the sporty time he was supposed to have had, joking through the long nights with Stoffels in the cell next door'. And, unfortunately, these years, which were 'the least private, never-ending years of his forced existence…remain inaccessible to us today' (Gray, 2005a:126). Gray never attempts to use *Cold Stone Jug* as a record of what occurred in prison. Instead, he makes sure readers are clear that this time in Bosman's life might forever remain a mystery to

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us. He asks the question, 'How may we reconstruct that grim interlude, which he himself chose to depict quite unreliably, once he could face it again, as some carnival descent into the lower depths' (Gray, 2005a:126). His reply is to turn to the reminiscences of fellow convicts and allow them to give him assistance in putting the puzzle pieces together.

Lago Clifford is the first of the convicts whose recollections of meeting and speaking with Bosman were used. They were perhaps easier to come by because upon his release his recollections were published in *The Sjambok* and headed 'rather sensationally, THE CONDEMNED MURDERER WHO WANTED TO DIE – POET IMPRISONED FOR PASSIONATE MURDER' (Gray, 2005a:127). What he wrote of Bosman was that he was 'the most interesting and intellectual man I met…refined, creative, poetical. He is…highly read and possesses a fascinating personality' (Gray, 2005a:126). The two would discuss many intellectual matters and Clifford mentions that he was asked not to give his name. But, from what he wrote, the man he met was most certainly Bosman. Clifford was upset that someone of Bosman's intellectual calibre was left 'wasting his life and abilities, which could be used in the service of his beloved South Africa' (Gray, 2005a:127). While Bosman was in prison his talent was not wasting away as most would think. He kept writing and when friends and family would come to visit he would smuggle out bits and pieces with them. Clifford himself managed to smuggle a few things out when he was released (Gray, 2005a:128). This smuggling out of his work is indicative of how strongly the people close to him felt about his writing, and how important it was to make his voice heard. A poignant description of Bosman here is that Clifford mentions that during a discussion of Dostoyevsky, Bosman said that man has the ability to get used to anything and Clifford added that this was 'the best definition of [Bosman]'. This is perhaps so, since Bosman's time in prison was spent partly in the library and at the printing press, and he seemed to have made the most of his time there. Gray makes mention of a man named Neil Rusch, who suggested that Clifford's pieces were in fact written by Bosman himself (the same was suggested by Rosenberg in her biography). Gray (2005a:130) clearly refutes this in saying that 'Clifford was quite capable of writing his own pieces and had every reason to do so, for his own purposes'. The second convict, Christoffel Lessing, is mentioned very briefly for the sole purpose that he was responsible for 'rehashing the drab, restricted years of about the only world he knew' and also for reporting the 'dreary details Bosman was too frivolous to reproduce'. Lessing then serves almost as a companion to what we read in *Cold Stone Jug*, which is focused more on the light-hearted aspects of the experience. Although it has its dark

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and troubling elements. Lessing wrote quite aptly that an ex-convict's 'punishment really only begins on his release: and never ends' (Gray, 2005a:131).

Upon Bosman's release from prison he was not greeted by any family or friends, and was sent to live with his uncle and cousin, Zita, in Bronkhorstspruit. Zita's reminiscences here remain the most important record of this rehabilitative time. She describes how he 'slowly but surely, charmed and won over her mother and father, and so was invited to join them in the evenings about the kitchen table for the kind of food he relished' (Gray, 2005a:133). This type of welcome and warmth must have been a very important part of Bosman's rehabilitation into society, rather than being left to his own devices in Johannesburg, without family or close friends. Zita remembers too that Bosman was always writing and when inspiration hit him he had no choice but to write what was teeming in his brain. After a fallout with his uncle regarding his working to pay his keep, he was sent off to Boksburg where he possibly (because there is no record) 'wandered around areas of the East Rand with which he was familiar from his early adolescence, staying out of doors to fight his claustrophobia' (Gray, 2005a:135). During his time on the East Rand townships he came to some important realisations , saying that

> I am changing my views, and I think there is a limit to what we can inflict on the native…[and] if the inhabitants of the native location of Benoni were to rise up in arms against the conditions under which they exist you could count on me as one person who would not take up a rifle for the purpose of shooting them down. (Gray, 2005a:136)

This, Gray (2005a:136) says, is important in showing us that Bosman had indeed changed from his time in prison and had become more tolerant and broader-minded than he had been. It also gives useful insight into his thoughts about race. The comment about not shooting with a rifle shows this quite clearly.

After Bosman's rehabilitative time with his family he moved to Johannesburg, which begins a time in his life that is the best documented. Blignaut's memoir, as well as Sachs's recollections, serves to piece this part of his life together. It is also a time when Bosman and Blignaut's partnership as writers and editors would produce a great deal of written evidence of the time. Gray (2005a:138) does mention that there are 'gaps and omissions, often intentional, which need to be investigated' but makes sure to add (as any good biographer would) that 'the glossy veneer that has been applied to the up and coming writer achieving his first successes should not deflect us'. Gray makes sure to not gloss over any details that

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would leave his presentation of Bosman's life incomplete. The outward appearance of Bosman he presents to us is someone 'immaculately dressed in a suit, leisurely strolling the pavements. A sheaf of forms to be filled in by advertisers he is canvassing is in one hand, in his other a button-hole. He is half rough gossip columnist, half dandy aesthete. And the soles of his shoes are going to wear thin' (Gray, 2005a:138). This image of the man is certainly not one of a loafer or someone merely floating through life. This was a time of great production and action for Bosman, especially with his writing partner, Blignaut.

Gray makes a point of uncovering Blignaut's tendency to make statements that were not true of his association with Bosman, and thus to cast the truth of his biography in doubt. Gray (2005a:141) mentions some instances where Blignaut made up stories about himself, like being in the army during the First World War, and others when he concocted stories about how he co-authored a play with Bosman and that he had a hand in rehabilitating him. He is described as being 'boastful' (Gray, 2005a:141) about his association with Bosman, but despite this, what is undeniable is the effect that the two men had on each other personally and in the literary sense. Gray's interpretation and point of view are important in this case because they give us another side to the story, another perspective from which to view the friendship. Regarding Sachs, Gray is far more scathing. He (2005a:148) writes that 'Sachs's gallery of dagga-smoking "onhangers" is hardly reliable, though, being a reduction of Bosman's own much later fictionalisation in *Cold Stone Jug*. But we are meant to believe Sachs tiptoed through one decadent Bosman party after another'. Bosman did associate with a wide variety of people during this time, both respectable and seedy, and they all influenced his writing and who he was as a person. His brother, Pierre, was one of them, even though their relationship was strained. Gray (2005a:152) quotes Bosman as being upset when 'Pierre was deep into his booze…Herman is said to have remarked "God did a terrible thing to me giving me a brother like Pierre." To which Pierre would retaliate: "You don't know what it's like having to live with a brother who is a murderer!"'. And though they were both writers, they did not associate with each other very much.

