



The small-town novel in South African English literature (1910–1948)

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of DLitt at the University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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15 April 2009



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Abstract

This study aims to examine a group of South African novels that have received very little critical attention. Part of the problem is that these works have never been grouped or assessed as belonging to a sub-genre, the South African small-town novel. Although individual texts have been treated to cursory commentary, the joint impact and significance of these works with regard to South African literature in English have never been properly assessed. It is suggested that clustering the works together as small-town novels of the Union period raises important issues and provides valuable insights on a significant period in South African (literary) history. The study's theoretical orientation is based on a model that J.A Kearney proposes in his book *Representing Dissension: Riot, Rebellion and Resistance in the South African English Novel* (2003). Kearney (xv) suggests that an important criterion in the study of historical novels is the degree to which the writers' recreation of particular events/historical phases leads them to an awareness of the gap between actual and ideal society.

In the introductory chapter a comparative analysis of South African town and farm cultures and their respective representations in literature are used to throw some light on possible reasons for the critical neglect of the novels. A brief historical background is provided with regard to the momentous Union period (1910–1948) which forms the setting for all the novels which are discussed in chronological order in the successive chapters: Stephen Black's *The Dorp* (1920), C. Louis Leipoldt's *The Mask*, written in the 1930s though only published posthumously as part of his *Valley Trilogy* in 2001, Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) and Herman Charles Bosman's *Willemsdorp*, written in the early 1950s but also only published posthumously in 1977 in a censored version and in 1998 in full. The authors uniformly use the small-town milieu effectively as a microcosmic setting from which to comment on the larger social and political issues affecting South Africa during this period. They provide a socio-political critique on a period in South African history marked by politically volatility and reactionary ideological developments.

Black's *The Dorp* satirizes social intrigue in a fictional town ironically yet appropriately called Unionstad. It reveals the ill effects of historical events such as

the Boer War and the 1914 Rebellion (specifically the animosity that it created between English and Afrikaner townsmen) but suggests the possibility of reconciliation. In *The Mask*, Leipoldt reveals a bleak picture of South African town life that is emblematic of the collapse of Leipoldt's utopian ideal for an egalitarian South African society. In *Too Late the Phalarope*, Paton dramatizes the devastating personal effects of racially discriminatory laws, which criminalized sexual congress between whites and blacks. Paton's essentially Christian view exposes hypocrisy and moral corruption in the attitudes of racist townsmen (and by implication the national architects of institutionalized racism), but offers the possibility of restoration by means of personal acts of forgiveness. In *Willemisdorp* Bosman offers probably the most sophisticated exposé of small-town culture as exemplary of everything that was wrong in the society from which apartheid was emerging. The concluding chapter invokes Bawarshi's notions on the value of genre classification and briefly focuses on post-1948 novels, confirming the notion that a continuum exists within the small-town novel sub-genre of the South African novel.

town; dorp; small-town novel; *dorpsroman*; *plaasroman*; sub-genre; liberal-realism; Union period; Immorality Act; satire; allegory

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For the manner of compiling such a history, I particularly advise that the manner and provision of it be not drawn from histories and commentaries alone, but that the principal books written in each century, or perhaps in shorter periods, proceeding in regular order from the earliest ages, be themselves taken into consideration, that so (I do not say by a complete perusal, for that would be an endless labour, but) by tasting them here and there and observing their argument, style and method, the Literary Spirit [genius literarius] of each age may be charmed as it were from the dead.
(Bacon, Francis. 1623. *The Advancement of Learning* in Payne, M. 2005. *The Greenblatt Reader* (42))

Chapter 1: Introduction

There are a number of prose works that form part of the larger body of early South African English literature (the Union period, 1910–1948) that have received very little critical attention. These works are set in the geographically specific location of the South African dorp (village or small town). The existence of this body of works came to the attention of the public via the publication of Herman Charles Bosman's novels, *Jacaranda in the Night* and *Willemisdorp* (the latter is a reworking of the former) in 1998 and 2000 respectively. *Willemisdorp* had been subjected to censorship at the time of first publication because of the writer's response to the mechanisms of prevailing racist ideology such as the Immorality Act, which resulted in police sadism towards people participating in interracial sexual acts.

In these novels there is evidence that Bosman availed himself of the opportunity to use the dorp/small-town milieu to deliver satirical commentary on critical aspects of South African society at large. In other words, he used the small town as a microcosm of South African society as a whole. It appears that Bosman regarded South African town culture as an accurate barometer of broader cultural and political trends. He passed up no opportunity to lampoon the snobbery, pretence, hypocrisy, and racial injustice that were symptomatic of the ideologically repressed national mindset. In *Jacaranda in the Night* and *Willemisdorp* he demonstrates how the socio-political ills associated with the post-Boer War rise of Afrikaner nationalism are

conveniently contained in a single space (the small town /dorp milieu) where they can be dissected at will.

At around the time when Bosman was preparing to write his town novels, *Jacaranda in the Night* and *Willemisdorp*, he wrote an article titled “Dorps of South Africa” for the July 1945 edition of the Johannesburg monthly journal *The South African Opinion*. This insightful exposé of Union period South African dorp culture stems from his close acquaintance with Pietersburg, a small but significant town in the former Transvaal Province of the Union of South Africa, where he worked as a journalist from March to October 1943. Earlier, during his sojourn in the Marico region of the Western Transvaal, where he briefly worked as a schoolteacher (January to June 1926), he frequented small towns in the region.¹ Bosman’s keen eye for and deep interest in the people who inhabited these towns provided material that he could draw upon in later years when he constructed the fictional towns of Kalvyn (in *Jacaranda in the Night*) and Willemisdorp (in *Willemisdorp*). Although the alternative names that Bosman used for Pietersburg foregrounds the allegorical-referential aspect of his novelistic project, he illuminates the South African small-town milieu of the Union era in a historically accurate and realistic manner.

Bosman’s acute analysis of South African *platteland* society in his novels and short stories prompted Belinda Bozzoli, in her introduction to the volume of essays “*Town and Countryside in the Transvaal: Capitalist Penetration and Popular Response*”, to comment: “Herman Charles Bosman’s wry portrayals of small-town rural culture make academic ruminations on the subject appear ponderous” (1983: 36). This is an interesting observation given that Bozzoli’s was a scientific-demographic study that (as she states) sought “to understand what is unique and what is not unique about small communities; to compare and contrast the class experience of the largest classes with those of the smallest” (35).

Bosman’s ideas about South African town life, candidly expounded in the following excerpt from “Dorps of South Africa”, are worth quoting at length, as they provide a useful starting point for a study of the representation of town culture in the small-town novel:

Dotted over the countryside in no semblance of order, and linked to the outside world, apparently at haphazard, by railway-line and/or road, are a profusion of South African dorps, each with its own strangeness and vagaries, and yet all conforming to the underlying features of a single pattern.

They are fundamentally alike, these country dorps. Small town or village, when you know one you know them all. Each has emerged from the struggling status of a rather unwieldy kind of hamlet.

The surface characteristic of a dorp is its placidity. The inhabitants seem to pass their lives in an atmosphere of tranquillity that verges, almost, on somnolence. People have got a lot of time in which to talk. A lot of time to stand and stare. And you don't need W. H. Davies's authority for entertaining the belief that this is not altogether a bad thing.

As we all know, the inhabitants of a dorp find a lot of time for indulging in the more virulent type of scandalmongering. From one point of view, this practice is unpardonable – observing the activities and mode of life of other people, and indulging in malicious gossip about them.

But there is another side of this question. What seems satanical, a low form of evil, something brainlessly unregenerate, springs from the warmer human feelings, from the taking of a sincere interest in life and in people.

And a dorp is unquestionably the best place in which to study life at close hand. Because it is all in slow motion, you don't miss the significant details. And you get a complete picture, circumscribed by that frame which cuts off the village from the rest of the world.

In a big city, it is the city itself that persists. In its monuments and its archives and its traditions it is the city that endures. In a dorp it is life that goes on [....]

And there is this other characteristic of life in a dorp. As I have said, if you know one dorp you know them all. That quiet, that other world peace and tranquility, is a very deceptive thing. All that restfulness is only on the surface. Underneath, there is ferment. When something happens by which you are drawn into those strong undercurrents that constitute the real life of a dorp, and that make a macabre mockery of its superficial air of repose, then you come to a stark realisation – possibly for the first time – of what tangled and gaudy and tempestuous material this substance consists that people call life (in Bosman, H.C. 2002 (Anniversary Edition). *A Cask of Jerepigo*: 85–86).

A close reading of *Jacaranda in the Night* and *Willemisdorp* confirms that Bosman's ideas about dorp/small-town culture in South Africa (cited in *The South African Opinion*) must indeed have been the creative impulse for his novels. Bosman's satirical novel, *Willemisdorp*, was selected to conclude this study not only for the sake of chronology (in terms of historical setting and publication date), but also because it climactically represents the severest, most artistically achieved, critique of the South African dorp microcosm that was produced during the time. The other selected novels are, however, no less interesting. They are *The Dorp* (1920) by Bosman's

mentor and fellow journalist, Stephen Black, which is set in a fictional town called Unionstad; *The Mask* (written between 1929 and 1930 and posthumously published in 2001) by C. Louis Leipoldt, set in a fictional town, the Village, that is recognizable as the writer's birthplace, Clanwilliam, and *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953), by Alan Paton, set in the imaginary town, Venterspan, in the Transvaal Province of the Union of South Africa. The grouping together of these novels on the grounds of their sharing creative insights about the allegorical possibilities of the small-town microcosm, is rendered more compelling by the diverse writerly backgrounds and stylistic orientations from which the subject material is negotiated.

It appears that the critical neglect that the novels selected for this study (together with other texts belonging to what I have named the small-town novel sub-genre² of South African literature) have suffered, may be linked to matters of classification. Novels in which the town milieu is utilized in the manner described above have not been grouped together and accorded the same critical recognition as those belonging to the *plaasroman* sub-genre of the South African novel. It is curious that the sub-genre classifications *dorpsroman*, “town novel”, “small-town novel” or “dorp novel” have virtually no history of usage in South African literary criticism, while the category *plaasroman*, which, admittedly, represents a more voluminous (though, apparently, no more significant) body of literature, is widely used. It appears that a literary text recognized as belonging to a certain genre or sub-genre category is already assured of the critical interest that its predecessors and co-texts within this grouping have attracted. Moreover, it appears that generic classifications may also serve as models of writing for authors. The intricacies of genre theory (into which this study does not venture) notwithstanding, it seems that there is after all something in a name!

The South African farm milieu has seized the imagination of many writers. Historically it was the inspiration for a large body of literature. In this respect Andries Wessels (2006: 44) remarks: “The genre of the Afrikaans *plaasroman* encompasses both the pastoral romanticism of C.M. van den Heever’s *Somer* (1935) and the modernistic complexities of Etienne Leroux’s *Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins* (1964)”. The combination of a voluminous output of *plaasromans* and an equally voluminous body of critical attention appears to have marginalized the town and its stories – of which there are surprisingly many. It is, therefore, necessary to take a

closer look at possible reasons for the lack of research carried out on the latter, seemingly significant, body of South African literature. A comparative analysis of farm and town cultures in South Africa may provide some answers.

Since the opening up of the interior of South Africa by colonial settlers, nomadic cattle farmers (*trekboere*) and dissident Dutch settlers (*Voortrekkers*) (who wished to move away from British rule in the Cape Colony), farms and towns existed alongside each other. The typical frontier village consisted of no more than makeshift dwellings, a trading store, a place of worship, a boarding house and a bar. From the early beginnings of the South African frontier era, however, the farm seems to have occupied “higher ground” in the communal consciousness. Farm ownership represents the spoils of the frontier tradition. The farm is regarded as *bloedgrond* (blood soil) in more than one respect. The first settlers braved natural perils and subjugated indigenous tribes to win their own tracts of land. Ownership was carried over to natural heirs (preferably sons) from generation to generation.

To farm on *erfgrond* (inherited land) confers a special sort of social status on a farm owner. Headstones in family graveyards on South African farms bear testimony to farm ownership through uninterrupted bloodlines. Moreover, tilling the soil has been regarded as obedience to God’s instruction to Adam, recorded in the Book of Genesis: “Then to Adam he said, ‘Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying ‘You shall not eat of it’: cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life’(Genesis 3:17).” Chapter 3 pays detailed attention to the notion that the “Boers” (a term which includes not only the Afrikaner farming community, but also the broader concept of the nation) drew an analogy between their own history and the history of the tribes of Israel who, according to the Bible, followed God’s command to subjugate so-called heathen nations to win their “promised land”. In the beginning land ownership in South Africa was not excluded from non-white groups. For instance, when slavery was abolished in 1834, freed slaves together with some sections of the black and coloured population proceeded to make a living out of sharecropping and tenant farming (Giliomee, H. & Mbenga, B.: 93). Shortage of land eventually led to the disenfranchisement of these peoples – a process that was

institutionalized by laws such as the 1913 Land Act, which excluded blacks and coloureds from land ownership in South Africa (233).

Historically, the South African dorp/village/small town hovered on the periphery of the farmlands like an outsider. The function of the dorp was to service and support the farming community through the provision of the necessary infrastructure such as the railway station (the gateway to the markets), the co-operative store (*handelshuis*) and the police service. The railway track, incidentally, manifested as a physical class division within the town – the “right” and “wrong” side of the track respectively refer to the most affluent and the poorer residential areas of the town. Before 1994 another division existed: the “location” area on the outskirts of almost every South African town was the most obvious symbol of racial segregation (which had existed informally since early colonial days, and which in time became more entrenched in formally legislated South African society). “The location” (as it was called), where the black and coloured population resided, was not only removed from the town proper, but also from the poor white areas on the “wrong side” of the railway track.

The dorp was the social, administrative, and religious centre of a rural community if only by virtue of centrality. If farmers looked down on the dorp and *dorpnaars* (town-dwellers), the former availed themselves of the opportunities that the town offered to socialize at political meetings in the town hall, at *Nagmaal* (Holy Communion: the exceptionally wide streets in front of Dutch Reformed church buildings were specifically designed to allow ox wagons to make a full turn) or at the local watering hole. As mentioned, the dorp had a social caste system – as anyone who has lived in a South African small town will testify. Professional townsmen such as the physician, the school headmaster, the magistrate, the pharmacist, and the insurance broker were able to acquire property in the *bo-dorp* (upper town) while the *onderdorp* (on the “wrong” side of the railway track) housed a motley collection of artisans, social outcasts, and unemployed whites. Still lower on the rungs of the social ladder were the black and coloured workers and their families, who were legally excluded from owning property in the town. They resided, as indicated, in the location area – well removed from the town proper.

Towards the end of the Boer War (1899–1902), the British High Commissioner Sir Alfred (later Lord) Milner implemented a “scorched earth” campaign in order to break the backbone of the Boer resistance. The plight of women and children, who were driven from burnt-out farmsteads and imprisoned in British concentration camps, touched the hearts and the imagination of many. For example, Thomas Pakenham, author of the comprehensive history *The Boer War* (1979), quotes the emotional response of a British officer, Lieutenant Phillipps:

The worst moment is when you first come to the house. The people thought we had called for refreshments, and one of the women went to get milk. Then we had to tell them that we had to burn the place down.

[....] We rode away and left them, a forlorn little group, standing among their household goods – beds, furniture, and gimcracks strewn about the veldt; the crackling of fire in their ears, and smoke and flames streaming overhead (440).