It is Bosman's relationships with women that most biographers are interested in. Some focus on his marriages, but Gray focuses on them all (short or long term) and writes that 'there seems also to have been some compensating for his barren years with women' (Gray, 2005a:155). He certainly did not let any of them escape the clutches of his writing, especially his poetry. He used his life and loves in his fiction, quite obviously at times, and this gives

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readers the chance to see the man behind the fiction. Fred Zwarenstein, a colleague, wrote that through all of his writing and escapades in literature and with women, his prison record and his reputation for being a murderer 'didn't matter a damn to him, and it didn't seem to make any difference to the people who knew him' (Gray, 2005a:161). This shows us that in the literary world, though he caused trouble at Blignaut's side and made a few enemies along the way, he was accepted as Bosman the writer, and not cast out as Bosman the murderer.

The time after his release from prison began smoothly, or as smoothly as it could, but soon Bosman arrived at a place in his life where adversity would be central. If being in prison for murder were not bad enough, he made a few more mistakes in his career, according to Gray: he lived and wrote under a pseudonym, he followed poetry instead of short stories ('his true metier'), he did not produce enough serious work and he did not reconcile with those in his life who loved him (Gray, 2005a:164). During this time, it was not only his own behaviour that seemed to have a bad effect on him, but also those with whom he chose to associate. Gray (2005a:164) writes,

> [i]nstead of taking the opportunity to rehabilitate himself, Bosman seems to have sunk into the worst of company; instead of coming clean and making something of himself, he grew more criminal by the day…. With a fanciful genealogy of literary rebels as backup (and the alcoholic American misfit Edgar Allan Poe, the French blasphemer Charles Baudelaire), Bosman chose to make his mark in the bourgeois city as an obnoxious outsider. Blignaut, egging him on, was the worst compadre he could have chosen; and then there was Ella to come, surely an appalling wife.

Leon Hugo goes further to describe him as 'a law unto himself, morally speaking, puckish, wayward and unpredictable, and perhaps true to himself only in his vocation of letters' (Gray, 2005a:164). This is certainly not a positive image of a man newly rehabilitated from prison. Gray does not yet make an attempt to understand why Bosman became this way or chose to live this way. He merely presents the facts and allows the readers to interpret them as they choose. Bosman's writing at this stage seems to have become a place for him to vent his frustrations and resentment about certain people. Gray describes these pieces as 'pointless vendettas' and suggests that 'notoriety at any price was all he could come up with' (Gray, 2005a:168). It was not until the end of May, 1931, that things started to get complicated for Bosman and Blignaut. For most of the year they were in and out of court and jail for offensive and often blasphemous pieces they had been writing and publishing. In 1932, Gray writes, the notorious two decided to target E.S. 'Solly' Sachs and insinuated that he was 'the enemy of the working class', but Gray stays objective by adding 'if there is any truth to the

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story' (Gray, 2005a:178). He deduces from what information he is given that Bosman and Blignaut targeted him 'purely because Sachs was unwilling to pay them more'. Mostly their shenanigans were based on their need to drum up readership and for them to have an outlet for their humour and trickery. Gray's chapter 'Adversity (Upper Case A)' reads like a study of court documents, which it ultimately is, because the troublesome two spent most of these years between 1931 and 1934 being tried for what they were writing. Bosman, in the end, managed to get off without lengthy jail time, while Blignaut disappeared from the public eye for twelve months, to which Gray (2005a:197) adds that 'the reader may be left to guess the reason why'.

In between his description of the trials and arguments, Gray slips in information about how Bosman met the woman who was to become his second wife, Ella Manson. By the end of 1931, Bosman's *Mara* pamphlet was released, which consisted of 'self-promotion' and 'flagrant subject matter' (Gray, 2005a:175) and contained a poem for Ella, dedicated to Blignaut but written about Ella Manson. Bosman shows a clear sense of who he was at the time as suggested by the dedication, 'it gives me some satisfaction to know that in spite of what my detractors have done to me – or perhaps because of what they have done – I have a larger South African public than any other writer in this country' (Gray, 2005a:175). This man presented is certainly not ashamed of self-promotion or of declaring his own genius, in the same vein as Oscar Wilde. As the earlier biographers also noted, Bosman and Ella's lives together were tumultuous and during the first year of their marriage (1932-1933) Bosman was involved in his many trials with Blignaut. She remained by his side during the trial for blasphemy and 'was in the front row, having taken the day off work. To keep her fingers supple, she was furiously knitting a warm jersey for her beloved' (Gray, 2005a:194). Once the trial was over, Bosman and Ella decided to leave South Africa for Europe.

Gray (2005a:198) states that 'reconstructing Bosman's wanderjahre with his second wife Ella is no easy task. His own references to this period abroad are unsystematic, usually thrown out later when some unrelated event brings to mind this or that detail of his years away'. Yet, Gray manages to piece together what he can, again from reminiscences of those who knew Bosman and from pieces he wrote at the time. One piece, written in 1948, tells of how a young girl was going abroad, but not because she needed to escape from South Africa, rather because she wanted to go. Gray (2005a:198) writes that 'there can be little doubt that Ella and he were doing a bunk in 1934. What is more, they meant to leave their South Africa for

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good'. When Bernard Sachs started *The South African Opinion,* Bosman was given an outlet, despite being far away in London. It is this publication that is responsible for preserving many of his 'Marico' stories, which are described as being 'a delighted response to the magically romantic medieval world he found in Britain' (Gray, 2005a:199). It is important to note that these stories were all signed truthfully, as H.C. Bosman, as would everything else he wrote from then on. This is important, I think, because perhaps Bosman felt no need to hide behind a mask while writing the stories that he felt so emotionally connected to, and is also another indication of his more assured sense of self and status as a writer. But what is most poignant about this time in Bosman's life is that after July 1937, he did not publish any more fiction for nearly seven years (Gray, 2005a:201). Gray (2005a:201) writes that 'to experience such a longlasting writer's block must have been a living death to him'. He did write essays about his experiences in London and Paris, which give some insight into what he was experiencing overseas. They moved between Paris, Brussels and London and soon there were only stories of how he and Ella were 'down and outs' (Gray, 2005a:204). Bosman writes (in Gray, 2005a:204) that when he returned to London after his time in Paris and Brussels he became almost nostalgic, but noted that 'memory is that held together with pieces of rusty wire. Therewith is the imagination fed and sustained'. This is also true of Gray's attempt to piece these years together. All he has are the 'pieces of rusty wire' with which to construct the story of Bosman's life. Gray collects evidence of how Bosman made money during this time from his essays, for instance in 'Reminiscences', where he mentions 'working for an educational publication in London' (Gray, 2003:147). Other than that, Bosman did not work very much since the 30s in London were a very difficult time for anyone looking to find work. It was thanks to John Webb's starting *The Sunday Critic* in 1936 that Bosman found a new writing outlet. He wrote a prison serial for the paper, but it was discontinued 'owing to the constant criticism that is being levelled at certain stark features of the story' and the claim that it was evoking 'shudders in many homes throughout Great Britain' (Gray, 2005a:212). Thereafter began one of Bosman's worst tricks on those who loved and cared for him – news filtered back to South Africa that he had died in London. Gray (2005a:215) describes a confrontation between Ella and Bosman's mother, Elisa, where Ella 'attacked Elisa with her soggy umbrella, poking her in the ribs and beating her about the shins. She began screaming too to the effect that if Mrs Russell had not spoilt him so much, pampered and pestered him to distraction, *none of this would ever have happened*' (emphasis in the original). Right then Bosman appeared and his mother's reaction was to 'never again search out her devil's spawn' (Gray, 2005a:215). This is where his family cut off all ties with him. Yet he did not seem to