The reality that Milner’s campaign wreaked equal measures of destruction on South African farms and towns appears either not to be commonly known or not to evoke the same degree of poignancy. Few historical documents (including Pakenham’s book) mention that marauding British troops sacked buildings and churches in towns and that townswomen and children also were captured and imprisoned in concentration camps. In a centenary publication of the Free State town Frankfort, J. van der Merwe (1973: 27) reports on the exploits of General Bruce Hamilton’s 21st brigade ³: “This general’s tactics consisted of setting fire to the town, driving out the women and children and forbidding the railways to carry supplies to them”. He goes on to quote General Hamilton’s report published on 1 November 1900 in *The Times History*: “We destroy every farm homestead, remove the cattle, burn every livelihood on the farms, *clean out the dorp of the district and partially burn it down*” (27; my emphasis). Accompanying photographs bear witness to the scorched remains of the town of Frankfort and the Dutch Reformed church of which only two walls and a bell tower (which, according to the caption, was used by British soldiers for target practice) were left standing. After the soldiers’ departure the women and children attempted to re-settle the town. However, the British troops returned in May 1901 to capture and transport them to the concentration camp at Heilbron.

In South African communal history, demographic shifts as a result of the Boer War (1899–1902) as well as the effects of economic catastrophes such as the depression (1930) were immediately evident in the social profile of the dorp. For example, poor-

whites and blacks that had lost their jobs as tenant farmers moved to the towns in the hope of finding employment. Rising Afrikaner nationalism and associated ideo-political oppression (a key theme in the novels of this study) also became a significant feature of small-town/dorp culture. In the village bar, after church, at school board meetings, at the barber shop or at the *handelshuis*, small groups of men engaged in the sort of political banter that had the potential to shape the political future of the country. Therefore, in addition to reflecting (more accurately than the farm milieu) a cross-section of the demography of the country, small-town society acts as a social barometer in the way that it mirrors the political changes and economic pressures of the wider national picture.

It appears that the small-town locale is more than a co-ordinate on a map. In this regard Alan Paton's biographer, Peter Alexander's description (1995: 2) of Paton's hometown, Pietermaritzburg, is interesting. He says, "The very map of the town is a palimpsest of dispossession" and describes the town layout as follows:

A spacious grid of streets was laid out and named by the Trekkers: Pietermaritzstraat, Bergstraat, Kerkstraat, Boomstraat, Loopstraat, and so on. This central grid, about eight blocks by eight, remains the heart of Pietermaritzburg today. But around it now run streets with names that tell of a second displacement, this time of Boer by Briton: Victoria Road, Prince Alfred Street, Pine Street, Bulwer Street; and beyond them again are whole new suburbs with names redolent of Britain: Scottsville, Wembley, Athlone, Montrose. For in 1843 the Boers, who had thrust aside the Zulus only a few years before, were themselves displaced by the British annexation of Natal, and most of them set off again bitterly, northwards into the Transvaal (2).

Similar street names in various South African towns confirm a common history. Almost every small town boasts a Kerkstraat from where the majestic spire of the Dutch Reformed church presides watchfully over the community. Alexander illustrates that a map of the iconic South African dorp, whilst bringing into focus its practical architecture and layout, throws into relief all its mythical layers and dimensions.

Alexander's observations are pertinent to the South African town as a fictional locale. What I have named the small-town novel sub-genre of the South African novel, is less concerned with the dorp/small-town as an incidental geographical setting for fictional plot action, than with the town as an ideo-mythological space redolent with allegorical

significance. Moreover, the creative use of the microcosmic societal traits of the small-town milieu by South African writers such as Stephen Black, C. Louis Leipoldt, Alan Paton, Herman Charles Bosman, Mikro, P. G. du Plessis, Michiel Heyns, Zakes Mda, Troy Blacklaws, George Weideman, Ingrid Winterbach and Jan van Tonder (to name a few), suggests a continuity within the South African social-realist literary tradition (a discussion of this aspect follows in Chapter 6). Critical acknowledgement of the creative possibilities that these novels open up within the tradition of the novel may render fresh insights regarding the literary representation of South African society. It may also fill gaps and restore imbalances in the South African literary historiographical and critical tradition.

With respect to the representation in literature of the rural localities of farm and town, the *plaasroman* (farm novel) sub-genre of the novel is a firmly established and well-researched corpus in South African literature. It has been (and remains) fertile fictional terrain for commentary on various aspects of a key segment of the population – the farming community. This genre has developed, as mentioned, through different phases from the romanticism of Afrikaans writers such as Jochem van Bruggen, C. M. van den Heever and Jan van Melle to the satirical, subversive works of the *Sestigers* (writers of the sixties) such as Etienne Leroux. The traditional *plaasroman* in Afrikaans, although realistic in its evocation of the farming culture and landscape, firmly entrenched prevailing political ideology and frontier mythology. The hegemonic tenets of this literary tradition remained unchallenged until the appearance of the *Sestigers*, who were at pains to debunk received notions of the farm represented in literature.

Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* is widely recognized as the progenitor of the English *plaasroman* in South African literature. It is not surprising that the views of Schreiner and her English-speaking contemporaries reflect notions about the farm milieu, which are strikingly different from those of contemporaneous Afrikaans writers. It appears that, up until the 1960s, the English *plaasroman* was a response to and a critique of the ideological underpinnings of the Afrikaans *plaasroman*. The possible reasons for this phenomenon, which is marked by disparate

developmental histories and different literary styles (e.g. romanticism versus realism) need to be probed.

Early Afrikaans literary forms were strongly associated with a cultural politics, characterized by an opposition to British imperialism. In other words, the South African Afrikaner community sought to establish a canon of Afrikaans literature from which, as Ezekiel Mphahlele (1962: 73) comments, “an Afrikaner historical consciousness could be interpellated” – a historical consciousness that, in the eyes of the world, came to be spurned as a theory of separateness. The traditional Afrikaans *plaasroman* was a suitable vehicle for ensconcing Afrikaner nationalist sentiments through its strengthening and validation of the ideological iconography of Afrikaner frontier mythology. In this regard, the character, Judge Lucius, in Etienne van Heerden’s farm novel *Toorberg* (translated into English under the title *Ancestral Voices* 1986: 172–173)), proclaims: “My birthright ... gives me a right to this soil, [...] even if the title-deed states that it belongs to you. I should have that right even if the farm belonged to the devil himself. By virtue of my birth, I have the right of way here [...].”

In an article titled “Die Afrikaanse plaasroman as ideologiese refleksie van die politieke en sosiale werklikheid in Suid-Afrika” (The *plaasroman* as ideological reflection of political and social realities in South Africa), Hennie van Coller lists some of the hallmarks of the traditional Afrikaans *plaasroman*:

A patriarchal society where not only the father figure dominates but also associated patriarchal values such as traditions and the traditional; the transient nature of man’s existence on earth and his co-existence with and dependence on nature and its cycles; the motif of heredity and lineage symbolized by graves, family portraits, heirlooms, farmhouses and plantations; women as idealized mother figures and frontierswomen on the one hand and serving Marthas and procreators on the other (1995: 24; own translation).

With regard to the mythically inspired “higher” status of the farm versus the dorp – a town *erf* does not compare to *erfgrond* – Ampie Coetzee (2000: 96) proposes that this notion was well represented in the early Afrikaans *plaasroman*. In these novels the town is represented as a mere infrastructural service centre to support the district’s farms – “a dorp vir ’n boeregemeenskap” (a dorp for a farming community, according to a quotation from Wilma Stockenström’s novel *Uitdraai* 1967: 8).

In the context of *Uitdraai*, this quotation from Stockenström's novel is ironic and should not be interpreted as a confirmation of romanticized notions of the farm and its inhabitants. Stockenström's novel is actually one of the severest critiques of South African *platteland* society (farm and dorp culture both come under fire). She joins a small group of Afrikaans writers who turned the *plaasroman* genre of the Afrikaans literary canon around and utilized it as a vehicle for protest and critique of the socio-political ills of the apartheid era. Some notable examples are *Kroniek van Perdepoort* (1975) by Anna M. Louw, *Toorberg* (1986) and *Die Stoetmeester* (1993) by Etienne van Heerden, *Hierdie Lewe* (1994) by Karel Schoeman and *Agaat* (2004) by Marlene van Niekerk.

As mentioned, a critical view of the farm as the cradle of ideologically inspired mythmaking was expressed much earlier in the South African English literary canon. J. M. Coetzee (1986: 1) regards Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* and Pauline Smith's *The Beadle* as “a valuable foil to the *plaasroman*, throwing into relief the preconceptions of their Afrikaans contemporaries”. In *The Story of an African Farm* (generally regarded as the fountainhead of the social realist tradition of the South African English novel), Schreiner challenges the moral ills of the Afrikaans farming community. The value of her novel lies in her awareness of, as Michael Chapman (2003: 136) asserts, “the tension between history and the ideal”. An awareness of the gap between reality and the ideal appear to be the defining factor in what Stephen Gray (1979: 136) dubs “liberal realism”. I agree with Gray that Sarah Gertrude Millin’s fictions, for instance, should be excluded from this classification.⁴ I shall return to the actual/ideal model in the next section.

To return to Schreiner, the value of her realism lies, in my opinion, not only in its awareness of social injustice, but also in its openness to the complexities of South African society. Schreiner was critical of the Boers, but she was also empathetic towards them. Her poignant short story “Eighteen Ninety-Nine” is one of the most probing insights into the psyche of the Afrikaner. Schreiner had lived in South African country communities for the greater part of her life and her writing reflects a warm affection for the South African landscape in which she grew up. Her “insider” status in the community informs her work to the extent that a greater understanding

(than many of her close contemporaries such as H. Rider Haggard, W.C Scully and Ernest Glanville) of the African continent was revealed in her treatment of the social conditions of the time.

Social and economic conditions were, as mentioned, evident in the demographics of South African *platteland* towns. Few representations in literature dealing with the effects of drought and depression during the post-Boer War years – which resulted in an exodus of poor white people from the farms – are as poignant as that in Pauline Smith’s short story “Desolation”. It tells the story of the poor white woman, Alie van Staden, who has lived a *bywoner* (tenant farmer) existence all her life. She outlives her husband and children, and when her last son dies, she and her only grandson leave the farm. They travel by donkey-cart to the town of Hermansdorp, where they hope to find a better life. Alie’s memories about the “hospitable” small town turn out to be illusions. There is no work and she is forced to place her grandson in the custody of the local orphanage.

It was not only drought and depression that impacted on the traditional way of life on South African farms. Industrialization and mechanization changed the face of the *platteland* forever. Impoverished farmers who were not able to compete in the market place were forced to mortgage their farms. Eventually many farmers had to sell out and find employment in the cities. The effects of the demands of modernization on rural life in South Africa are poignantly dramatized in many of the stories in Herman Charles Bosman’s *Voorkamer* series. In the story “Home town” (in Bosman, H.C. 2005 (Anniversary Edition). *Homecoming: Voorkamer Stories* (II): 122–127), for instance, the character, Oupa Bekker, comments:

And I only hope you feel as lonely as what I felt, when I turned away from the kerkplein and walked down the main street of the village, and everywhere I saw only strange faces and strange buildings, and there was nobody I could say to – and there was nobody who was interested, even – that that was my home town. But, of course, it wasn’t the place, anymore, that I had spent my childhood in. Not the way they had changed it, it wasn’t.

In his introduction to the volume *Homecoming*, editor Craig MacKenzie (2005: 11) remarks how the *voorkamer* denizens’ world has changed: “This is becoming a forgotten world, containing people increasingly marginalized by developments

elsewhere. Impoverished and abandoned, but obstinately resisting the inevitable, these farmers gather to pit their homely wisdom against all innovations”.

The town and the city are often seen as a temporary stopover. A nostalgic longing to return to the *boereplaas* and the old way of life remains alive in the memories of the disowned and the displaced. The words of the well-known Afrikaans song “O Boereplaas” attest to the mythical qualities that for centuries were associated with the traditional farm in South Africa. With the advent of the city metropolis in South Africa, the small-town locale, however, has assumed a romantic image similar to that of the farm idyll. In Herman Charles Bosman’s unfinished novel *Louis Wassenaar* (in *Old Transvaal Stories* 2000: 88–114) the Sodom-and-Gomorrah aspect of the city versus the pastoral domesticity of the town idyll is emphasized. In the Afrikaans literary canon there also appears a certain ambiguity with regard to the small-town space. On the one hand the town is portrayed as a place of innocence and bucolic peacefulness. On the other, more realistic pictures are painted with regard to the ill effects of social class division and the living-in-each-other’s-pockets syndrome that appears to be endemic to the small-town milieu. Notable examples are the Afrikaans writer Mikro’s novel *Klaradynstraat* (1947) and P. G. du Plessis’s *Koöperasiestories* (written for television in the 1980s and collected under the title *Sommerstories* in 2006).

In South African English literature the liberal-realist small-town novel debunks the pastoral romanticism associated with the South African dorp milieu in demonstrating that the dorp is no less a place of human folly than the city (or the farm) – societal ills are merely better concealed under a “mask” of correctness. Louis Leipoldt’s *The Mask* (discussed in Chapter 3), as the novel’s title suggests, pays detailed attention to this aspect.

Fictional representations of town society have suggested that, since the beginnings of organized human settlement, the physical confines of the small-town/dorp/village/hamlet impact on the psyche of its inhabitants in more than one way. The myopic narrowness of the town’s mental landscape is apparently created by a situation where everybody knows everybody. In other words, the gridlocked, closed-off geographical aspect of the typical country town echoes attitudes of parochialism and insulation

among its inhabitants. Moreover, the relatively small population of a typical country town is generally unable to generate the sort of revenue required to provide various entertainment and other facilities to the community – hence the living-in-each-other's-pockets syndrome, which implies that townsmen are focused and dependent on each other for charity and amusement. The latter often assumes the form of malicious gossip veiled by the hypocritical pretext of neighbourly concern, as the stage manager character in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* ironically observes: "In our town we like to know the facts about everybody" (7). Another character, Mrs Gibbs's remark, "Now Myrtle. I've got to tell you something, because if I don't tell somebody I'll burst" (18), is a typical opening line of small-town gossip. Wilder goes on to reveal the superficial nature of town gossip and its mongers when the character of the "belligerent man" enquires whether there isn't anyone in town who is aware of social injustice and industrial inequality. Mr Webb responds: "Oh, yes, everybody is – somethin' terrible. Seems like they spend most of their time talking about who's rich and who's poor" (25).

Because almost every person in town finds himself or herself under the societal microscope, a sort of defence mechanism is set into motion as a buffer against the close personal scrutiny that such a situation inevitably invites. This gives rise to a vicious circle of pretence. The fertile ground for social commentary and the psychological examination of the human condition that the small-town locale offers has captured the imagination of writers both locally and elsewhere. Two aspects in particular, the town as an allegorical-referential space, on the one hand, and the claustrophobic mental aspect of small-town culture, on the other, appear to have universal appeal. The physical confines of the small town lend themselves exceptionally well to stage adaptations, as productions of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* have demonstrated.

The town locale, Wilder seemingly suggests, is the small stage on which the drama of life is set. He comments as follows on his impulse to "record a village's life on the stage, with realism and with generality": "The stage has a deceptive advantage over the novel – in that lighted room at the end of the darkened auditorium things seem to be half caught up into generality already. The stage cries aloud its mission to represent the Act in Eternity" (1985: 155). Wilder prefers the dramatic genre as a

mode of presenting small-life dramas, but the novels selected for this study show that a similar “spotlight” focalization that illuminates the human condition may after all be achieved by the novel form.

Theoretical Orientation

In the introduction to his book, *Representing Dissension: Riot, Rebellion and Resistance in the South African English Novel* (2003), J. A. Kearney provides useful guidelines for the way historical novels represent history. He proposes that a study of this genre should not aim to determine how closely writers have kept to official historical records, or deviated from them. Rather, it should focus on exploring the imaginative use of such knowledge. He quotes an early reviewer of Sarah Gertrude Millin’s *King of the Bastards* who expounds what s/he considers the main consideration for the writer of historical novels – that is, the challenge of creating the “illusion of present reality”. The historian, according to the reviewer, documents the facts; the novelist’s task is to envision the *human drama* responsible for them (xiii: my emphasis).

With regard to historical literature, Paul Ricoeur (1990: 158) holds a similar view:

The function of standing-for or of taking-the-place-of is paralleled in fiction by the function it possesses, with respect to everyday practice, of being undividedly revealing and transforming. Revealing, in the sense that it brings features to light that were concealed and yet already sketched out at the heart of our experience, our praxis. Transforming, in the sense that a life examined in this way is a changed life, another life.

With regard to the novelist’s tasks of “revealing” and “envisioning”, Kearney (xiii) says: This [...] might well enable the novelist to transcend his/her prejudices, at least in the process of composition”. He states that he has selected the novels for discussion in his book specifically for the manner in which they “provide some way of affirming the value of a democratic South Africa”. (xv). In the same vein, Myrtle Hooper (1996: 38) (in an article on Alan Paton’s short story “The Waste Land”), explains the ethical effect of literature. She quotes Homi Bhabha as saying, “Telling a tale is an action. It’s not merely the reflection of an event happening in the world outside which then comes to be reflected in literature. The very act of narrative raises

questions of identity, location, action, forms of conduct and acts of judgement”. Regarding the act of reading, Hooper (38) says: “Reading is not a passive act of receiving: it entails ‘responding responsibly’ as Attridge asserts – accepting our agency, embracing our ethical positioning, rather than taking away our hands”. In Paton’s short story “Death of a tsotsi”, Hooper sees a degree of idealism, which demands that ethical power be placed once again in individual hands. She proposes: “Only through such a transformation of the small life-worlds in which acts of violence occur can the reform of a society come about. Only thus can conditions of possibility be restored to a dead land so that people may indeed arise and our world be made anew” (38).

These remarks are pertinent to the novels examined in this study in that the latter evoke the social evils of the (to use Hooper’s term) “small life-world” of the Union-period South African town and dramatize how the socio-political repression associated with rising Afrikaner nationalism after the Boer War was indeed aimed at shifting ethical power from individual hands to those of the state. More importantly, each novel also suggests – within this microcosmic setting – an ideal, or “conditions of possibility” (as Hooper proposes), for the restoration of the broader society. In this respect this study shall focus on the degree to which the novels’ recuperation of historical events is concerned with the gap between the actual and ideal society.

To summarise my inclination towards Kearney’s simple but useful theoretical model which was instrumental in the selection and the evaluation of the novels of this study: Several aspects of Kearney’s theory concur with my own views regarding the fictional representation of historical events. First, Kearney places a high value on the novelist’s task to imagine the *human drama* behind official historiography. Also, he recognizes early South African authors’ “genuine courage and insight” (xxi) in order to subvert “white ideological conceptions” (xv) of their own time. With regard to the literary merit of historical novels, I agree with Kearney’s view that deconstruction should be an inevitable part of one’s critical activity in relation to the selection of novels for research projects such as my own. He says, “It is not only intriguing but important to register the kind of avoidance or escape techniques used by particular writers in relation to the wider reality of South Africa and, moreover, to observe the loopholes, flaws or shifts in such techniques which subtly or unsubtly, as the case may

be, betray their use” (xvi). Kearney goes on to cite Nadine Gordimer’s well-known distinction (which I support) between the ‘necessary gesture’ and the ‘essential gesture’: “The first being a commitment to a just social cause; the second involving those aesthetic and moral ‘values that are beyond history’” (in Kearney: xx). In contrast to Kearney (whose study has demanded a greater measure of inclusivity with regard to South African novels that represent “dissension”) I have decided to avoid novels that have (as Kearney dubs it; xxi) “the double limitation” of not making either gesture referred to by Gordimer. In other words, I have selected only novels which reveal, in addition to historical value (the “close proximity” of the novelist to the temporal and spatial milieu of his/her novel is valuable with regard to the mimetic qualities of the realist text), those “transforming qualities” referred to earlier, i.e. – awareness of the discrepancy between the real (social imbalances and wrongs) and the ideal as well as aesthetic value or literary merit.

The novels that I have selected share not only a specific temporal setting, but also the same spatial setting, i.e. an allegorical recreation of the Union period South African small-town locale. It appears, moreover, that Stephen Black, C. Louis Leipoldt, Alan Paton and Herman Charles Bosman were not the only South African writers who saw in the South African dorp a microcosm that held creative possibilities for commentary on society at large. In fact, it would seem that their novels constitute the beginnings of a tradition of the small-town novel (from Stephen Black to Zakes Mda and beyond) in South African literature.

Biographical Information

To return to the issue of critical neglect, the texts explored here are valuable not only historically (in that they illuminate an important period in South African history), but also for their intrinsic merit (in their individual and collective contributions to the body of South African literature). In an article titled “Stephen Black: some introductory notes”, Stephen Gray groups together historically neglected writers (such as Stephen Black) who have been failed by literary historiography. To pinpoint

reasons for this state of affairs, it is necessary to focus on various circumstances surrounding their lives and work. Gray (1981: 66) explains:

Black belonged to a long-lived school of writers who appear somewhat problematic to reclaim at present, for reasons of their varied, widespread and hand-to-mouth activities, and because of the fugitive or ephemeral nature of much of their work. They were figures of their time, given to commentary on the moment rather than to the manufacture of lasting literary moments. Black's direct forebear is Douglas Blackburn, his contemporaries include Beatrice Hastings, Sol T. Plaatje, Eugene Marais and C. Louis Leipoldt [...], and Black's direct heir, Herman Charles Bosman. Of all these, however, Black is accorded the most neglect [...]

A study of Stephen Black's novels – and the other novels discussed in this study – reveals that the critical neglect that they are suffering (some more than others) are unjustified. It is a pity that these works have not been accorded the measure of distinction that they deserve and a fair chance to stake their respective claims in the national literary history. Recognition for *The Dorp*, for example, has been limited to brief mentions in literary historiographies. In this regard Christopher Heywood's account in *A History of South African Literature* is noteworthy. He singles out *The Dorp* and suggests that Stephen Black was the leader of a group of writers who satirized the effects of the 1910 Union constitution with increasing severity (114). Although Leipoldt's and Paton's work is not overtly satirical, their respective critiques of the moral ills of South African society are nonetheless highly effective. Black, Leipoldt, Paton and Bosman were part of a dynamic national (and international) context that was facilitated by a well-established newspaper network to which they actively contributed. It is therefore no coincidence that the small-town newspaper office has provided the inspiration for some of their most interesting fictional characters.

Biographical information about these authors (very scant in Black's case) sheds light on the challenging times in which these writers lived and worked, and reveals some interesting facts about possible and actual connections and influences. Black's literary career started slightly earlier and, by dint of the wide audience and popular acclaim that his travelling theatre company enjoyed, it can safely be assumed that his contemporaries such as C.Louis Leipoldt, Alan Paton and Herman Charles Bosman had attended (or read reviews of) these productions. However, Stephen Black may

well have been a pioneering literary influence beyond his politically audacious satirical dramatic texts. (In Bosman's case Black's influence can be traced with some certainty – see Chapter 4.)

Although literary cross-pollination and interpersonal relations between Black (1880–1935), C. Louis Leipoldt (1880–1947), Alan Paton (1903–1988) and Herman Charles Bosman (1905–1951) are not easy to trace, there is evidence that they had taken cognizance of each other's literary and journalistic careers. For one, they were all actively involved with the liberal press in South Africa at certain stages of their careers. On 5 August 1929, in his editorial note in *The Sjambok* (11), Stephen Black commented as follows on what he appears to regard as the lack of originality of Leipoldt's dramatic work "Afgode" (of which his novel *The Mask* was a reworking):

Now we have press puffs about an "Ibsenesque" Afrikaans play, "Afgode," by Dr. Leipold [sic], yet the printed synopsis of this work, "Idols," might be that of an adaptation of Ibsen's immortal "Ghosts!"

Save that the illegitimate child of the idolised husband is (naturally) half black in "Afgode," whereas in "Ghosts" it was white, I can discern no essential dramatic difference between the foundations of Ibsen's plot and Dr Leipold's. Ibsen's mother hid the truth from a son, Dr. Leipold's hides it from a daughter.

Bosman's earliest pieces were published in Black's journal *The Sjambok* (they were smuggled out of Pretoria Central Prison where he, still in his early twenties, was serving a sentence for the murder of his step-brother) and, according to Stephen Gray (2005: 157) Black later "seeded in Bosman the notion that South African theatre would make a recovery" (Black had at that point abandoned his own theatrical enterprise), upon which Bosman wrote two plays: "Mara" and "Street-woman". These plays were published posthumously and "Street-woman" (to my knowledge Mara has never been staged) was first produced only in 2003 (at the Herman Charles Bosman's Literary Society's annual Bosman weekend).

As editor of *The New Sjambok*, which he and his friend Aegidius Jean Blignaut started after Black's death, Bosman took note of a certain Afrikaans poet/school doctor's ideas about South African nutrition. Louis Leipoldt's address to the Sons of England organization about his concern as a Transvaal school doctor about the detrimental effect of mealies as staple food on the health of school children in the

Union was published in the *Rand Daily Mail*. Bosman, referring to Leipoldt as a “flat-brained pseudo-poet” (Giliomee 1999: 403), invited him to *The New Sjambok*’s offices after having showed the article to the “office-boy”, a man who was raised on mealies. “I don’t care what any doctor says about me,” the latter commented, “If he thinks that I am not physically fit, let him come up here, and see how quick I chuck him down the stairs”. Leipoldt (Giliomee reports) wisely declined the invitation! Bosman’s somewhat patronizing attitude towards successful Afrikaans poets such as Leipoldt (he expressed similar views on Uys Krige’s poetry) attests to the fact that he not only read their work, but was presumably also envious of their success. (Bosman’s own poetry never reached the same heights as either Leipoldt’s or Krige’s.) On the other hand, it would appear that Leipoldt’s interest in the impudent Mr Bosman might also have been stimulated by the “mealie incident”. Giliomee (1999: 571) notes that Leipoldt’s *Bushveld Doctor* shows traces of being influenced by Bosman.

Professional jealousy also appears to have marked relations between Alan Paton and Bosman. After the worldwide success of his novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, *The New York Times* approached Paton to comment on the literary scene in South Africa. His response reads: “Special mention should be given to Bosman’s *Mafeking Road*, a collection of short stories *thought by many* to be of international stature” (in Gray 2005: 345; my emphasis). Bosman regarded Paton’s admission to not having read *Mafeking Road* as a snub and implied this in a personal letter to Paton. Paton responded: “My reference to your book was not kind. It was a judgement uncorrupted by kindness or by any relationship with you whatever. I hope you will treasure it as a jewel, flawless and unique” (346). Paton’s mention of Bosman’s work nevertheless caught the attention of an American literary agent, and this indirectly led to the first manuscript of Bosman’s novel *Willemsdorp*.

I suspect that Paton, after reading Bosman’s letter, took the trouble to read Bosman’s short story volume *Mafeking Road*. It would appear that he may have been more than a little impressed, because he employs in *Too Late the Phalarope* the same narrative technique (which was fairly uncommon at the time in South African literature). In the short stories in *Mafeking Road* Bosman uses a narrative framework in which he creates ironic tensions between himself and his unreliable narrator, Oom Schalk

Lourens, thereby creating a distance between himself as author and Oom Schalk as character, especially with regard to racist attitudes. It appears to be more than coincidental that Paton conceived the character of his unreliable narrator, Aunt Sophie, according to the same formula. Moreover, Aunt Sophie's habitual self-contradiction, her occasional glint-in-the-eye humour and speech peppered with Afrikaans expressions, are traits that are distinctly reminiscent of Oom Schalk. Also, "Tante", as Paton's narrator is often referred to, is the Afrikaans opposite gender term for "Oom". My discussion of Bosman's novel *Willemisdorp* in Chapter 5 reveals many similarities between Bosman's protagonist, newspaper editor Charlie Hendricks, and Paton's Pieter van Vlaanderen in *Too Late the Phalarope*.

Historical Contextualization

Before offering a historical context for the novels selected for this study, it is necessary to focus briefly on some issues and contentions arising from the location of historical novels in their "real" contexts. As mentioned, J. A. Kearney offers some useful comments on this aspect. He quotes Michael Green (1997: 34) as saying: "[Historical novels] enter into a contract with the reader that requires him or her to recognize sequences or events formalized outside the text in question as 'history'". Kearney goes on to say that a literary critic who has not undertaken any primary historical investigation must rely for basic information on what has been presented by historians. This, he says, may be problematic in the sense that it is easy to lapse into regarding history as background that can be established securely and authoritatively and, therefore, perhaps to forget that historical texts are themselves representations.

The novels examined in this study have not necessarily been selected for their "accurate" correlation to and representation of historical events. I have attempted to show that they have much more to offer than mere "story" versions of history. Social realism in fiction is, on the other hand, premised on the mimetic qualities of the text – in other words, the reader's ability to recognize settings and events as historically accurate. The novels' respective historical settings reveal that this is indeed the case. Although the action in all the novels is broadly set in the Union period (1910–1948) in South Africa, different socio-political aspects are explored in each case. For instance, Leipoldt, who grew up in the town of Clanwilliam in the Cape Colony, gives

great prominence to the Cape Rebellion and events surrounding it in his novel *The Mask*. Leipoldt was not only acquainted with Cape rebels and their families in the Clanwilliam district, but was also a war reporter accompanying the war tribunal that tried and convicted rebels. He apparently witnessed some of the hangings of the convicted rebels. Each of the novelists drew inspiration from his own social background and experiences in towns that he knew. The brief historical contextualization given at the beginning of each chapter establishes a logical connection with a writer's particular historical focus within the broader context of the Union period in South Africa. (The reader who wishes to gain a comprehensive insight into South African history is strongly advised to consult the highly acclaimed reference works mentioned below.)

I have been careful to consult historical sources that are concerned with a revisionist view of South African history. This is of particular importance, because I wish to steer clear of the so-called master narratives of historical discourse – documents that entrench hegemonic ideo-political agendas of the time. In this regard, I have found Herman Giliomee's comprehensive work *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (2003) a most useful source of information. A blurb on the dust cover of the book states: “[It is] the first comprehensive history of the Afrikaner people based on – and critical of – the most recent scholarly work. [...] The book depicts the contradictions and complexities of Afrikaner history with empathy but without partisanship”. Other recently published historical reference works that were useful include Sampie Terreblanche's *A History of Inequality in South Africa* (1652–2002) published in 2002, and co-authors Hermann Giliomee and Bernard Mbenga's *New History of South Africa* published in 2007. Because the rise of Afrikaner nationalism during the Union period in South Africa is inextricably linked to the effects of the Boer War (1899–1902), I have also consulted the 2004 edition of Thomas Pakenham's iconic work *The Boer War*.

It is interesting that Pakenham (xv, xvii) refers to the Boer War as “infamous”, “a gigantic political blunder”, and “one of the greatest errors of judgement committed by the imperial government”. Sir (later Lord) Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner in South Africa, the man whom Pakenham (xvi) accuses of being “chiefly responsible for making the war”, did not live to see, what the latter dubs, “the

complete overthrow of all he tried to accomplish” (577; my emphasis). The wheel (Pakenham says) eventually turned full circle and the Great Trek happened all over again. He continues:

Dr Verwoerd led the volk out of the Commonwealth – and took all other South Africans, black, brown and white, with them. He declared the Union a republic fifty-nine years later, to the day, after the Peace of Vereeniging. The party founded by Botha and Smuts had been replaced in 1948 by Malan and the Nationalists. [...] Today [1979, the year Pakenham’s book was first published], the Nationalists rule white South Africa on their own terms, [...]” (576).

In a footnote Pakenham (576) remarks how the memory of the war is kept alive by an exhibition (in the War Museum in Bloemfontein) of concentration camp relics, including the ground glass that was supposedly put in the camp food by the British authorities.