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learn from this experience and continued to live under pseudonyms and cause trouble, with his new partner in crime by his side, Ella.

In his chapter 'A Tough Country' Gray recounts the breakdown of Bosman's marriage to Ella despite his being left with 'the jumble sale they both left of their lives' (Gray, 2005a:221) where he needed to sort through the documents of their lives. The accounts of much of their lives upon their return to South Africa are incomplete, but we know that they mainly stayed in Johannesburg. Bosman took a job on a few building sites in the city and according to George Howard he 'grew quickly proud…of the gnarled look his hands took on again through heavy manual labour' (Gray, 2005a:223). He worked for a while writing pieces on art for various publications, but in 1942, he found that there was more work for him in Pietersburg. This is where his life would change and he would regain his inspiration and be able to write two novels set in the city. There is not much information about Bosman's feelings and thoughts about this time, but there were reports that he was a 'dandy show-off [who] kept turning in dazzling literary pieces, the likes of which provincial journalism had never seen before' (Gray, 2005a:234). Gray again leaves readers to interpret the type of man Bosman was becoming. One of the admirers of his journalistic skills during this time was Helena Stegmann, whose relationship with Bosman was complicated from the beginning. Gray, like Rosenberg, gives the background of Helena and her family, who lived in Pietersburg in detail. She has given her own account of this time in her life, which is why both Gray and Rosenberg focus on her side of the story. Their first meeting, as described by Helena, reads like a meeting of souls, in which they discussed their reasons for being in Pietersburg. One particular line he speaks to her stands out, where he said 'Don't you realise that life is magical – that if you close one door another opens?' (Gray, 2005a:238). In this instance we as readers can see that Bosman remained optimistic and hopeful and despite the hardships he had endured he was still looking towards a 'magical' future. In the time following, Helena, Bosman and Ella had a rather odd relationship, where Bosman and Helena would have deep conversations with Ella. Helena recounts how one day Ella spat out that 'everything Helena says is all right and acceptable to you. Anything I say nowadays I notice is questioned' (Gray, 2005a:241). This shows how the relationship between Helena and Bosman was growing, despite his still being married to Ella.

Helena's description of Ella is that she had three distinct personalities, which made her very difficult to understand at times. The way Helena describes it, it is as if Ella were the one who

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decided Helena and Bosman could have a relationship and be together without interference, which places Bosman in an inactive position in his own life. But Bosman took Helena out for a walk and said something to her which shows that he saw in her a source of inspiration in bringing back his ability to write. He said (in Gray, 2005a:248), 'Don't leave me. My life with Ella is empty. Ella has chased away everybody…I cannot create anymore; I cannot write any more…I have reached a hopeless stalemate'. Helena did indeed become an inspiration to him and Gray quotes excerpts from letters he wrote about the Jewish community, which show his 'new temper' (Gray, 2005a:249) – a much calmer and more rational man in contrast to the rash man he was when partnered with Blignaut. Yet, when Bosman was around Ella, he was confused and to Helena both of them seemed to be mentally ill (Gray, 2005a:252). His conduct in relation to Helena, especially when she found out she was pregnant by him, does not show him to be much changed, because he inflicted on her, as he had on Ella, an abortion. There was an accusation and a trial, but she refused to press charges against him and he was freed. From 1943, their lives would be lived together—Ella, Bosman and Helena—and Bosman would spend the rest of his life writing more of his great stories.

In his final three chapters, Gray details the writing life of Bosman during his last few years. The importance of this time in his life was that he was inspired by Helena's presence, and their close relationship, and managed to write many important and personality-revealing pieces. The first of these is a letter he wrote to his cousin, Zita, about his recent marriage to Helena:

> Helena is a very sweet and refined girl, and my meeting with her in Pietersburg was an event which transformed my whole life, bringing me back into intimate contact with the raw realities of existence – whereby I was broken into pieces like the soil or like kraal-manure, and whereby my imagination has again been rooted in the sombre depths of the earth: the earth is the only true inspiration for the purple grandeurs of the heart when it is quiet, for the night-filled loveliness that is in sorrow, and for the graceful flourishes and flamboyances of poetry. (Gray, 2005a:259)

This shows not only how she inspired him again, but also how she healed a man so broken from the troubles he had experienced in his life. There was a revival of *The South African Opinion* and Bosman used it as an outlet for his opinions on a variety of subjects. He had regular columns discussing cultural matters, most of which formed his *A Cask of Jerepigo* collection, and others that reviewed the stage and screen. Most importantly, perhaps, he was the link between the publication and the emerging Afrikaans literary culture (Gray, 2005a, 262). At this time Bosman was interested in building up and supporting the South African

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culture of writing, in both English and Afrikaans. He felt that Johannesburg was far too vibrant a city to ignore the art that was being created there (Gray, 2005a:257). He writes, in an article Gray does not cite the title of, that literature 'must grow up from the granite of our pavements, from the sun-stained soul of our veld. It must be born here out of the minds and the blood of our writers' (Gray, 2005a:257). This was perhaps him speaking of his own contributions to South African literature, but also of the literature that he wanted to emerge after him. His writing life, especially in *The South African Opinion,* was something he took very seriously and though Helena was an inspiration for his creative life he did not seem to want her to interfere in his professional writing life. Gray (2005a:261) recounts an incident where Helena had taken it upon herself to comment on a young woman's work, a book of memoirs, which had been given to Bosman to evaluate. Helena's suggestion that the young woman should perhaps write in Afrikaans instead enraged Bosman and he asked her later that evening to not interfere when he was asked to give his opinion on a matter. This instance shows how Helena thought of herself as someone who could calm the waters when Bosman perhaps overstepped the bounds. Bosman did not feel the same way and preferred to deal with matters in his own way when it came to literature and writing.