Pakenham’s summation of the vengeful impulse behind the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the iconography that it fed on is confirmed by Alan Paton’s views (quoted in Chapter 4) on the Great Trek centenary celebrations as a major influence on the strengthening of Afrikaner nationalism. The seeds of bitterness and hatred that the Boer War sowed in the Afrikaner consciousness yielded a bitter harvest. The Afrikaners, morally and economically devastated and humiliated by the war, vowed to be a nation again. Economic considerations (the rich gold deposits in the ZAR) played an important part in President Kruger’s unwaveringly hostile attitude towards the British Imperial Government, and the latter should have realized that these riches would not be given up without a fight. In other words, the British government should have had an inkling of the kind of resistance – and of the ruthlessness that its stamping out would require – they would be up against in South Africa.

At the end of the war the signing of the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging signalled the end of the independent Boer Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. In 1910 they were forged into a union with the two British colonies of Natal and the Cape Province – as Giliomee (264) states, “under British auspices and direction, with Milner at the helm”. Milner’s imperialist project, however, came unstuck. Political divisions in the country did not cease to exist. On the contrary, they continued in the form of various political parties: The *Afrikaner Bond* of the Cape Colony took the

lead in the formation of the South African Party. The Boer leadership in the ex-republics, however, avoided collaboration with other parties. In January 1905 Louis Botha announced the formation of a political party, *Het Volk* in the Transvaal, and in May 1906 the Boer leaders in the Orange River Colony (Free State) formed the *Orangia Unie* with J.B.M. Hertzog as their leader. It was no surprise that the latter party won the first election in the Orange River Colony by a large margin. Abraham Fischer became the first prime minister but Hertzog wielded the most influence in the cabinet (Giliomee: 268).

Milner's attempts to anglicize the country's education met with fierce resistance among the Afrikaners and resulted in the establishment of the Christian National independent schools. Botha and Smuts, as a way to build a political constituency without directly challenging the imperial authorities, earmarked these schools, which sprang up in the ex-republics. (The joining together of the Christian religion and the nationalist project is significant because it prefigured a radical strain of nationalism that aimed to justify racial exclusivity in religious terms.) The post-war imperialist project in South Africa increasingly seemed headed for failure. Giliomee (274–275) relates how the move towards the Union government proceeded. Milner left South Africa in April 1905. Referring to Britain's Liberal Government's decision to introduce self-government, he stated: "In the face of a *volte face* so complete, obviously it would not have made the slightest difference what one did. It was evidently hopeless from the first to try and make a good job of South Africa for the British people" (in Giliomee: 274). Giliomee adds, "With the type of imperialism proposed by Milner and Chamberlain so thoroughly discredited, Afrikaners began to unite around the idea of a South African South Africa". Jan Smuts in Pretoria and John X. Merriman in Cape Town played the leading roles in the formation of a political union of the four colonies. They sought the support of M.T. Steyn in the Free State (Merriman still addressed him as "President"!). Giliomee proposes: "The principles of a union acceptable to white South Africans were taking shape: minimum interference from London and maximum powers short of independence".

The 1914 Rebellion, a mere twelve years after the Treaty of Vereeniging, proved how determined the Afrikaners were to reinstate the nationalist programme. The Rebellion broke out in reaction to the Union government's support of the British invasion of

German South West Africa during World War 1. Matters were exacerbated by the economic depression in the country that had been caused by factors such as the destruction of property by Milner's scorched-earth campaign during the latter stages of the Boer War as well as a severe drought. In the Free State, by 1912, as many as three-quarters of the farms in some districts were bonded, with no loans made available to non-landowners. Giliomee (379) quotes a report on the situation in the town of Hoopstad: "Bills were falling due, cattle were dying and food prices were rising". In addition to economic factors Giliomee (380) stresses the indelible personal scars left by the war and the compulsion it created in the minds of the defeated to rise from the ashes. Some rebel leaders were driven by, what he describes as, "the unfinished business of the Boer War and perhaps by a secret war pact among some Boer leaders to resume the independence struggle" (379–380). Although the Boer Rebellion was crushed without much ado, Afrikaner nationalist aspirations were not stamped out. (Additional historical background on the Rebellion is provided in Chapters 2 and 4.)

Afrikaner nationalism was inextricably linked with religion in the way that Afrikaners based the idea of an exclusive identity on Biblical dogma, particularly the Old Testamentary notion of an elect race. (Stephen Black's novel, *The Dorp*, pays detailed attention to this aspect.) In this regard it is useful to focus briefly on the role that religion played in South African history. An article written by C. Louis Leipoldt titled "Cultural development" (for vol. VIII of *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*) is interesting. Leipoldt's own ancestry harks back to the early German missionaries in the country. His father left the Rhenish mission field in 1884 and became a Dutch Reformed Church minister. He served the congregation of Clanwilliam in the Cape Province until his retirement in 1910.

"No account of the cultural development of the colony in its early stages", writes Leipoldt (845), "would be complete without a tribute to the influence of the churches". He goes on to provide an overview of religious influences in the country – from the lay preachers, also called "sick-comforters", of the Dutch East India Company to the European missionaries and the three Calvinistic denominations. With regard to the latter, Leipoldt (848) says:

At present there are three main branches of Dutch Calvinism in South Africa. The oldest and largest is the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk*), consolidated by Act No. 23 of 1911, with 349 congregations, a membership of 310, 065, and 173 mission congregations with a membership of 49, 562. The second is the Reformed Church of South Africa (*Die Gereformeerde Kerk*), with 85 congregations and a total membership of 43, 207. The third is the *Nederduits Hervormde Kerk*, the official Church of the first South African Republic, with 41 congregations and a total membership of 37,500.

Other denominations such as the Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics and Anglicans were in the minority. Yet, Leipoldt says, their cultural influence through education should not be underestimated.

Leipoldt's comments about differences (848; “more dogmatic and political in character than cultural”) between the abovementioned branches of Dutch Calvinism in South Africa are meaningful. At this point, it suffices to say that religion and politics in South Africa became interwoven (the religious underpinnings of Afrikaner nationalistic projects is evident from the term “Christian Nationalism”, which was, for example, officially used in the Nationalists’ education policy) in such a manner that they provided satirists like Stephen Black and Herman Charles Bosman with ample raw material.

In addition to critiquing the church’s involvement in matters outside its sphere of influence (such as politics), an awareness of social imbalances in South African society – specifically the contrast between conditions in the town and the location area – is fictionally represented in all the novels of this study. Therefore, it is necessary to provide some background of the history of racial segregation and the creation of separate settlement areas for whites and blacks in South Africa. The apartheid era (1948–1994) in South African political history and the constitutional entrenchment of a policy of racially separate development in the country, may lead to a perception that racial segregation originated during and was confined to this period. This was not the case. In fact, the historical roots of racism in this country go back to the very early days of colonial settlement – long before even the time when Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner, enforced measures to support the imperial policy of “white supremacy” such as – after their defeat by the British forces in the

colony of Natal – the creation of separate “reserve areas” for the Zulus (Terreblanche 2002: 254).

As regards the history of racial segregation in South Africa, two articles are useful for their well-researched content and their respective authors’ sensitivity to the intricacies of this subject. These articles appear in the volume *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (1995). I wish to highlight some of the salient points that pertain to my study: Martin Legassick, in his article titled, “British hegemony and the origins of segregation in South Africa, 1901–14”, locates key elements of segregationist theory within broader imperial debates. He indicates that these ideas retained influence in the Union period and afterwards when segregation was fully realized and implemented by an Afrikaner-led government.

Legassick regards segregation as symptomatic of capitalist social relations in a colonial society. In this regard he quotes Alfred Milner as saying: “The ultimate end is a self-governing white community supported by well-treated and justly governed black labour from Cape Town to the Zambezi” (46). Legassick explains how economic factors such as the labour demands of the gold mining industry influenced the formulation of a native policy in South Africa and how factors such as the detribalization of black workers, the poor white question and the influence of reigning European race eugenics greatly complicated practicalities with regard to realizing liberal ideals for an equitable society in South Africa.

Legassick points to the prominence of Englishmen such as Lionel Curtis (a member of Milner’s “Kindergarten”) in the formulation of native policy. Curtis presented a paper to the Fortnightly club (the same forum at which the Closer Union Campaign was launched) titled “The Place of Subject Peoples in the Empire”. Curtis’s suggestion that “a well-conceived set of laws” (53) should control the native whose increasing numbers posed economic and social problems (such as miscegenation, which according to Curtis, “is tending to degrade both races” (53)). Legassick concludes: “Give or take some of the details, this is an extraordinarily precise foreshadowing of the situation which “a well-conceived set of laws” began to establish in South Africa” (54).

In his paper titled “The elaboration of segregationist ideology”, Saul Dubow offers an overview of some views held by historians on the origins of segregation in South Africa. He says: “It is worth noting that for all the competing explanations for the origin of segregation-apartheid, the theory of Afrikaner nationalist responsibility is perhaps the least convincing” (146). He goes on: “[...] the misleading notion of apartheid as the eccentric creation of racist Afrikaners continues to enjoy prominence” (147). Dubow, like Legassick, emphasizes the capitalist underpinnings of race policies in South Africa. Resettling natives into either reserves or locations – where they would be compelled to enter into wage labour – were measures meant to secure a stable economic work force close to large industrial centres (148). He reports that the first thoroughgoing and broadly disseminated theory of segregation was Maurice Evans’s *Black and White in South East Africa* (1911). Evans’s book, Dubow says, was frequently cited in political debate in South Africa, the principles of which resonated strongly with the paternalism of trusteeship ideology, of which segregation was a variant. Dubow proposes that significant segregationist ideology was firmly planted (in embryonic form at least) on the statute books by 1920: the 1911 Mines and Works Act, the Native Labour Regulation Act of the same year, the 1913 Natives Land Act and the 1920 Native Affairs Act, are among the most important examples. Together with the pass laws, this legislation laid down job discrimination and territorial separation, as well as mechanisms by which labour could be controlled and coerced.

Chapters 2–5 offer an analysis of four English novels that fictionally illuminate an important era in South African history, the Union period (1910–1948). These texts have been selected for many reasons not least of which is exceptional individual literary merit. More importantly, in addition to forming part of the beginning of the liberal tradition of the South African realist novel, the novels share an important physical setting – the South African town/dorp. Chapter 2 deals with journalist, dramatist and novelist Stephen Black’s *The Dorp* (1920) a novel, which I regard as the earliest example of what I have named the small-town novel sub-genre of the South African novel. Black satirizes the goings-on in a typical South African town called Unionstad. This name is ironic in the context of political disunity during the Union period in South Africa. Therefore, Unionstad, like the towns in the other novels, is portrayed as a microcosm of the national macrocosm. *The Dorp* reveals the

ill effects of historical events such as the Boer War and the 1914 Rebellion, specifically the animosity that it created between English and Afrikaner townsmen. Black's vision for reconciliation is symbolized by the union in marriage of Anita van Ryn, the Afrikaner mayor's daughter and Ned Oakley, the English shopkeeper's son.

Chapter 3 explores C. Louis Leipoldt's portrayal of the South African Union period small-town microcosm in his novel, *The Mask* that was written in the 1930s and posthumously published for the first time as part of his Valley trilogy in 2001. Although Leipoldt is one of South Africa's most versatile bilingual writers, he is best known as the first major poet in Afrikaans. *The Mask*, the concluding novel of his Valley trilogy, reveals a bleak picture of the South African small town in that it is emblematic of the collapse of Leipoldt's utopian ideal for an egalitarian South African society (as depicted in the first and second novels of his Valley trilogy, respectively titled *Chameleon on the Gallows* and *Stormwrack*). In this regard the third novel's title (*The Mask*) is appropriate: Leipoldt "unmasks" the moral folly associated with repressive Afrikaner nationalism, which is gaining a foothold in the town called the Village (the fictional equivalent of Leipoldt's birthplace Clanwilliam in the Cape Province). The generic name that Leipoldt has chosen for the small-town locality in *The Mask* underlines – in a similar manner as Stephen Black in *The Dorp* – the microcosmic aspect of the Union period South African dorp. For example, the attitudes expressed by Leipoldt's main character, Santa, are indicative of the impact of political indoctrination on the minds of ordinary citizens.

Alan Paton's second novel, *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953), is the subject of discussion in chapter 4. Paton dramatizes the devastating personal effects of racially discriminatory laws such as the Immorality Act (1927), which criminalized sexual congress between whites and blacks in South Africa. The novel is set in a fictional town named Venterspan and relates how the Afrikaner character, Pieter van Vlaanderen, and his family are destroyed when his adulterous relationship with a coloured prostitute is discovered. Paton's exposé of the hypocrisy and morally corrupt attitudes of racist townsmen (and by implication the national architects of institutionalized racism) is as powerful as it is heart-rending. The most outstanding feature of the novel, however, is Paton's vision for restoration. In personal acts of

unconditional forgiveness, says Paton, lies the kernel of hope for the redemption of a morally depraved society.

Herman Charles Bosman's small-town novel *Willemisdorp* (written in the 1950's and posthumously published in 1977 (censored) and 1998 (uncensored)) is discussed in chapter 5. As mentioned, it has been the inspiration for this study. In addition to containing artistically achieved stylistic elements, Bosman's dorp satire is the most severe exposé of small-town culture of the time in South African literature. The action in *Willemisdorp* takes place shortly before the fateful 1948 election, which carried Dr D.F. Malan's National Party to victory when apartheid became the official government policy. However, as mentioned, racially discriminatory laws existed before 1948. Like Paton's protagonist (Pieter van Vlaanderen), Bosman's main character, newspaperman Charlie Hendricks, engages in a sexual relationship with a coloured prostitute. When her dead body is found, Hendricks is a prime suspect. His subsequent flight from Willemisdorp is meaningful. It is a response to the narrow-minded ideology associated with Afrikaner nationalism. It also emphasizes the psychological turmoil and confusion resulting from the criminalization of "normal" citizens. Bosman, like no writer before him, portrays the South African small town as a cesspool of everything that is wrong with society as a whole.

The research problem, which this study addresses, is the lack of research carried out on a seemingly significant body of South African literature. Part of the problem is that certain novels have not been recognized as "belonging together". In other words, the message and the project that these works share have not been acknowledged. Furthermore, no assessment has been made of the significance of these texts for twentieth-century South African literature as a whole. Although individual texts have been treated to cursory commentary, the wider field represented by these novels has not been surveyed with any thoroughness. It is anticipated that, should these works be clustered together and recognized as a corpus (i.e. the small-town novel sub genre of the South African novel), as this thesis proposes, valuable insights will emerge about a body of works that cover an important period (1910–1948) in South African literature. Moreover, it appears that the microcosmic character of the dorp/small-town milieu has guaranteed its fictional currency and usefulness with regard to ongoing commentary on key aspects of South African society. The concluding chapter

of the study briefly focuses on post-1948 novels and confirms the notion that a continuum exists within the small-town novel sub-genre of the South African novel.

Chapter 2: *The Dorp* (1920) by Stephen Black

Stephen Black, South African literary pioneer

Stephen Black was born in 1879 in Claremont, Cape Town. Not much is known about his early childhood except that he was brought up in poverty-stricken circumstances. Black said in an article in the *Cape Argus* (17 October 1925; Black papers, Strange Collection, Johannesburg Public Library), “I had lived vividly, touching against the pulse of life, poverty-stricken, obscure, and also unsheltered when once I had left my parents’ home”. The part of his schooling in the town of Kimberley presumably provided inspiration for his second novel, *The Golden Calf: A Story of the Diamond Fields* (1925). (A third novel, *Limelight*, about life in the arts in South Africa, remains unpublished in the archives of the Public Library in Johannesburg.)

At the age of fourteen Black worked in a Cape Town bookshop, where a love for the written word was kindled. A lack of financial resources coupled with a passionate temperament induced him to become an amateur boxer, during which time he continued to live close to ordinary, equally deprived people for whom he developed empathy and understanding which are clearly evident in his literary work. In 1902 George Kingswell, the proprietor and editor of the newspaper *The Owl*, noticed Black’s talent for words. Kingswell recruited him to work for the paper as boxing writer and sports editor. Of Kingswell’s influence Black wrote: “I was very fond of him and terribly envious of his vocabulary. He seemed the greatest man I had ever met; his wonderful stories most profoundly impressed me (*Cape Argus*. October 17, 1925; Strange Collection, Johannesburg Public Library)”. From 1906 Black worked as a sports and crime reporter on the *Cape Argus*. During this time Black’s contributions to the newspaper as a court reporter caught the attention of Rudyard Kipling, who called him a genius and complimented him on the entertaining manner in which he reported on court scenes that involved Cape Coloured people (Gray 1981: 87).⁵ In a *Daily Mail* article (Strange Collection; 12. 1- 09) titled “A Kipling Discovery”, a certain “Horace” reports on Kipling’s visit to the *Argus* office:

One day Rudyard Kipling toiled up the stairs, which lead to the editorial department of the “Cape Argus” and flung a copy of that day’s paper before the sub-editor. “Who writes these stories of Africander life?” he asked. “Who is it that has awakened us to the existence of Johnnie Hendriks, Sanie Snuibek, and Achmat Samsodien? [...] He has made us familiar with those who have been around us for years and yet we never got to know them.”

Kipling provided invaluable pointers for Black’s literary career. His contempt for a pedagogical style of writing greatly influenced Black’s own writing style, which eschewed explicit “lessons”. In a *Cape Argus* article (17 October 1925) Black summed up Kipling’s wise counsel as follows: “He left on my mind the impression that the current of a man’s thoughts should run through his work like a golden thread ... if people then believed in a hidden ‘message’ it did not matter. Artistic form was what he aimed at; and art taught by the beauty of its expression rather than by visible efforts to preach”.

From 1909 onwards Black was set to broaden and deepen his experience of South African society and gather valuable material for his future work as he established his own theatre company and toured South Africa and Rhodesia. Thursday, 16 November 1908, the date of the première of Black’s first play, *Love and the Hyphen* may be regarded, according to Gray (Introduction to Black. S. 1984. *Three Plays*: 9) as the birth of the South African play. It ran for ten days, until the following Saturday, and was put up for another ten performances over the following Christmas and New Year period. By 15 January the next year it was estimated that it had already played to approximately 30 000 people. This production went on tour in late January 1909, to many railway-connected centres, played a season in the Standard Theatre in Johannesburg, and travelled as far north as Rhodesia (Gray 1981: 92).

The satirical content of Black’s oeuvre, his keen observation of and insight into the societal impact of political developments in South Africa are outstanding features of his work. In this respect Stephen Gray (Introduction to Black, S. 1984: 10) remarks on the political turbulence of the Union period and Black’s evocation thereof in his play *Love and the Hyphen*:

The period of Black’s active career [...] coincides quite exactly with the rise and fall of an idea in South Africa, an idea of which he was more a symptom than a cause. It is the notion that there could be an independent, unified land

called South Africa which, no matter how heterogeneous, could have one dominant and common national ideal including all the categories of its cultural life. That ideal was the very substance of the life of the year, and even the month, in which *Love and the Hyphen* was launched. It was the time of the first sittings of the National Convention, which met in October to hammer out the issues of Closer Union, which would lead to the unification of the four provinces in 1910. On the first night the Hon. F.S. Malan, minister for agriculture of Cape Colony, attended the play, as did key representatives of the military. Closer Union was, in fact, the play's theme, and the whole substance was [...] the 'liberal' and 'civilised' Cape's stand to maintain its liberal social values and civilisation, specifically on the issue of traditional freedoms and the non-White franchise, challenged at the convention by the conservatism of Natal and the two defeated Republics, now making their recovery of power.

The Hon. F.S Malan (mentioned above) was not the only Union Government dignitary who attended Black's plays. On 21 March 1910 he received a letter from the private secretary in the office of the Hon. J.W. Sauer. It reads: "Dear Sir, Mr. Sauer asks me to say he enjoyed "Helena's Hope" very much indeed and he thinks the effect of your plays will be good in South Africa especially that of "Love and the Hyphen", which he is glad you are again staging (Stephen Black papers, Strange Collection, Johannesburg Public Library)". One can only guess that Mr Sauer, in his capacity as Minister of Justice and Native Affairs, might have been interested in what M.W. Woodrow (1972: 43) refers to as "Black's keen observation of the idiosyncrasies of black, white and coloured speakers which enriched his dialogue". Woodrow (44) proposes that these ingredients of Black's art coupled with, what he dubs, "an intuitive stage technique, and an ability to handle the comic situation in particular", ensured his success as a playwright.

During Black's lifetime he was personally able to revive his dramatic scripts (many other scripts followed *Love and the Hyphen* and *Helena's Hope*). He kept audience interest alive by continually updating the contents of the scripts (in order to comment on social and news events of the day) for every new season that lasted intermittently up to 1929. On 1 February 1929 the weekly newspaper *The Cape* (7) reported as follows (under the heading, "The New 'Love and the Hyphen'"): "Mr. Stephen Black has had the amazing good fortune, not often reserved for play-makers of [this] genre, of seeing his work accepted and appreciated after a lapse of a score of years". Unfortunately, the popularity of Black's plays would not endure for more than that score of years.

In 1981, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Black's death, literary historiographer, and editor, Stephen Gray, published various articles on his work as well as a selection of his journalistic writings. Another commemorative event saw one of Black's plays, *Helena's Hope Ltd.*, performed by the University of the Witwatersrand Drama School. The text appeared in print for the first time in 1984 when Gray published a collection of Black's plays titled *Three Plays*. These events confirmed the importance of Stephen Black's literary legacy. It is, in fact, not improbable that he may have influenced the work of South African dramatists such as Athol Fugard and the satirist, Pieter-Dirk Uys.

Black's influence on the work of Herman Charles Bosman can be traced with some certainty. While Bosman was serving a sentence for murder in Pretoria Central Prison, he became acquainted with Lago Clifford, one of the members of Black's theatre company. (Clifford was serving a sentence of one year for pederasty.) Clifford was greatly impressed by Bosman's literary talent. He smuggled some of Bosman's writings out of jail to be published pseudonymously by Black, who was then working as the editor of the Johannesburg periodical *The Sjambok* (Gray 2005: 127). Although Black published many of Bosman's pieces before they met in person shortly before Black's death in 1931, Black's personality and his life story (presumably gleaned from Clifford's oral accounts and whatever daily media Bosman could obtain in jail) appears to have made a profound impression on the young Bosman. They were, after all, as Stephen Gray (2005: 155) accurately observes: "[...] both Capetonians washed up on the Rand, poor boys from the wrong side of the tracks, making it in those snobbishly British circles". (Bosman's dress code, especially his trademark fedora hat worn at a cocked angle, appears also to have emulated Black's style.)

Although Bosman, to my knowledge, never unequivocally confirmed Black's influence, one is tempted to deduce that Bosman's two short stories ("Sold down the river" and "Susannah and the play-actor"), dealing with the trials of a travelling theatre company doing the circuit of South African dorps, may have been inspired by Stephen Black's "road show". There is much in these stories that appear to suggest this. Bosman (2002: 66) mentions a similar route followed by the company of play-

actors in “Sold down the river” (“They visited all the dorps from the Cape – where they had started from – to Zeerust in the Transvaal, [...]”). There are, incidentally, also many similarities between Black and Bosman’s depiction of Union period town culture in their respective small-town novels, *The Dorp* and *Willemisdorp*.

Black’s novel *The Dorp* (1920) was presumably written while he was abroad. He lived in England from 1913 to 1915, where he wrote articles for London’s *Daily Mail*, and in France from 1918–1927. Very little is known about the events around the publication of the novel. There is an undated handwritten manuscript in the D. C. Boonzaaier collection of the South African Library in Cape Town. The title, “Union is Strength” at the top of the page, is crossed out and replaced with a second title, “Sour Grapes”.⁶ Although the written manuscript’s contents agree more or less with the printed copy of the novel, it is considerably longer owing to further elaboration of some of the sub-plots. It appears to be unlikely that this draft would have been sent to the publishers, as it is sloppy in appearance and contains too many deletions and emendations to have been the final manuscript draft. What appears to be certain, however, is that *The Dorp* is not a reworking of one of Black’s play scripts. (His second novel, *The Golden Calf* (1925), is a reworking of a four-act play titled *I.D.B.* [illicit diamond buying]). Close inspection of an undated typed play script with the dual title, “Love and Altitude, The Belle of the Dorp”, shows that, barring a few similar character names, there is very little evidence to suggest that *The Dorp* was based on the play (or vice versa).

Although some copies of the novel appear to have been circulated in South Africa (copies are held in some university libraries), I was not able to trace any South African press reviews of the novel. A contemporaneous review appeared in London in the weekly *The New Age* (quoted on p. 38 of this study). The only other recorded response to the novel at the time is in a letter dated February 7, 1921 that was typed on a *The Times* of London foreign department letterhead (The Strange Collection, Johannesburg Public Library). It is addressed to Stephen Black, Esq., The Press Club, and St. Bride’s House, Salisbury Square and reads:

Dear Mr. Black,

It is very kind of you to send me a copy of your book, “The Dorp”, and I shall read it with great interest. It was news to me that you had written a novel

about South Africa and I, too, wish that I had been in England when it appeared, as I might have been able to do something for you, though I should hardly have had the cheek to attempt a review of it myself.

Anyway I shall look forward to reading it and should like to thank you very much for having sent it to me.

Yours sincerely
B.K. Long

Although the formal tone of the letter discounts close ties between the letter writer and the addressee, it is understandable why Black should have sent a copy of the novel to Mr Long. He was an influential newspaperman who, if he approved of the novel, would be able to recommend it in the right circles. Whether Long enjoyed the novel is not known. It is safe to presume, however, that he recognized and appreciated the subject material of Black's novel. He had lived in South Africa (1902–1913) where he was an advocate at the Cape Bar, editor of the newspaper *The State*, member of the Cape Parliament and one of the members of the first Union Parliament. He returned to England in 1913 when he was offered the position of Dominions editor of *The Times* of London. Long returned to South Africa in October 1921 to succeed Sir Maitland Park as editor of the *Cape Times*.⁷

The dorp, Unionstad: macrocosmic implications of small-town politics and organization

We might have a few words on the history of man here.

Our Town by Thornton Wilder (22)

Stephen Black's novel *The Dorp* (1920) is set in a South African town called Unionstad. The plot deals with the cultural intricacies of post-Boer War society in South Africa. Black tells the story of human relations between Afrikaner and English townsmen in the town. The name of the town reveals the novel's threefold thematic impulse: an allegorical evocation of the Union Period (1910–1948) in South Africa; an ironic-satirical thrust (the Union period was one of increasing political polarization) and ultimately, an idealistic vision of cultural-political reconciliation. The novel's action begins shortly after the establishment of the Union of South Africa. Tension and strife marks the relations between the two political factions in

town, the Hertzog supporters (of the National Party – nicknamed the Nats) and the Smuts supporters (of the ruling South African Party, nicknamed the Sappers). Black’s satirical exposé of small-town society reveals it to be an important key to the broader complexities of South African society during this time of political flux and turmoil.

Black’s fictional representation of the goings-on in a typical South African town sheds light on, as Christopher Heywood (2004: 25) suggests, “a conflict between classes, exacerbated by the concentration of power, land and wealth in a conglomerate of white races”. Heywood goes on to explain that this era, the concluding phase of white dominance and literary resistance, found a point of focus in Afrikaner patriotism, which tended to exclude other communities following British aggression in the war of 1899. Black’s keen insight into the forces responsible for the political turmoil in the post-Boer War years is dramatized in *The Dorp*. The generic slant of the novel’s title emphasizes the referential aspect of the South African small-town microcosm. In this regard the British High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner’s remarks about rising Afrikaner nationalism, are interesting. He observed (in Giliomee: 269–270) that the Afrikaner’s activism which was aligned to a political nationalism emanated essentially *from the towns* [...] “It is quite certain” Milner said, “that but for the influence of parsons, doctors, attorneys, law agents, journalists, [...] the country Boers would not be irreconcilable”.

In his chapter on the fictional representation of the Boer Rebellion in South African literature, Kearney (2003: 28–44) discusses *The Dorp* together with Frances Bancroft’s *An Armed Protest* (1918), Leigh Thompson’s *The Lion and the Adder* (1918), F. Mills Young’s *The Shadow of the Past* (1919) and Norman Giles’s *Rebels in the Sun*. He explains that he grouped together these novels because they engage with the Boer Rebellion of 1914 as a significant facet of their fictional projects. According to Kearney, the literary value of these novels is inherent in the degree to which their recreation of historical incidents such as the Boer Rebellion has led their writers to some awareness of the gap between the actual and the ideal society. This point is pertinent to my own discussion of *The Dorp*. My critical examination of the novel is significantly informed by Kearney’s actual/ideal dichotomy. It is a useful instrument with which Black’s insights into the socio-political problems of South Africa in the Union period together with his vision of possible solutions and a better

future for all may be evaluated. In addition to elaborating on Kearney's actual/ideal model, I hope to demonstrate how *The Dorp* evokes the allegorical-referential aspects of the small-town milieu in order to represent post-Boer War society in South Africa.

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

Dorp politics are what we should call in English “parish pump politics,” but they have more significance than our local government scandals because they are complicated by and are representative of the racial problems of South Africa. Against a background of “the black menace,” which so many South Africans fear without attempting to conciliate, Mr. Black shows the embittered enmity of the Boer and English races [...] (anon 1920: 47)

It is not surprising that the superficial divisions of class and other social codes governing small-town life provoked Black's liberal, satirical tendency and inspired

him to poke fun at *dorpeneaars* (townsmen). Much is revealed, however, about more serious issues under the patina of pretence in the typical South African dorp. Black's keen awareness and representation of how, on the one hand, political turmoil in the country impacts on the lives of ordinary people and, on the other, how town culture reflects key aspects of a bigger problem, are the main strengths of the novel.

The Town Council meeting

[...] this meeting of the Unionstad Town Council would have an important bearing on the political future of South Africa, and not improbably modify or even alter the Constitution.

The Dorp by Stephen Black (12)

To return to the novel's action, Black makes his satirical intention clear from the outset. The first chapter, which he mockingly titles "Almost an epilogue", deals with political activity in the town. Growing enmity between the Nats and the Sappers comes to a head at a Town Council meeting in the Town Hall. Black skilfully demonstrates how the Town Council meeting reveals the entire spectrum of small-town social dynamics. Although all the council delegates agree that it is not a political meeting, political polarization associated with nascent nationalism is clearly evident in the proceedings. Patriotic sentiments of townspeople who supported the Boer side during the war are pitted against loyalism. Because feelings run high, this sort of gathering brings out the worst among the so-called respected citizens of the dorp. Decorum is cast aside and the true colours of the participants are revealed.

The Town Council meeting offers a glimpse of exactly how life operates in a typical post-Boer War South African town. Barend Oosthuisen and his friend, Johannes van Ryn, the Mayor of Unionstad, make no bones about their contempt for the jingoes among the Afrikaans-speaking community. Barend finds himself in a predicament when he greets Koos Ferreira, his brother-in law. He tries to explain himself to the mayor who feels that familial sentiments should not be considered. According to the latter Koos and his cronies are "*smeerlappe* [filth] with King George and the Union Jack stuck all over them" (5). The pro-British members of the community (Koenraad du Plessis, P. Son and Jacobus (Koos) Fereira) are equally insulting about their

opponents, whom they suspect of “plotting against the Empire and the Flag” (6). Black points out the irony of the situation when the latter group, who “pride themselves as being leaders of progress and enlightenment in Unionstad” (6), display exactly the same kind of prejudice as their adversaries. In this respect Kearney (2003: 36) proposes that the chief thrust of Black’s satire is that the factions are only superficially different and that, “[l]ike almost all the white inhabitants in general, both sides are guilty of meanness, hypocrisy, double standards, economic greed, pretensions and ignorance”.