Many of the people who knew Bosman during his time in Pietersburg wondered how a man who knew so many great writers, and knew so much of European culture and literature, could possibly reconcile the two worlds. A veteran actor, André Huguenet, wrote of Bosman that he felt 'a sad incongruity of all this splendour against the backdrop of, say, a typical Pietersburg audience of farmers and shop-assistants and school teachers' (Gray, 2005a:263). But Bosman used the incongruity of his knowledge and his surroundings in order to incorporate great humour into his writing, perhaps where others would not think to use it. His stories 'Sold Down the River' and 'Susannah and the Play-actor' are two example of his using the incongruous background, along with Huguenet's acting troupe (Gray, 2005a:263). Aside from his opinions about literature, Bosman was asked to write obituaries, which allowed him to incorporate a 'Poe-like streak in his nature' (Gray, 2005a:265), which also came through clearly in the stories he wrote at the time, like his story 'Veld Maiden'. Gray (2005a:265) credits Helena with this information because she remarked once that this morbid streak in him often 'made him stop the car at any forlorn graveyard'. Gray uses this to link to ideas earlier in the biography where he discusses Bosman's fascination with Poe and death in order to show that this part of Bosman did not change from when he was younger. Though his

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opinions became broader and more accepting of others, his fascination with one of his earliest influences had not changed.

Gray comments on how much, during the last few years of his life, Bosman had reformed his thinking, especially as evidenced in his essay 'Universities'. His opinions in this essay are vastly different from what we read in earlier pieces, particularly with regard to the intellectual leaders and professors at the University of the Witwatersrand. Gray (2005a:266) writes that his attitude turned from 'contemptuous' to having an air of gratitude. Bosman wrote in that essay:

> now I feel only a sense of humble gratitude towards those men from overseas who came to the Witwatersrand University when it was first started, bringing with them that vital breath of culture that includes the Near East and Alexandria and the Renaissance, that rich Old World of thought in whose inspiration alone the soul of man can find a place for its abiding. (Gray, 2003:117).

Part of his maturing process also included his reuniting, platonically, with his first wife, Vera. This was a reunion he never told Helena about. The part of his journey to maturity in both his life and his writing that Helena was a direct part of was his return to the Marico Bushveld in October 1944. He returned and came to a realisation, after chatting to a soldier on the train, an episode which he recounted in his essay 'Marico Revisited', that 'it is only things indirectly connected with economics that can change. Droughts and human nature don't' (Gray, 2003:143). This realisation also led to the happiness that came along with knowing that the heart of his stories, the human nature that he reflected so well, was something that would not change. But what he found most interesting about returning to the Marico, as is clear in the essay, is that he 'had re-entered the world that belonged chiefly to his imagination' (Gray, 2005a:268). This world included the things he left behind that had remained unchanged, namely an ant-hill that 'was still surmounted by what looked like that same pair of kudu horns' (Gray, 2003:144) and the moepel trees that were again 'beginning to ripen' (Gray, 2003:145). Perhaps this visit was his way of closing the book on a part of his life that had haunted him, particularly the way he left the Marico so many years earlier.

One part of Bosman's personality that did not seem to change much was his tendency to provoke controversy. When he returned to Johannesburg, Helena came with him and so did Ella. Since Helena could not do anything against her husband's wishes, Gray (2005a:269) writes, she had no choice but to accept a marriage that involved Ella. But Ella did remarry, a man named Donald Harris, who also joined the married couple in their home. Soon, new

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scandals came into the Bosman household, again to do with abortion and this time involving Ella. Bosman is shown to care deeply for Ella's welfare, but Helena was the one who would protect her husband from being embroiled in another scandal. Gray (2005a:271) writes that Helena believed that Ella was so very broken after losing Bosman that she 'was utterly defeated and so preparing to go by her own hand; her spirit extinguished already'. A number of opinions abound regarding Ella and her death, but one thing that remains undisputed is that Bosman was deeply affected by it when she died. We are given a clear indication of his feelings in his obituary entitled 'Ella Manson'. He writes: 'Naturally Ella Manson had hell knocked out of her by life…and so it was inevitable that the world knocked hell out of her. And, of course, she hit back at life. There were occasions when she struck back savagely. A caged spirit seeking to rend asunder the restrictions of mortality. A lion snapping at the bars' (Gray, 2003:152). And furthermore, she 'died as she had lived, and the manner of her passing came as a fitting close to life of wild tempest and incredible colour. She went out like a meteor, leaving some of her closest friends under the impression, up to the very last moment, that she was play-acting' (Gray, 2003:153). After her death, Bosman carried on as before, once in a while returning to Shakespeare House, where her portrait stood, in order to toast her memory, along with Helena. He was someone who did not let go of the past easily and this shows how Ella was a huge part of his life, even in death.

According to Gray (2005a:277) Bosman took to 'scrutinising his own conscience' after Ella died and this allowed him to face the demons of his past and begin to understand his own behaviour in his earlier life. This meant that for him there would be no more 'evading and sidestepping' (Gray, 2005a:277). He began to revisit his childhood in many of his essays. Gray (2005a:277) suggests that working through his childhood tribulations allowed him to free himself of his past and face his lost years that he spent in prison. His essays written during the final years of his life reveal many intimate reflections of times in his life of which there is little external evidence. He wrote of the small towns he and Helena visited, in 'Dorps of South Africa', of his childhood in 'Witpoortjie Falls', his school life in 'Jeppe High Revisited', and later his time in prison in *Cold Stone Jug*. All of these works allow us to see into a mature mind looking back on a time with deep reflection.

A point of interest, especially with regard to Bosman's concern for others, is the relationship he formed with Lionel Abrahams while he was teaching a few classes in poetry at Damelin College. Bosman did not want to return to teaching, but monetary issues forced him to turn to

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something that could bring in immediate money. Abrahams went to Bosman for mentoring with his writing (both essays and poetry) and Bosman was happy to help him. I get the sense that Bosman was eager to pass the torch, in a sense, to a young man who was passionate about literature, particularly South African literature. After their first meeting, Abrahams recalls that Bosman said he 'may still be the best writer in South Africa' (Gray, 2005a:283). This soon turned into a recurring event where Bosman helped systematically to 'unleash the lad's talent' (Gray, 2005a:283) and inspired him in all aspects of his life. Gray (2005a:284) writes that Bosman even convinced Abrahams, who suffered from dystonia, that he could ride on the trams by himself. After Bosman's death, it was Abrahams who would become his lifelong disciple and would 'redact no fewer than six volumes of Bosman's work' (Gray, 2005a:283). Abrahams immortalised their relationship in a memoir, which will be discussed later in this chapter as it forms part of the collection of reminiscences entitled *Remembering Bosman*.