Following the mud-slinging incident just before the commencement of the Town Council meeting, a succinct description of the atmosphere in the Town Hall emphasizes the novel’s message regarding the possible broader implications of small-town politics:

A strained feeling of expectancy, almost a hush, was in the air – one felt that some profound sensation was on the *tapis*; that this meeting of the Unionstad Town Council would have an important bearing on the political future of South Africa, and not improbably modify or even alter the Constitution (12).

The above statement suggests that, as chaotic and ludicrous as they are, political activities in the typical South African dorp are small-scale barometers, even determinants, of wider political trends.

Black’s “clever satirical touches”, as Kearney (41) observes, include one O’Flinnigan, the newspaperman whose job it is – following, what he calls, his career path’s “descent into dorp journalism” (11) – to cover the Town Council meeting for the local newspaper, the *Unionstad News*. O’Flinnigan, Kearney says, “cravenly seeks to please all parties in his paper: if he writes an article attacking the Nats, he follows it in the same issue with a disclaimer signed “Sapper” (41). The novel indicates that party members are aware that their association with the capricious O’Flinnigan works both ways:

Du Plessis was studiously amiable to the Celt, whose ready pen he knew could be wielded, either for or against him, with all the superficial skill, ardour and enthusiasm that surface emotionalism inspires, especially when directed by such things as a sense of importance, wounded vanity, alcohol, proximity, hot weather, domestic influence and paid advertisements. Apart from these varied elements, O’Flinnigan’s point of view shifted daily – hourly – it certainly oscillated more rapidly than the solitary Unionstad weather-cock (7).

Dubious personality traits such as surface emotionalism, sense of importance and vanity, however, appear not to be the exclusive domain of the newspaperman. They cause strife and trouble that pervade the dorp in general. They are emotions that, as O’Flinnigan reflects, “[are] directed by the wayward currents of a cruel and exacting society, [...]” (12).

Townsmen’s cruelty is evident from a discussion by the Unionstad Town Council of the black community’s “privileges” (“location” residential areas on the outskirts of South African towns were, as mentioned, the most obvious symbol of racial separatism). The Unionstad mayor introduces this point on the agenda:

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

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

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

“Hear , hear,” cried Ferreira.

But Councillor Willem Achteruit, long-haired and sleepy-looking, angrily rose to his feet and said, “Mr. Mayor, why is Councillor Du Plessis talking about military matters again?”

“Mr. Mayor, I said nothing of a military nature.”

“You did,” shouted his opponent; “You talked about sending ‘non-coms’ to the Kafirs!”

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

In the above passage Black tacitly draws a parallel between the unkempt, illiterate councillor Achteruit (literally meaning “backward”) and the location people who have managed to “style” a petition. Criticism by Kearney (42) of Black’s so-called bet-hedging manoeuvres that fail to give challenging prominence to the lives and aspirations of the non-white citizens of Unionstad is, therefore, unjustified.

The native question is, in fact, brought up on many occasions in the novel, and this makes Black one of the few white writers of the time to show insight into the intricacies of racial discrimination and the possible future implications of avoiding the real issues pertaining to it. Michael Chapman’s (2003: 189) observations about the work of Black’s protégé, Herman Charles Bosman, reveals a common feature of these writers’ liberalism: “[...] Herman Charles Bosman saw little active role in his plots for black South Africans. What Bosman did nonetheless, was to *begin the process* –

hesitantly, at first – of debunking the myth of the pastoral Boer” (my emphasis). With regard to early nineteenth century South African English novels, Kearney (271) observes that even though novelists seem not to be equally aware of “the black cause”, their novels may be thought of as “paving the way to the impressive change that occurs in fiction as one moves to the period just before and just after the Nationalist party victory of 1948”.

Returning now to the Unionstad Town Council meeting, which is effectively used as a vehicle for delivering a searing indictment of town society’s racial prejudice, Black demonstrates how religion and language are appropriated by Afrikaner nationalist ideology for political gain. Amongst the chaos and bickering emanating from those present, the Mayor is pleased at the opportunity that opening the meeting with a prayer in High Dutch offers for, as he states, “ramming the Dutch language down the throats of those who disliked it” (13). The mayor’s observations about those who dislike the Dutch language ring true in relation to the sentiments of British immigrants such as the shopkeeper, Tom Oakley. Oakley is an older generation Englishman who is as openly intolerant of the Dutch as they are of him. He still thinks of England as “home” and dislikes the weather and the customs of his adopted country. Ironically, he calls the Boers “a narrowminded lot of brutes” (32). Black is at pains to point out that both Afrikaner and English townsmen are guilty of this manner of pettiness. When it comes to bias and prejudice there is, he proposes, very little difference between Boers and Englishmen – such as the mayor and Old Oakley.

The General Dealer’s store: the stage where political differences are played out.

The history of this General Dealer’s store, the chief business establishment of the dorp, was noteworthy, for it crystallized the story of Unionstad, if indeed not that of the entire Union of South Africa

The Dorp by Stephen Black (27)

Ned Oakley is utterly unlike his father, Tom. It is mainly Ned’s character that exemplifies Black’s vision of an ideal society from which a new South African identity may emerge. Black juxtaposes the latter part of the narrative, in which an ideal situation develops (symbolized by a romance between Ned and Anita van Ryn,

the mayor's daughter), with the strife and discord in the dorp in the first part of the novel.

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

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

Meanwhile, Afrikaner nationalism is on the upsurge in the country and Tom Oakley's barely concealed, uncompromising attitudes towards the Boers become increasingly intolerable. The latter begin to withdraw their business in favour of the Indian shopkeeper, Mahomet, who, the narrator says, “opens his *winkel* [store] at the opportune moment that [Generals] Hertzog and Botha's political differences were beginning to split the Boers into two bitter factions” (34). Mahomet is a member of the fringe communities of the dorp. So is the Jew, Schlimowitz. Black reveals how they (do not) fit into the rigid social order of small-town culture. The townspeople regard Jews and Indians as intruders and place them just above the blacks and the coloureds on the rungs of the social ladder. They are tolerated merely for their business acumen. Black, however, suggests that when Boer and Briton quarrel, the outsiders, Jew and Indian, walk off with the spoils. Mahomet ingratiates himself with the townspeople by handing out chocolate to the children and by obsequiously

supporting *all* his customers' political views. Black satirically expounds Mahomet's "business philosophy" when dealing with the location clientele:

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

Moreover, Mahomet's frugal habits (his family, who comprise his work force, live on the shop premises) enable him to beat Oakley's prices and sway the loyalty of his customers.

In Unionstad a strong emotional bias prevails when it comes to dealing with Jews. This is confirmed when the Town Council considers the application for the use of the Town Hall by one Horace Hashem's travelling dramatic company. (Here Black presumably draws on his own troupe's experience.) This is Black's cue to take a stab at selective moral attitudes and double standards based on ignorance and preconceived notions, displayed towards so-called "ungodly" entertainment. A member, Oom Kaspar van Koeker protests:

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

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

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

However, when advance payment – a cheque for five guineas – is presented, all objections are withdrawn. Oom Kaspar nevertheless reserves the right for Town Councillors to enter the hall free of charge to "keep an eye on the class of entertainment" (22).

The name (Schlimowitz) of the Jewish travelling salesman, which plays on the Afrikaans word “slim” (clever or cunning), is significant in the context of Black’s critique of the townspeople’s attitude towards aliens. Black shows up townspeople’s patronizing attitudes towards the enterprising travelling salesman, when Schlimowitz for his part takes advantage of the former’s narrow-mindedness. Like Mahomet, Schlimowitz uses racial prejudice in the district to benefit his business. For example, he buys chickens and pigs cheaply from the location people. When confronted with the townspeople’s objections to this type of business, he retorts: “Vy not? [...] “Do you think I put ah label on, marked ‘location fed’? Fowls ain’t like farmers – tank Gord – dey haven’t got any race, or place or politics” (68).

With regard to anti-Semitic sentiments in South Africa, P.J. Furlong (1991: 66) proposes that the debates around questions of anti-Semitism and Jewish immigration into the Union provide an index of the hardening of a general anti-alienism under the Fusion government into more strident forms of *volk* nationalism. Radical organisations such as the Ossewa-Brandwag – founded in 1941 in reaction to the Union government’s support of the British government’s war effort against Nazi Germany – aligned themselves with Hitler’s ideas of racial purity. In this respect Giliomee & Mbenga (300) states: “As a quasi-military organization, the OB, riding on the wave of Afrikaner disillusionment with “British-Jewish” democracy, acquired a mass membership, [....]”.

Meanwhile, the Oakleys realize that their financial predicament should be addressed. Ned suggests to his father that a buyer for the store should be found to prevent liquidation. He approaches the local attorney, Johannes Van Ryn, who holds several mortgages on farms⁸ whose owners owe the shop large sums of money, and asks him to make an offer for the shop. During a visit to Van Ryn, Ned renews his childhood acquaintance with Van Ryn’s daughter, Anita, and is immediately attracted to her. Van Ryn, if only to curb the Indian’s financial greed, takes over the General Dealer’s Store from Tom Oakley on the condition that Ned stays on as manager in order to secure the patronage of the English clientele.

During Ned’s stint as manager farmers and townspeople frequent the General Dealer’s Store not only to procure necessary supplies, but also to exchange political

views. These in-store debates actually bear a strong resemblance to political meetings, indicating that the General Dealer's store indeed "crystallized the story of [...] the Union of South Africa" (27):

When Van Ryn entered the store (the "Sappers" generally assembled while he was at his office) the right became silent and sinister, like conspirators at the appearance of a policeman. They would whisper "*Daar kom 'Jan Bloed en trane'!*" (There comes 'John blood and tears'), this being the nickname which had been conferred on the owner of the sacks over which they held their *Imperial council*" (77; my emphasis).

History touches the dorp: "The miserable business of the Rebellion"

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

"The miserable business of the Rebellion" (as Anita laments; 52) creates yet a deeper rift among the ranks of Unionstad's white inhabitants. For example, the narrator says: [At] the Bioscope the very soul and centre of dorp life, Nationalists and "Sappers" refused to sit in the same rows; [...] Concerts and theatrical performances fell flat, because the two factions refused to go to the Town Hall together" (81). With regard to fictional representations of the Rebellion, Kearney (28) observes: "One realises through these novels how grave a threat the Boer Rebellion posed to the recently forged 'Union'". He goes on to say that the novels demonstrate that "ignorance is regarded [by the Anglophone and often Anglophile authors⁹] as the main reason for

the difference between the two types of Afrikaners, ‘verlig’ [liberal, enlightened] and ‘verkrampt’ [conservative, narrow-minded, i.e. the rebels] [...] The fuelling of feelings of revolt by bitterness against the English is an ingredient in all the novels” (32).¹⁰

Black, however, is careful not to pass judgement or take sides (his aim is, after all, to satirize both political factions’ prejudices). Instead, he shifts the focus to the newspaperman, O’Flinnigan, who may be regarded as Black’s alter ego in the story. Although O’Flinnigan is portrayed as a very changeable, rather superficial, and emotional fellow, he does not openly take sides; he is the “joker”, the satirist. Through the newspaper editor’s character the fragility of the situation in the dorp becomes apparent. O’Flinnigan’s grappling with a personal predicament that may compromise his professional neutrality is an effective narrative device that reveals both sides of the politically polarized situation in the dorp. O’Flinnigan is painfully aware that the Boer Rebellion is a sensitive issue that requires him to tread carefully in order not to disturb the precarious balance in which his position in the town hangs.

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

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

O’Flinnigan knows that his sentimental evocation of the Bible is bound to strike a chord with the Afrikaner townspeople. The Old Testamentary “promised land” mythology was a pivotal aspect of the Afrikaner nation’s ideological tradition.¹¹

O' Flinnigan congratulates himself on his stroke of genius: "He smacked his lips over "Land of Hope and Glory," which the Boers would associate with Moses or Joshua, rather than Elgar, while "milk and honey," he knew, always went down well with the pastoral people" (49).

In contrast to O'Flinnigan, Ned Oakley's conflicting emotions regarding the Rebellion are real and heartfelt. Although he is a pacifist at heart, his British allegiance compels him to join the British forces, which quell the nationalist uprisings in the Free State. Anita too, is torn between her growing affection for the gallant Englishmen and her Boer sentiments. She consoles herself with the hope that all will be over soon. Black does not dwell further on the matter of the Rebellion save to mention that "a sense of dull pain and sorrow" (60) pervades the town and that Ned is loath to speak about it, even in conversation with inquisitive loyalists who want to know more about the fighting. Only to Anita does he reveal how decisively the Boers were humiliated in spite of their courage.

The small town as the cradle of mythmaking: nationalism and religious ideology.

*God gave the law in lightning and thunder,
To that lost nation bann'd and unredeemed –
A pastoral people, whom he swept asunder
Because of Baal they dreamed."*

John Runcie (in *The Dorp* (60))

The epigraph to the chapter describing the aftermath of the Rebellion, is telling for it implies a parallel between the inhabitants of the Unionstad district (the "pastoral people" that O'Flinnigan refers to) and the Israelites. Moreover, the question of idol worship is tacitly evoked. Interestingly, the "idol worship" theme is referred to in all the novels of this study. This idea is linked to the notion that nationalism based on ethnic exclusivity is a form of idol worship. In *The Dorp* Black deconstructs the Afrikaners' "elect race" myth on which they construct an exclusive Afrikaner identity. In other words, he exposes what he views as the folly of appropriating Old Testamentary Biblical doctrine in order to endorse self-serving political ambitions. Johannes van Ryn, the mayor of Unionstad, is a prime example of the Union period Afrikaner nationalist mindset with regard to racial purity. For example, Van Ryn is

pained by rumours of a relationship between his daughter, Anita, and the Englishman, Ned Oakley, because he feels it might impact negatively on his chances of being re-elected as mayor. He muses: “The Nationalists are intensely proud of her beauty and her intelligent personality – they look upon her as a party possession, an argument to be used in the interminable debates on the relative superiority of the two races. It is one more proof that the upright Afrikaners were the Chosen Race” (91).

A discussion between Ned Oakley and Anita van Ryn about politics reveals the extent of prevailing political indoctrination. Anita, who is otherwise portrayed as a sensible girl, displays a somewhat uncharacteristic, sentimental preoccupation with the “Boer cause”. She says, “The future of the Afrikaners lies in their spirit of justice and independence – in Faith, Hope and Charity” (61). Ned’s response is sobering: “Faith in all *but* themselves, Hope of nothing *but* themselves; Charity to all *but* themselves” (61). Ned challenges the Israelitic “promised land” myth by pointing out that, for all their intelligence, they (the Jews) do not have a country. (According to some readings of the Bible the Israelitic diaspora may be interpreted as God’s punishment for the Israelites’ idol worship practices.) Anita’s response echoes Black’s vision for an ideal society based on mutual respect and harmony between Boer and Briton. The Messianic overtones of this message foreground the question of leadership; that only leaders with integrity, maturity, and foresight could achieve this ideal. Anita says: “A great Afrikaner will one day rise with a genius for peace instead of politics or war – another Kruger, but half Dutch, half English, with modern ideas, advanced and as broad as the world” (61). Black’s visionary ideas are voiced through his mouthpieces, Anita and Ned (who are fictional representations of liberal, new-generation members of the Afrikaner and English communities). However, a desperate tone prevails when the narrator describes Ned’s state of mind: “For the moment he felt that there was hope for South Africa; that Nature, by one of its miracles of melodrama, would avert the tragedy that brooded inevitably over them; and at the eleventh hour save this *insignificant white civilisation*, just as the hero is saved from certain death in an improbable play” (64; my emphasis). In other words, the idea of the struggle between the two politically dominant “races” – the English and the Afrikaners – is actually an insignificant one in the face of the ominous presence of the black majority. This is an important theme in the book that will be taken up later in this chapter.

The role of the *predikant* in the dorp

Niki and Viliki stood outside the gate where they would remain for the rest of the service. [It was] The Reverend Francois Bornman's beautiful church built of sandstone and roofed with black slate. Everyone said it was shaped like hands in prayer, but Niki did not see any of that. Often she had tried to work out how exactly the strange architecture translated into hands in anything, let alone prayer.

The Madonna of Excelsior by Zakes Mda (29)

Religion played a vital part in colonial history. In many instances religious evangelism became a part of the “gold, glory, gospel” idea. It provided a convenient pretext for the greed and political ambitions of unscrupulous agents in the colonies. So-called heathens were converted to the Christian faith in order to render them “civilized”. “Uncivilized” conduct often served as an excuse for punishing indigenous tribes into subservience. To put it plainly, the Bible was carried in one hand and the gun in the other.

As mentioned, religious dogma strongly influenced political directions in South Africa, especially during the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, as Stephen Black demonstrates in microcosm in *The Dorp*. (In *Too Late the Phalarope*, Alan Paton develops an even more trenchant exposé than Stephen Black of the mythical origins of Afrikaner nationalism. Therefore, a more detailed discussion of the Afrikaners’ ideological appropriation of Biblical dogma appears in chapter 4.) However, historical records bear evidence that religion has served other, purer purposes. For instance, it was a beacon of hope for colonists on the frontier where everyday life was fraught with perils. According to an entry by B.R. Krüger in *Die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika 1859–1959* (328) the term “doppers” is derived from “dorpeling – die meer behoudende dorpenaar teenoor die meer liberale stedeling [sober townsmen opposed to liberal city-dwellers]”. The latter denomination originated in the Netherlands in 1834 when church fathers protested against nineteenth-century liberalism and the apparent acceptance of liberal ideas by the church. A return to the simple Christian values of the Reformation was advocated and Enlightenment ideas such as religious tolerance were rejected in favour of exclusive dogmatism.

Church office bearers were respected and followed with trusting obedience because of the Bible's promise that the flock that heeds the shepherd's voice will be blessed. A minister of the church enjoyed a privileged standing in the community because he was a man of high calling and education. Because he laid out the Scriptures to his congregation and devoted his life to their spiritual well being, they revered him as God's emissary on earth and held him in the highest possible regard. Such unquestioning adoration, however, has been known to give rise to corrupt practices on the part of unscrupulous members of the cloth. The latter have unfailingly provided social commentators and satirists, such as Stephen Black and Herman Charles Bosman,¹² with raw material. In *The Dorp* Unionstad's resident *predikant* (minister) is a prime example.

Black makes no bones about his contempt for the sort of religious bigotry that Reverend Paulus Nicholas Justus van Heerden practices. He pierces the *predikant*'s pretences and exposes him as a hypocritical opportunist who, having lost sight of his religious calling, abuses his elevated position in the dorp by interfering in matters beyond his duty (such as politics). The narrator's tone, when he introduces the *predikant* to the reader, is charged with irony:

His position in Unionstad not only commanded the respect inspired by a man of God, but it had all the weight as well of a temporal power that was largely political . [...] As a man of God he had the right to appear in any place where order and decency reigned. So far as political significance being attached to his appearance at Van Ryn's [during the political leader, Huysman's reception] he was indifferent. For the Predikant represented "Sappers" as well as Nationalists, and the only other races in Unionstad were religiously beyond the pale. First came the Scotch, represented by the station-master; second, the Irish, represented by O'Flinnigan; third, the English; and fourth, the "*swart goed*" or Kafirs and coloured races generally" (120–121).

The latter part of the quotation touches on a disturbing aspect of religious exclusivity and selective morality, which appears to have been firmly entrenched in the doctrines of the Union period Dutch Reformed church. Black goes on:

The predikant was not concerned with the *swart goed*, or coloured people – one of his deacons looked after a corrugated iron chapel which had been erected for them near the Location. So far as the Dutch Reformed Church in Unionstad was concerned, black or chocolate-coloured *skepsels* were not admitted at all. In fact they knew better than to try to pray to the white men's God in the white man's *Kerk* (123).

Rev. Van Heerden does not attempt to conceal his racist attitudes at all. In an argument with Ned Oakley he proposes: “But the vote is a great privilege; next to man’s skin and the recognition of God, it is what chiefly distinguishes him from the Kafirs” (125).

The predikant’s bigotry extends to other social areas such as culture and language. He is a pompous individual who regards himself intellectually superior to the “ordinary” folk who prefer speaking Afrikaans to High Dutch.¹³ Ironically, Anita, who is both educated and refined, points out the folly of the predikant’s snobbery in the scene where he condescends to the widow Fredericka Viljoen who struggles with the Dutch language. Anita declares: “Language grows like men *mijnheer*, [...] When you take people to another country they change, so should language” (123).

Conclusion: The Ideal

At the climax of Stephen Black’s story about the strife-torn town, Unionstad, Ned Oakley finds it impossible to deal with a situation where political fanaticism dominates every sphere of small-town life. His altercation with the Rev. Van Heerden strengthens his conviction that all hope is lost and that common sense has failed in a community where politics have unnaturally divided everyone into seemingly irreconcilable camps – a situation which, according to O’Flinnigan’s reportage, reflects the national situation. Ned is convinced that a community where fellow men may live side by side in peace and harmony has become an impossible ideal and he decides to leave the town.

At this point it may be useful to return to J.A. Kearney’s discussion of – what he dubs – the “actual/ideal” dichotomy in historical novels. He holds the view that fiction concerned with the “ordinary life of the people” is privileged over history (2003: xv). He is attracted to the manner in which these texts imaginatively explore historical material. With regard to the liberating power of the imagination (referred to in chapter 1) in novels that attempt to re-create historical events, it would appear that what I have called the small-town novel sub-genre of the South African novel is an interesting case in point.¹⁴ According to Kearney, the literary value of historical

novels such as *The Dorp* lies in their capacity to recreate historical incidents and thereby give rise to an awareness of the gap between the actual and the ideal society.

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

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

Far out beyond the dorp, [where] browsing on the stunted bushes, the sheep and cattle were lifting their heads and grazing towards home; farther north Huysmans saw the shapeless and sinister outlines of the location – foul, mysterious and menacing; then his eyes caught the glint of the railway track, running from south to north like a silver thread, symbolic of the civilization that had been implanted at the southern end of the Dark Continent by the sturdy Dutch and from there on carried on by the British; and then finally he turned to the east and fixed his gaze on the horizon where to-morrow the sun would shine for them all. Looking out across the little houses of the dorp, clinging together as if for safety and companionship, he said: [...] “You are wrong, old friend, [...] when you say an Afrikander should give his daughters only to Afrikanders. [...] Oakley is a fine young man, Jan, we should be proud of him ... and Anita's task will not be a difficult one, for she ... loves him (301–2).

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

Black thus relativizes the main thesis of his novel when he indicates that, in spite of reconciliation between whites, the land actually belongs to the natives, and will continue to do so. Elsewhere in *The Dorp* Black's perspective on the "native question" is rather startling. For instance, Ned Oakley, in conversation with Anita van Ryn, raises the reality of the increasing black population majority in the country and the inherent volatility of a situation where the black man's labour is economically exploited whilst his political aspirations are ignored. Ned, of course, cannot realize how prophetic his admonition is: "In twenty years' time they will be at least seven or eight to our one, strong and prosperous with one idea. Give them a Chaka with modern ideas, or a Moshesh ... and where shall we be?" (62). *The Dorp* here significantly reflects the thinking on race at the time: the main preoccupation in the public domain is clearly relations between the Dutch and English "races". This suggests that the future of the country is being determined by this interaction, but discerning voices on the margin would in future years come to articulate how insignificant this phenomenon is in the face of the overwhelming problem of the rights of the black South African population.

Chapter 3: *The Mask* (1930) by C. Louis Leipoldt

Historical Contextualization

To obtain an overall impression of C. Louis Leipoldt's prose writing in English, it is advisable to read the three novels comprising his Valley trilogy (of which an overview follows) together. However, since the action in these novels span a period of almost one century of South African history, I shall provide a brief historical context specifically for the novel with which this chapter is concerned. *The Mask*, the last book of Leipoldt's trilogy, continues the story of the Village (the fictional equivalent of Leipoldt's birth place, Clanwilliam in the Cape Colony) where the second novel, *Stormwrack*, ends.

The storyline of *The Mask* focuses on the political polarization in a South African rural community as a result of the Boer War and the Cape Rebellion during this war. Leipoldt dramatizes the lingering bitterness among the citizens of the Cape Colony as a result of conflicting loyalties. Many colonists remained loyal to the British government while others sympathized with and supported the neighbouring Boer Republic of the Orange Free State. A book in the Clanwilliam Museum (*Clanwilliam: The Town, The District, and St John's Church*), relates the church historian R.R. Langham-Carter's account of the Boer commandos' insurgency into the Cape Colony:

Clanwilliam seemed to be a long distance from the likely scenes of warfare and it must have come as a surprise when Boer commandos began entering the district. These hoped to recruit young men to their ranks and some did join. There was much other help. Food and horses and information on the movements of British units were supplied. And when a party was hard pressed local men could lead them to safety in the Cedarberg woods by paths unknown to the British (29).

Leipoldt was familiar with the tragic consequences of the Cape Rebellion. The early stages of his literary career coincided with this ignominious period in the history of the Cape Colony. As a journalist for *The South African News*, Leipoldt travelled the Colony reporting on the circuit court cases where Cape Afrikaners were tried for rebellion against the British government. The loss of humanity and moral depravity caused by the war made a lasting impression on the young Leipoldt as is evident from the following emotional passage penned as part of his *Bushveld Doctor* (1937)

memoirs (Leipoldt's summary of these events already suggests the ideological position he would take in his novels.):

During the Boer War the republican commandos invaded the Cape Colony and proclaimed parts of it republican territory. The Dutch-speaking farmers in those 'annexed' divisions were told that they were now republican burghers and had to fight in the commandoes. When the districts were re-occupied, these men, who were British subjects and technically rebels, were arraigned before a special court of three judges and were tried on charges of treason, murder and various offences. It was a circuit court, travelling from district to district, and it tried many rebels, with the majority of whom one could not help sympathizing, since they had gone into rebellion, not always because they rebelled against the Government under which they lived, nor because they so whole-heartedly sympathized with the cause of the republics, but because they had been induced to believe that they were by annexation republican subjects and as such bound to fight in the commandoes. The republican leaders who cajoled them into this belief knew perfectly well that every man they recruited in the Cape Colony ran the risk of being summarily shot as a rebel when captured; they themselves, being republican burghers, could claim the privileges of prisoners of war, but their dupes could not reckon on such immunity (81–82).

The historical context of the third novel of the Valley trilogy concerns the social changes following the Boer War. The war and the tragic events surrounding the Cape Rebellion (described in the second novel of the trilogy, *Stormwrack*) caused irrevocable polarization among the members of the Afrikaner community. Afrikaner nationalism was on the upsurge after the founding of the National Party in 1915 with the Boer War General J.B.M. Hertzog as its leader. During this period Leipoldt, who had returned to South Africa after the completion of his medical studies in England, experienced another significant historical event that contributed to even greater political strife in the country.

The 1914 Rebellion broke out when Afrikaners protested against the Union Government's decision to support Britain in World War I (only twelve years after the bitter strife of the Boer War had ended). The Prime Minister, General Louis Botha (himself a former Boer General), led his forces in the invasion of German South West Africa on the behalf of the government. Leipoldt, who was Medical Inspector of Schools in the Transvaal at the time, was asked to join General Botha's staff. He was given the task to examine volunteer soldiers medically, and to act as Botha's personal doctor. Leipoldt also accompanied Botha's soldiers on their search for rebel leaders and treated some of the wounded. It appears that Leipoldt, in spite of being in

government employ, felt great sympathy for the imprisoned rebels. Leipoldt's biographer, J.C.Kannemeyer (2003: 3) proposes that Botha's imprisonment of rebels may have led to feelings of resentment towards the general on Leipoldt's part. He quotes the latter as saying that his political stance was veering towards social democracy and that he hoped that a strong party with these principles might come into being.

Although Leipoldt's political allegiances may appear ambiguous, his sympathy for the rebels' plight is, in my opinion, a human response and should not be read as a support for Afrikaner nationalism. In fact, Leipoldt's earliest polemical pieces reveal his aversion to moral injustice in any form. When he was fifteen years old, he wrote his most prominent polemical piece (cited in Kannemeyer 1999: 97–98) on relations between black and white South Africans in the form of a letter to *The Cape Times*. In this letter Leipoldt calls on fellow South Africans to root out all forms of racial discrimination:

Away with the doctrine that teaches a difference between a 'maaksel' [God's creation, i.e. the white man] and a 'schepsel' [creature, derogatory term for black people]. Efface the distinction and join the hand with your black comrade ... Teach it to your children's children ... and proclaim it to the nations that South Africa no longer recognizes a bar between two races of man ... If our ages of chivalry are past, we have at least the age of honour ... Let us be worthy of that honour, and let us show our worthiness by carrying out the principle of equal rights and equal freedom for black and white alike.

Introduction

The passage above hints at the fact that Leipoldt's formative years were anything but conventional. His European family background, home schooling by his eccentric parents, his love, and knowledge of nature, medicine, and cooking were contributing influences to his liberal-cosmopolitan worldview. Leipoldt's ideological position comprised a heavy emphasis on the value of a broad Western cultural tradition of inclusivity, which he felt was being eschewed by the Nationalists with their isolationist and segregationist focus on a separate own identity.

Leipoldt's first volume of poetry, *Oom Gert Vertel en Ander Gedigte* (1911), which focuses largely on Afrikaner experience in the Boer War, earned him the distinction

of one of the first major poets in Afrikaans. Together with the contemporaneous poems of Eugene Marais, Totius and Jan F.E. Celliers, Leipoldt's anthology became an important literary platform for Afrikaner nationalism. Although Leipoldt poignantly portrays the Boers' suffering, it is unlikely that his poetry was meant to promote Afrikaner cultural iconography. It appears that Leipoldt's Boer War poems were co-opted, as it were, by the nationalists. In my opinion the poetic imagination is bound to respond creatively – irrespective of the poet's political affiliation – to the kind of human suffering that occurred during the Boer War.

As mentioned, Leipoldt – as a young journalist reporting on the Boer War – did not shy away from criticism of the Boers when he considered them wrong. Therefore, a broad view of Leipoldt's work is favoured as opposed to a focus on individual works such as *Oom Gert Vertel* in which the young Leipoldt's response to atrocities committed against the Cape Rebels is reflected. In his introduction to the 1911 edition of this volume, Leipoldt attempts to explain the ambivalent emotional response that war memories are wont to elicit: "It is perhaps better that we no longer talk or sing about such things. But there is another side: and it may be, that among my readers there are those that cannot easily forget, no matter how soon they can forgive" (1921: x). Taking a broad view of Leipoldt's work, Peter Merrington (2003: 33) comments: "[W]hile much of his lyrical poetry is quintessential to the Afrikaner national canon, his allegiances were far more complex and varied".

When Leipoldt started writing, the Afrikaans language was in the early stages of development. Since the age of eleven years, Leipoldt had written contributions for periodicals such as *Die Huisgenoot*. As a result of having travelled and read widely, Leipoldt became fluent in many languages. His oeuvre bears testimony to his close acquaintance with world literature and literary trends. For example, the germ of inspiration for Leipoldt's English prose triptych, *Gallows Gecko*, *Stormwrack* and *The Mask* apparently was his interest in Thomas Mann's novel *Buddenbrooks* (1901). In *De Volkstem* (20 November 1926), the daily newspaper to which Leipoldt contributed, he praised Mann's style. In a letter (cited in Kannemeyer 1990: 480) to F. V. Engelenburg, the editor of *De Volkstem*, Leipoldt reports that he had started a novel about two Cape families, "á la Mann's *Buddenbrooks*", an indication that he modelled his Valley trilogy on Mann's novel.