This was also an important time for Bosman because his first novel, *Jacaranda in the Night*, was published as well as his collection of short stories, *Mafeking Road*, was published in 1946. Helena describes his reaction to hearing that he was to be published, saying that he was 'unable to contain his joy, [and] he threw his hat into the air and danced a jig in the kitchen' (Gray, 2005a:289). This kind of jubilation shows how excited Bosman was that his work would finally be in print, other than in journals and newspapers, for people around the world to read. With his work finally being collected, he seemed to be feeling his age – even though he was still a relatively young man. His work became more nostalgic and thoughtful. His close friend, Edgar Bernstein, wrote a piece describing Bosman, the writer, which captures him quite well. He writes:

> I think he did get a heck of a kick out of life, even when it was hurting him. He liked people, he liked good conversation – he liked to exchange ideas…. But Herman was most himself when he was writing. Writing did really fulfil him. His approach to writing was deeply serious, even when he was dealing with humorous situations. He had a sense of timing, a sense of artistry of the presentation of his work, about which he was always very careful…. Herman in his best work knew those things, and particularly what part of the story to leave out, making the whole thing a well-knit, artistic structure, which had depth, characterisation, a touch of humour, quite a lot of romanticism and a sense of just so completeness about it. (Gray, 2005a:292)

This allows us to see Bosman from both sides: the man and the writer. It shows how much he loved what he did, and loved life no matter how difficult it was. Towards the end of his life,

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there was an acceptance of what he had gone through and a need to put those experiences down on paper to preserve them.

In his chapter 'Trekking On', Gray focuses on how Bosman was seen in the last few years of his life by those who knew him. Helena and her reminiscences play a large role in piecing together the last few years of his life. This was also a period when Bosman's relationship with his brother, Pierre, finally came to an end. Gray (2005a:296) writes that the end of the relationship between the brothers was not something Helena saw in a bad light. She was happy that she could now have Bosman to herself. She and Bosman left Johannesburg in 1947 for Cape Town, and even though he did not work in journalism as he had hoped, he was given the opportunity to translate the classics into Afrikaans. This did not end profitably because the man who had offered the opportunity ended up running off with the money (Gray, 2005a: 300). The time in Cape Town seems to have been a happy one, though, and Gray (2005a:298) describes Bosman during this time as being 'in good nick'. He kept in touch with Abrahams and continued to mentor his writing and his intellectual growth. But, after a while, and after being left basically penniless, they returned to Johannesburg after 'the windy Cape no longer stirred his creative juices, despite his origins there' (Gray, 2005a:300). When they returned most of Bosman's time was spent finishing *Cold Stone Jug*, which Helena had inspired him to sit down and write. It was to be published and he knew the importance that surrounded his finishing it. The expression, whether factual or not, of that time in his life was important in bringing him closure because 'packaged and put aside, prisoner B3378 could cease having his nightmares' (Gray, 2005a:324) and put the experience behind him. He did continue to write for Sachs's publications and in 1947 in a piece called 'Writing' he expresses just how adversity, especially with regard to writing, spurred him on and particularly that 'the practising of the creative art of letters is contrary to the laws and demands of life' (Bosman, 1974:136) and that 'it is far better not to write' (Bosman, 1974:137). At this stage in his life, Bosman was reminiscing, still, about the hardships he had endured and realised that writing, and his passion for it, were perhaps to blame for many of the hardships, particularly the economic hardships.

This did not stop him from feeling almost delighted disbelief about the publication of *Mafeking Road* and he described in a letter to Roy Campbell his reaction when he found out they were not publishing his stories in the forms he wished them: 'I was unable to speak. I actually thought I was too old to care, anymore' (Gray, 2005a:305). It is strange that Bosman

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writes so often about being old when he was only, in fact, 42 years old. He had been through so much that perhaps he felt he was much older in spirit than he was in years. He had not needed to be worried about his collection because the critical responses were very favourable. Mary Morison Webster wrote in *The Sunday Times* that it was 'one of the best things to have happened in South Africa for many a day' and that 'Mr Bosman, it appears, has had to wait fifteen years before finding a publisher willing to take a chance on these stories. Let us hope that the South African public will not prove equally dilatory in according him the recognition he deserves' (Gray, 2005a:306). Leon Feldberg praised Bosman similarly in *The South African Jewish Times,* saying that 'to read this collection of his stories is to forget, for the time being, all other such complications, to yield to a highly individual spell' (Gray, 2005a:308). In 1948, Edgar Bernstein wrote that he was proud that 'literary critics are acclaiming Mr Bosman's work as enthusiastically as I was doing many years ago. Which – if you will excuse the personal "gloat" – is very pleasant indeed' (Gray, 2005a:308). The flood of praise continued for his collection, but there was also a certain amount of what Gray (2005a:309) calls 'sniping'. Bosman did not seem to be too bothered by it all, and continued to write as he always had. In order to keep track of everything that was happening for him during this time, Gray stops to 'take stock' at the end of 1949. Bosman was still writing for *Trek*, both journalistic pieces and short stories, but he had stopped writing poetry for the most part. Helena rescued a few of the poems he had discarded in the wastepaper bin and secretly kept them safe.

Gray uses his final chapter, 'A Class of His Own', as a summing up of Bosman's life—a way to tie up all the loose ends. In a clear and concise piece he describes how Bosman himself found people reacting to his life story when he told them of all the experiences he had lived through. Gray (2005a:331) writes:

> as a raucous hothead he had made one fatal mistake…and forever after because he could never reverse the situation, he had had his own life crushed out of him, so that any little pleasure discovered was a bonus to him…that he kept on with a liar like outsmarting of his stupid moral fellows; that when he was at last becoming an establishment figure and invited to an event in the Wits Great Hall, he found the post-war generation of students gauche and unsophisticated, because they had never been trained by Adversity, never had to strip down and fight for their lives; when as the accomplished writer he revealed how he loathed his earlier, ignorant teacher self; how he was killer Cain – ruthless; how he required his women to be hand-maidens, but never to carry his cursed offspring…When he actually put down on paper these details about himself nobody believed him.

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He was starting to have minor heart attacks and Gray mentions that Bosman must have known that his days were numbered (Gray, 2005a:331). He and Helena grew closer during the final year of his life and both of them started to have premonitions about life after his death. Bosman told her 'I'm a ghost; people see me as a ghost. They look through me. The only contact I have with human beings is through my writing. Through my writing I reach them and they reach me. Therefore I must write – or go mad' (Gray, 2005a:332). Helena too had a dream where Bosman had died but she could still sense his presence around her. She recalled in an interview that during this last year Bosman did nothing but write and that 'the worst thing that could happen to him then was death' (Gray, 2005a:331). And Bosman did keep writing right up to the last moments of his life. He and Helena were throwing a housewarming party, which was also partly a celebration of the publication of *Willemsdorp*. The party lasted the whole weekend and in Helena's words 'his parties were famous for brilliant and witty conversations which went on all night' (Gray, 2005a:360). Bernard Sachs and his wife were invited, despite his and Bosman's falling out. Gray (2005a:338) describes Sachs in the last few years of Bosman's life as trying to 'vampirise off Bosman's reputation' and says that 'whatever Bosman came up with [in writing], Sachs piggybacked on' (Gray, 2005a:339). It seems Bosman brushed off the fact that Sachs was trying to live off his fame vicariously. Sachs was the reason many of the guests could not leave on the Friday night after the party, because the rain had trapped his car in the mud, which then parked in most of the guests. Bosman and Helena spent Saturday braaing with some of the guests and the party was finally over, despite the heavy rains. On the Sunday, Bosman spent his day, according to Helena, drinking Coca Cola, smoking cigarettes and writing his final story, 'Homecoming'. Once he had finished, he shuffled off to the bathroom where he had a heart attack and died in silence on that Sunday afternoon (Gray, 2005a:361-362). Gray lets Bosman's final moments speak for themselves, almost as if he had been preparing for his own death in finishing his story and seeing his close friends one final time. Unlike Rosenberg, Gray does not lapse into sentimentalism and slowly leads the reader into the final moments of Bosman's life. He seems to be praising Bosman and his accomplishments and highlighting just how important writing was to him in that he needed to do it, literally up to his last breath. His last line reads: 'So was Herman Bosman's troubled life sentence complete' (Gray, 2005a:362) leaving the reader feeling that though Bosman died young, he was free of his troubles and his spirit would live on in his work.

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Remembering Bosman

Remembering Bosman is a fascinating collection of reminiscences by those who knew Bosman at many stages of his life. The pieces are written by people from many different walks of life and present to us an fascinating portrait of the man. This is, of course, not the traditional biography where the life story is told from beginning to end, but it allows us to see intimate parts of the subject that we would not have known otherwise. These pieces may be classified as portraits because they capture essential character traits that allow us to see the man behind the work, and ultimately the man behind the mask. These reminiscences are particularly important in understanding Bosman because they represent the points of view of those willing to let readers into their minds to understand the mind of Bosman. Gray (2008:3) introduces the collection and writes that it 'is what may be recovered, today, from the appropriate writerly sources' and he hopes that 'a new generation with different perspectives from his familiars meet Herman Charles Bosman, as if afresh'. This collection is important also for setting the record straight about the man Bosman was to so many, and hopefully clearing from readers' minds the sensationalism that came before.

There is not one reminiscence of Bosman that is more important than any other because each gives us a unique view of who he was, according to the writer concerned. The account of Lionel Abrahams's relationship with Bosman stands out in the collection, but before getting to this piece it is necessary to look at how he is represented by the others who remember him. The first three in the collection, Edgar Bernstein, Leon Feldberg and Lily Rabkin, colleagues of Bosman, published their recollections only five days after his death. They each capture a very personal part of a man whose death caught them all very much by surprise. Edgar Bernstein writes that 'a dark star dogged too much of his quickly squandered life' (Gray, 2008:7) but most of his recollection remains cold and detached. Bernstein's recollection reads like an obituary rather than a tribute to a close colleague. Leon Feldberg describes Bosman as being 'a close personal friend' and someone he had a deep respect for (Gray, 2008:10). The portrait he paints of Bosman is that he was 'spiritually lonely' and that 'even his happy marriage, which meant so much to him, could not overcome this inner loneliness' (Gray, 2008:10). The man we see from Feldberg's point of view is one who is deeply lonely, yet intensely passionate about his writing in that he had to 'write only what his heart and soul demanded of him' (Gray, 2008:10). The portrait shows a respect for Bosman's talent and Feldberg adds that he was deeply moved that Bosman showed respect for him too by

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dedicating *Mafeking Road* to him. Lily Rabkin presents Bosman the writer as having 'a ruthless ironic perception' (Gray, 2008:11) and adds that he was 'remote, yet friendly, superficially jovial yet with a sensitive awareness of the pain of being human'. These elements certainly came through in his writing and it was clear to her that this part of himself revealed itself in his work. Rabkin writes that 'he looked on the world without illusion, with a humorous tolerance, yet with a sympathy and sensibility which extended to the lower animals and even to the humble weed' (Gray, 2008:13). This shows that Bosman revealed himself to Rabkin in the same way he revealed himself to his readers in his short stories. In his short stories we are confronted with a writer who sees the reality of life and inserts humour in order to bring out the ironies of life.

Many of the recollections describe Bosman as the 'odd man out' (Gray, 2008:18), but also as someone who had a 'fascinating personality' (Gray, 2008:26), which is something that most people who knew him seemed to say about him. He was a loner who certainly intrigued people with his ideas about life and his often inexplicable behaviour. But, as suggested earlier, the one person who stands out in his memoir of Bosman is Lionel Abrahams. He was 'the original motor force to drive the reputation of Herman Charles Bosman through from obscurity to his becoming commonly acknowledged today as South Africa's major literary figure of the first half of the twentieth century' (Gray, 2008:120). He is responsible for collecting several volumes of Bosman's work and even translating a few of his stories that were only written in Afrikaans. His memoir remains important not only because he was such a close disciple of Bosman's but because, as the title of his memoir suggests ('A Protégé's Memoir'), he was a protégé of Bosman's and Bosman said that he might just become 'the best writer in South Africa' (Gray, 2005a:283). Bosman could recognise talent and made sure that it was nurtured.

Abrahams's portrait describes his first impressions of Bosman, which were seemingly superficial, noting his hat 'worn tipped far to one side and forward, at an angle that expressed both jauntiness and a desire for concealment' (Gray, 2008:121). His first meeting with him was in a poetry class at Damelin where Bosman was anything but confident, jaunty and debonair, but rather nervous and embarrassed. After this meeting, Abrahams wrote a story about Bosman and what he was learning from him, which was that he did not realise 'art could be taken so seriously, or life so religiously or God so earthily. Imperative behind all art there were the "eternal verities", there were venerable traditions and secrets of art, and yet all

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was essentially only known in the heart' (Gray, 2008:127). Abrahams made a conscious decision to write his memoir of his mentor in order to express his point of view to those who want to know more about Bosman. His main aim, which is close to what most biographers strive to do, is to record the true image of the man, as he knew him, because 'if I were not to attempt this record my silence would condone what I know to be a mythology full of distortions…arising from attitudes that range between antinomian sensationalism and politically correct sentimentality' (Gray, 2008:128). He thus sees his memoir as a corrective to what he sees as distorting and inaccurate depictions of Bosman and his life. Abrahams takes pains not to misquote Bosman or attribute anything to him that would not be truthful. He uses italics when expressing ideas that were presented to him by Bosman during his teachings. From these we get a good sense of who Bosman was to Abrahams and the importance of what he taught him about literature. The lessons reflect how Bosman saw the world and how he approached his own writing, which is something he felt was important to pass on to his protégé.

Many of the lessons he taught Abrahams were to help him become a writer in a way that was close to how Bosman saw himself. The first of these lessons that Abrahams reproduces is to 'trust the heart, not the head' (Gray, 2008:128) which we know is how Bosman lived his life. The lessons also reflect how Bosman had grown, and not necessarily how he was when he was a young writer. A good example is the lesson he gives that 'the artist has to have humility in respect of his art, his creative forebears and life' (Gray, 2008:128). This would have been an important lesson to teach Abrahams in order for him to avoid the mistakes Bosman made early in his career. Many of the lessons also reflect the way in which Bosman wrote his short stories in order to have them remain as true to life as possible. These are: 'Observe the life around you. Draw your inspiration from what you see, what you know. Make Johannesburg your own. There is so much that is unexplored, so much to be told', 'Write about what you know. Your material is humanity, reality, life', 'Truth to life is the only truth that matters' and 'it's not what you say, it's how you say it' (Gray, 2008:128-129). All of these can be understood in relation to how he wrote his short stories because of how true to life's experiences they are. Yes, although it is important to note that they also contain conspicuously non-realistic elements. It is more complex than this. Another important lesson, which relates closely to how Bosman dealt with his experiences in prison, is not to 'write about intense experiences you are over-close to. That way you run the risk of falsely dramatizing the material or being maudlin. Wait ten years. Sooner than that you are liable to

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be emotionally heavy-handed' (Gray, 2008:129). Bosman offered lessons on storytelling, poetry, humour and technique in writing in order to shape Abrahams into a writer who could carry his torch once he was no longer alive. His main lesson with regard to technique is that 'there is no easy way, no bag of tricks of the trade. You have to learn what suits you, what works for you, the hard way, by writing and writing and making all the mistakes' (Gray, 2008:132).

Abrahams describes Bosman as seeing the Enlightenment as abhorrent and says that he believed rather in 'the authority of the heart, the primacy of feelings, the wisdom and power of instincts, and the supremely profound interest in human nature' (Gray, 2008:135), all of which are present in his writing and in the way he lived his life. Abrahams too cites his sources for much of his insight into Bosman's writing. The stories, poems, essays and plays gave Abrahams further understanding of a man he knew in life and who was someone who could see things that perhaps many others could not. He says these works (especially *Jacaranda in the Night* and *Mara*) gave him a sense of Bosman in a freer and earthier sense (Gray, 2008:135). Through his writing he could pick up on Bosman's character and he would also speak to him constantly about where to find inspiration and said that 'you don't write for publication or fame or money or to please an audience or to propagate a message. You write because you feel you must, you have to serve your muse' (Gray, 2008:137). Words like these encapsulate how Bosman lived his life and followed what he believed his destiny to be. But he did not speak to Abrahams about himself. He preferred to keep much of his personal life to himself, unless it was relevant in relation to his writing and teaching Abrahams about writing. What Abrahams did pick up on was that the writing Bosman did in his early days, as Herman Malan, had a 'startlingly different outlook from that of the Mr Bosman who was at pains to impress upon me that a due humility was inseparable from any genuine artistic endeavour' (Gray, 2008:141). He noticed how Bosman's outlook had changed and that the man he was learning from had been vastly different from the man he was at the beginning of his career.

Abrahams did get a glimpse into Bosman's home life when he was invited to a party at his house. He describes Bosman at the party as someone who

> [s]eemed purely, if exuberantly, at play, greeting each new observation, fancy or wisecrack in the interchange with excitement and huge applausive laughter, often topping the last remark with a further twist of inspired elaboration. He seemed always to be urging the other players on to lift the fantastic joke still higher, but his own

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> imagination was the mainspring of the interplay, and thus, with no effort, no such intention on his part, he remained its centre. (Gray, 2008:145)

He enjoyed humour and being the centre of conversation and activity. Helena seemed almost to fade into the background and let him be in situations like this. Many people said that Helena changed him, but Abrahams saw their relationship as 'warm and sympathetic' (Gray, 2008:156) and believed that she spurred him on creatively. Helena mentioned to Abrahams that Ella detached him from reality rather than bringing him to a place where he could accept his own reality. The last party Abrahams would attend would be the party after which Bosman would have the heart attack that would kill him. Abrahams writes that he felt protective towards Bosman, especially at that party, perhaps because of his 'extraordinary sensitivity and those qualities of his uniqueness, his oblique angle to the plane of commonly conceived reality, which exposed him in a lonely separateness where he might all too readily be misunderstood or injured' (Gray, 2008:161). This is perhaps why he felt impelled to collect his work and preserve it for future generations. He was shown something special in Bosman and was given the chance to pass it on to writers after him in order to carry on his tradition. His memoir, brief as it is, remains one of the most accurate and reliable recollections of the man who eluded many in their attempts to capture his character.

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CONCLUSION

In this study, I have attempted to show how each biography, though it may share some 'family resemblances' with the others, should be seen as a separate entity. Each one approaches Bosman's life in a different way with each bringing a unique point of view to the life of a man the biographers or writers of memoirs either knew personally or felt they had a responsibility towards.

Bernard Sachs's biography, *Herman Bosman As I Knew Him*, paints, as I have shown, a vague and often envious portrait of Bosman and many who have come after him have suggested that he was intimidated by and felt inferior to Bosman. It has its place because it does represent a point of view of who Bosman was to Sachs, which in its own way is important. Its importance does not lie in its factual accuracy but rather in that it gives the other biographers something to work against. Many of the other biographers have not refuted the facts of Bosman's life, as Sachs presents them, but rather Sachs's interpretation of them. The biographies that follow mention Sachs's part in Bosman's life, as an editor and publisher of his stories and essays in his publications, but other than that Sachs is seen as someone riding on Bosman's coat tails. As a portrait, it does fulfil its obligation, which is to 'express the personality and suggest the life *behind* the surface exhibited to the world' (Edel, 1984:177, emphasis in the original). But he does this in a way that is not truthful to the person Bosman was and it shows that he did not truly see the person Bosman was behind the mask he wore.

Blignaut's biography, *My Friend Herman Charles Bosman*, is a more successful portrait than Sachs's attempt. He presents his friend in a way that shows his understanding of who Bosman was and he does it with sensitivity. His biography is important because it brings out the earlier, wilder side of Bosman, the side that many of the later biographers did not see first-hand. The later biographies focus on how he changed from this earlier, wilder, unpredictable person to the humble, more rational and calmer writer he was later in life. Unfortunately, it is difficult for Blignaut to remain disinterested because he and Bosman were so close. He brings a great deal of emotion to his interpretation and we do get to see how close the partnership between them was. They shared intimate thoughts and experiences and Blignaut was allowed to see a very personal side of Bosman that very few people were given the opportunity to see. His portrait remains completely subjective, despite the addition of facts to the work. His

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account is far more personal that Sachs's, and we could argue that the person we get to know by the end is not solely Bosman but an amalgamation of Bosman and Blignaut. But Blignaut, like Gray and Abrahams, felt he needed to set the record straight after the biography by Valerie Rosenberg.

Rosenberg is known as being the first to attempt a full biography of Bosman and for laying the groundwork for the biographers who were to follow her. Her biography takes the form of a narrative portrait, which is meant to be interpretive and analytic, but her interpretations are taken to wild and blatantly unsubstantiated lengths. Most memorably, her assertion that Bosman's origins were incestuous is used as a perfectly acceptable interpretation of his behaviour in later life. Biographers should never let readers merely accept interpretations based on their word alone, and this is what Rosenberg seemed to expect from her readers. Gray's biography takes the same information but gives rational explanations for Bosman's desperate need to not have children and does not jump to far-fetched conclusions. Gray relies not only on one person's view, as Rosenberg tends to, but rather collects all the information possible and presents it to the readers, interpreting it as far as he can. The rest is left up to the readers. Rosenberg's biography, though it presents all the information that was gatherable about Bosman, fails to give us an impression of the man that is sensitive and illuminating. She betrays herself by relying on rumour. Subsequent biographers have had to provide a more convincing understanding of Bosman and his tumultuous life.

Gray's biography is the most complete and the only one that attempts objectivity, even though full objectivity is not possible. He attempts to give all points of view, while adding his own, and often allowing the readers to come to their own conclusions. Gray wrote in his article for the *English Academy Review* that his biography was especially necessary because he had in his hands 'the evidence of how meticulous a workman he himself had always been, cautious down to the last, fine detail: a writer not deserving of such cavalier treatment' (Gray, 2005b:123). It is the job of the biographer 'to chart illuminating connections between past and present, life and work - that is the biographer's aesthetic, that is his or her recreative process' (Holroyd, 2002:19), and it is what Gray manages to do. He makes sure that he incorporates many examples of Bosman's work that illuminate his state of mind when he was writing, and adds the opinions of those close to him at the time in order to try to understand Bosman's way of thinking and presenting himself to the world. *Life Sentence* is a very good example of a documentary biography because he attempts to understand the important

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experiences and aspects of Bosman's life, yet accepts that there is much that we will never know. He tries to put the pieces together and present all the information about Bosman's life to the readers. Though there is a large amount of information to take in, Gray is careful to be sensitive always to his subject and interrupts large sections of dates and information with reminiscences from those who knew Bosman, bringing in a more personal element. Bosman does not become what Edel warns about, a 'frozen statue' (Edel, 1984: 177), because recollections from those who knew him bring warmth to the descriptions, and Gray's own sensitivity to his subject prevents the subject from becoming lifeless. Gray knew his responsibility to Bosman and takes pains to refute both Sachs's and Rosenberg's attempts at presenting his life.

The warmest and most sensitive portrait of Bosman is the memoir written by Lionel Abrahams. He presents to readers a side of Bosman that comes from a very personal recollection of an intimate relationship between him and his subject. He succeeds in persuading readers to see how much Bosman had changed from the man presented by Blignaut to the man he was at the end of his life. In this way, Blignaut's and Abrahams's recollections present Bosman at two opposite ends of his life. Abrahams felt a closeness to him and a deep responsibility to present his life in a way that could bring future generations closer to the man he came to know. It is really only Blignaut (to a certain degree), Gray and Abrahams who manage to bring out Edel's 'figure under the carpet' and present a knowable subject to readers, as far as that is possible.

The Bosman biographies reveal the usefulness of theories about life writing, but also their limitations. How each biographer conformed to a specific narrative style is important in understanding how they wanted to present the life of Bosman. Leon Edel suggests four principles for biographers to follow in order to present a good and reliable biography, the first being to 'learn to understand man's ways of dreaming, thinking and using his fancy' (Edel, 1984:28), the second to not be 'taken over by their subjects, or [falling] in love with them' (Edel, 1984:29), the third is to 'analyse [their] materials to discover certain keys to the deeper truths of [their] subject' (Edel, 1984:29), and the fourth that 'every life takes its own form and a biographer must find the ideal and unique literary form that will express it' (Edel, 1984:30). These principles are revealed in the Bosman biographies in that each biographer attempts to understand Bosman's way of dreaming and thinking. But as Monk (2007:542) says, this can never be fully understood because 'any attempt to represent the life *of another*

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through factual means must necessarily fail, since facts are external and life is essentially internal. As the inner life of another is closed to us, whenever we attempt to describe the *life* of another, we are forced into writing fiction' (emphasis in the original). This understanding of the subject then relies on the necessity of a point of view, which is 'required of a good biographer [because it] is a *way of understanding* the facts [and] *a way of seeing* the biographical subject' (Monk, 2007:540, emphasis in the original). As we have seen, Sachs's point of view remains unreliable because his biography is coloured by feelings of inferiority and bitterness towards his subject. Blignaut's point of view is also problematic in that much of what he presents as fact cannot be substantiated. So the picture we get of Bosman is too subjective and cannot be adequately linked to empirical truth (as far as it can be reached). Rosenberg's point of view is particularly troublesome and unreliable because she bases it on rumour and the unsubstantiated opinions of others. Without a reliable point of view her biography loses some of its weight and value as a presentation of the life of Bosman. Gray's point of view is reliable in part because he, at many points in the biography, admits that there is a great deal of Bosman's life that cannot be pieced together or understood. He relies on the facts he is given and interprets them in a clear and concise manner, using the accounts of those closest to Bosman to substantiate them. Abrahams, similarly, bases his point of view on words actually spoken by Bosman, and ideas and thoughts given directly to him from Bosman. For readers, knowing Bosman the writer brings us closer to understanding Bosman the man because what he wrote came from his heart.

Edel's second and third principles link to point of view too in his argument that one should not be overtaken by the subject, or having one's admiration for them colour what one presents in the biography; also, analysing the materials one is given has implications for point of view. Lytton Strachey (2012) believed that 'it is not [the biographer's] business to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case, as he understands them'. Therefore if one is coloured by admiration one might not want to include elements that might paint the subject in a bad light. None of the biographies does this in that they include both the good and the bad about Bosman in order to present him as a complete man. In analysing the documents and the available material, all the biographies attempt this and are successful in enabling the reader to make sense of what they are presenting. Monk (2007:539) writes that point of view is necessary in analysis because it 'enables the biographer to present to the reader not just a *selection* of facts and documentation but also an *interpretation*…one that will

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enable the reader to make sense of the material and thus to understand the biographical subject' (emphasis in the original).

Is it possible then for a biography to present a knowable person to readers, when perhaps the only person who can know the subject intimately is the subject himself? The answer is a simple, and yet complicated, yes. Monk (2007:542) maintains that biography 'is doomed to remain forever unsuccessful in its endeavor to capture the "rainbow-like intangibility" of personality through the "granite-like solidity" of external facts'. Despite this, the subject is knowable as far as he or she allows himself or himself to be known, and though Bosman remains an enigma to many, he can be found in his writing and in the marks he left on the lives of those closest to him.

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