Leipoldt unfortunately did not see his English novel trilogy in print. He was unable to find a publisher and the manuscripts were shelved until their recent publication. The second novel titled *Stormwrack* was published in 1980 to coincide with the centenary of Leipoldt's birth. In 1994 the Johannesburg newspaper *Mail and Guardian* confirmed the importance of this novel in the canon of South African literature when it nominated it as one of the top twenty South African works of all time (Gray, S. Introduction to Leipoldt 2000: 16). The editor, Stephen Gray, republished *Stormwrack* in 2000 together with the first novel titled *Chameleon on the Gallows*. In the introduction Gray (5) explains why he chose this title for the novel:

Leipoldt called this work “Gallows Gecko” because he meant that title in an amusing way to refer to his Afrikaans *Galgsalmander*, which takes the pithy nickname of the eponymous hero as its title. But “Gallows Gecko”, the novel, is by no means a direct transcription of his novel *Galgsalmander*, nor is “Gallows Gecko” a very catchy or euphonious title in English.

Stormberg Publishers subsequently published the entire Valley trilogy (edited by T.S. Emslie, P.L Murray and J.A.J Russel), including the final novel, *The Mask*, in 2001. In 2006 a separate edition of *The Mask* appeared as a result of collaboration between Emslie, Murray and Cederberg Publishers.

The following succinct synopsis by Leipoldt (cited in Kannemeyer 1999: 543) of his three English novels known as the Valley trilogy, suggests that a study of any of the novels included in the triptych should be conducted in relation to the wider framework and overall import of the whole:

These three are separated and independent but closely related books that are designed to describe the history of a small semi-rural community in the Cape Colony from 1820 to 1930. Each book is complete in itself, but the three together are necessary to outline the environment and to explain the changes that have taken place in the course of a century in the relations between the English and Dutch speaking element in the community.

Leipoldt's insight into the changing complexities of South African society and the root causes of the increasingly fraught relations between English and Afrikaans speakers in South Africa, is explicated in a chapter titled “Cultural Development” that

he was commissioned to contribute to *The Cambridge History of the British Empire* (1936). In this chapter he states:

The cultural development of a country in which two peoples of the same race, but with different ideals and different standards of value, live side by side, necessarily presents so many points of comparison and contrast that a true estimate of its progress is difficult. [...] Differences in language, outlook, education and history still tend to give an impression that the cultural development of the two sections is divergent rather than parallel (844).

In the above article Leipoldt provides a well-researched overview of South African cultural history. In the same manner (albeit fictionally), his Valley trilogy boldly sweeps over the South African historical landscape. It maps out critical shifts in the socio-political situation spanning approximately one century, from the early eighteenth-century beginnings of the Cape Colony to the 1920s. This study is concerned with the referential meaning with which Leipoldt imbues demographic shifts in society, for example from farm to town and, in particular, with the way in which physical and social changes in the South African small town itself allegorically invoke the negative effects of historical events such as the Boer War on a national scale. In this respect editor and literary historiographer Stephen Gray (1980: 249) proposes: “Leipoldt’s intention was a grand one: he meant to revise contemporary views of history which he felt were working against the closer union of the factions of the society of his own times. He meant his work allegorically; he meant it to have an application to the way South African society was going” (1980: 249). In the introduction to *Chameleon on the Gallows* Gray (2000:12) states: “[Leipoldt] meant to show that there was an alternative version of history to the Trekker myth of white superiority, held so strongly in the north, for the story [...] is really that of [people] who chose not to trek, who stayed behind to fight for a bigger, better South Africa”. Leipoldt’s views – dramatized in the novels of his trilogy – of the ideal society that might have come into being – is important in terms of Kearney’s actual/ideal binary. In this respect Merrington (36) notes:

Running directly counter to Preller⁽¹⁵⁾, all of Leipoldt’s sympathetic characters in his trilogy argue that the Transvalers, the burgers of the erstwhile Transvaal Republic in the north (and equally the burgers of the Orange Free State Republic), are a negative force behind the divisive and racist nationalism of the 1930s precisely because they elected to leave the British-ruled Cape Colony a century before, and in doing so chose (according to Leipoldt’s argument) to abandon the wider moral and intellectual horizons of the Western European nineteenth century. The viewpoint against the Trek, which is a

narrative perspective that sets Leipoldt squarely against both the Afrikaner intellectual establishment and popular sentiment of his day, is expressed in each of the three novels in the trilogy.

With regard to the fictional representation of the liberalism that was so characteristic of Leipoldt's moral universe, it is telling that the setting of the Valley trilogy – distinctly recognizable as Leipoldt's birth place, the Clanwilliam district of the Cape Colony (as the passage below tells) – is given a generic slant through the unspecific names by which Leipoldt (2000: 97–98) denotes the region. The district is called the Valley and the town, the Village:

The Village was composed of a number of houses, set in a straggling line with their backs towards the main road that led across the hills to the north, and with their fronts turned towards their gardens, with the River at the extreme northern end. To the east, or to the right as one entered, lay the *native location*, a collection of thatched huts and small mud-plastered shanties set in an expanse of almost barren veld, whatever greenery there was being the result mostly of self-planted wild tobacco shrubs whose straggling branches were almost constantly in flower. To the left, at the other extreme of the Village, the tributary river on which the Village was built ran into the great *River of the Valley* itself, the confluence of the two streams being marked by one large expanse of white wind-tortured shingle.

The Village had been founded a little less than half a century before, at the time of the first British occupation of the Colony, when the district had been divided off from the neighbouring and up to that time much larger district, and had been given its own landdrost. Where the Village now stood had been a flourishing wayside farm, whose owner had been reputed to have made a fortune by stock buying and, if tradition could be believed, by trading in human cattle and by devious methods even more blameworthy. The Governor had found the place to his liking, christened it in honour of one or other of his overseas acquaintances, and decided to build on it a hunting lodge or drostdy which could serve as an official mansion for the magistrate (my emphases).

The second and third novels of the trilogy, *Stormwrack* and *The Mask*, are both set in the Village. Chronologically, *The Mask* represents the final and dramatic climax of the saga that takes the reader on a historical journey through a century of life in the Valley. This journey commences in the first book, *Chameleon on the Gallows*, a novel Stephen Gray dubs “one of the most clearly explicated historical novels ever written in South Africa” (introduction in Leipoldt 2000: 11). The plot deals with the trials of the character Amadeus Tereg, who travels to the frontier of the Cape Colony in search of a new life for his family. His journey is simultaneously spiritual in that he wishes to escape his “tainted” past as the Company’s official hangman. A

fortuitous family bequest enables him to change his name to Everardus Nolte and to acquire a tract of Crown land in the Valley where a contingent of British settlers has been eking out a living for some time. Leipoldt's version of the early beginnings of the Valley settlement closely follows official historiography of the Clanwilliam settlement. It was established as a result of an official Company decree by order of which the remotest parts of the Colony were to be populated as part of a buffer zone against enemies (Langham-Carter 1993: 25).

In *Chameleon on the Gallows* Leipoldt suggests that settlers who have survived the harsh conditions of the region are men and women of true grit and integrity.

References to these families as “aristocrats” evoke a nobility of heart and gentility of spirit. According to Leipoldt’s vision these pioneers of character put their stamp of civility and honest toil on an unforgiving landscape thereby recreating, as it were, a community of colonial landed gentry that does the empire proud. In this respect Peter Merrington (2003: 43) proposes:

In the field of literary history, it is almost commonplace that an emphasis on heritage provided thematic material and narrative dynamics for the novel, from the eighteenth century well into the early twentieth, dwelling on topics such as family lineage, bequests and inheritances. [...] Leipoldt’s trilogy follows suit, exploring the fortunes of several families as a microcosm for the political life and social fabric of South Africa from the 1830’s to the 1920s.

The settlers that Nolte encounters in the Valley are people of mettle who are also kindhearted and hospitable. The Quakerleys, the Seldons, Rekkers, Van Aards and Rev. Johann Uhlmann and his co-workers of the Neckarthal mission station open their hearts to the newcomer and his family: “What it could the Valley gave to Everardus Nolte. It gave freely, generously, ungrudgingly, with the courtesy and hospitality innate in a community so primitive in its conception of communal obligations” (Leipoldt 2000: 35). The novel holds up the gentle Cape valley as an ideal location where Afrikaans and English citizens learn to live and co-operate in peace, and where inclusiveness and even rights for the black population are mooted by the enlightened German missionaries. (It is interesting in the light of the history of Europe and the rise of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s when these novels were written, that the most enlightened force in the Valley is German. This naturally reflects Leipoldt’s own family background.) Even when Nolte’s “dark secret” is revealed, the magnanimity of the Valley inhabitants comes up trumps. The novel ends on a high note with an

optimistic picture of a South African community in which man and nature exist in harmonious union. The union in marriage of the schoolmaster, Pierre Mabuis, and the widow Priem, symbolically clinches Leipoldt's liberal ideal for a South Africa that *could have come into being*.

However, Leipoldt's vision of a liberal potential for South Africa was not to be fulfilled. The utopian atmosphere in the Village at the end of *Chameleon on the Gallows* is rudely shattered in the second novel of the trilogy, *Stormwrack*. With regard to Leipoldt's vision for an ideal society, Leipoldt's initial title (*The Garden*) for the second book is meaningful. It refers to Andrew Quakerley's sprawling town garden – a picture of edenic beauty and harmony. Its rich diversity of indigenous plant species symbolizes the multicultural character of the town where British and Dutch settlers and freed slaves live and work happily side by side. However, tragedy strikes when Quakerley's garden is completely sacked (the “stormwrack” of the title) by soldiers during the Boer War. He is heartbroken and dies of shock.

Even more tragic, is the bitter rift created in the Valley community as a result of conflicting political allegiances. Many of the villagers have remained loyal to the imperial government and have demonstrated their loyalty by celebrating Queen Victoria's birthday every year. Now, even families are torn apart as some of the Valley sons join the “enemy”. The romantic atmosphere of *Chameleon on the Gallows* stands in stark contrast to Leipoldt's realism towards the end of *Stormwrack* and in *The Mask*.

The manuscript of the third novel of Leipoldt's Valley trilogy is untitled.¹⁶ Leipoldt alternately referred to the text by the titles, *The Mask* and *Idols* in his diary. It appears, however, that he was still contemplating a suitable title for the novel. Just after he had finished the manuscript, a diary entry dated 29 May 1929 reads: “Must have a good title for it” (Leipoldt's pocket diaries. Special Collections, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town). The title, *Idols*, is a direct translation of the title of his Afrikaans dramatic work *Afgode*, the novel being a reworking thereof. Leipoldt was unfortunately unable to find a publisher for the novel. In fact, the London literary agent, Curtis Brown, turned down all the novels in the trilogy sequence (pocket diary

entry dated 22 February 1931). One can only guess that a lack of authorial attention to the finer aspects of editing may have influenced such a decision.

The manuscript of *The Mask* is, however, by no means sloppily put together. Having compared this manuscript with the 2001 Stormberg publication of the novel, I have opted rather to use a copy of the manuscript for the purposes of this study. The editors of the latter edition claim to have left the manuscript as intact as possible. Close inspection, however, reveals that this is not entirely true. Not only have these editors neglected to correct minor spelling and grammatical errors made by the author, but they have also added some of their own. As far I could ascertain, Leipoldt made only one serious continuity error with regard to a character's surname in the manuscript: Eric Seldon, Santa's suitor, becomes Eric van Deren in the latter half of the manuscript.

Notwithstanding Leipoldt's misgivings about the title of the final novel in his trilogy, it accurately encapsulates his ideas about South African small-town culture. *The Mask* allegorically reveals how communal society is not only irrevocably divided, but also how the political turmoil in the country impacts on the moral fabric of townspeople. It demonstrates in microcosm how the tenets of the nascent nationalist ideology rooted in narrow Calvinist doctrine compel citizens to conform to restrictive, stereotypical codes of living; in other words, *to wear masks*. A rigidly conservative social milieu, however, tends to warp and corrupt the human condition and the natural order of things. Living a life of pretence in order to conform to prescriptive societal norms is shown to find an outlet in and spawn all sorts of moral aberrations. In this manner Leipoldt makes the Village a telling example of what is happening on a wider scale in the South African society in the 1930s. The title, *Idols*, that Leipoldt considered for the novel derives from the “broken idol” theme of his Afrikaans drama, *Afgode*, on which he fashioned the story of *The Mask*, as stated above. Vantloo’s character in *The Mask* is modelled on that of Gys van Stal in *Afgode*. Leipoldt shows both men coming to a fall. Van Stal’s wife, Aletta, laments at the end of the drama that he is a “gebroke afgod” (fallen idol: 58). This remark is pertinent in the context of Leipoldt’s overall message, which links the images of *masks* and *broken idols* to his critique of small-town culture, and, by implication, of white South African culture.

The unmasking of small-town culture

Belligerent man: Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?

Mr. Webb: Oh, yes everybody is – somethin' terrible. Seems like they spend most of their time talking about who's rich and who's poor.

Our Town by Thornton Wilder (25)

The Mask is the story of how the idyllic life in the Valley has changed since the time when Everardus Nolte experienced the warm embrace of neighbourliness and hospitality when he joined a small brotherhood of settlers. Calamitous political events in the country have since completely changed the character of the community, just as it had destroyed Andrew Quakerley's garden. In *The Mask* the small-town milieu is symbolic of the sad remains of an ideal. Ayah Minah's petunias in petrol cans on the stoep of her derelict little house in the dorp location area are symbolic of the end of the utopian era (28). Leipoldt's trilogy, therefore, may be seen as a *retrospective* representation of Kearney's actual/ideal model. In the culminating novel of his trilogy Leipoldt contrasts the moral degradation associated with the dorp to the utopian pastoralism of the first and second books. In this respect *The Mask* prefigures novels such as Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* and Herman Charles Bosman's *Willemsdorp* in which the small-town milieu is utilized to critique the moral decay of the broader society.

The Mask demonstrates how posturing for social standing and the holding up of appearances have become a way of life in the Village. This is evident at the outset of the novel where the reader is informed that the main character, the lawyer Elias Vantloo, lives in "the *most imposing* house in the Village" (Leipoldt, undated manuscript: 1; my emphasis). The narrator goes on to explain the social pecking order in the town:

That was as it should have been, for Elias Vantloo was, if not the *most important* inhabitant of the Village, at least one of the three who might be looked upon as *aspiring* to that dignity. The magistrate, by right of office and authority as the direct representative of the government, took *precedence*; the Dutch Reformed parson, who lived in the rambling old Dutch parsonage, part

of which was falling to pieces because the congregation saw no need of spending money upon it while there was talk of building an entirely new manse, came second, but after these Elias had no *competitor* who could dispute the third place with him (1; my emphases).

With subtle irony Leipoldt mocks the social caste system in the town. He also takes aim at the hypocrisy of the collective dorp mindset with regard to turning a blind eye to the shady doings of the rich and powerful. Vantloo is the “monied townsman” to whom J. M Coetzee (1988: 78) refers in a discussion of the Afrikaans *plaasroman*. The latter, he says, has achieved an advantage over the peasant farmer “who has barely emerged into the money economy, and who in order to win the capital that will place his farm on a competitive footing in the new Darwinian economy, has to mortgage his own land [...]”

Elias Vantloo’s money power and political connections have apparently raised him above criticism in the town. He is untouchable, an idol. Leipoldt, however, demonstrates that Vantloo is an impostor and a false idol. His apparent lack of background is significant in the wider context of the Valley trilogy. His family tree, for instance, cannot be traced to the first settlers who represent the Valley “aristocracy” – gentle folk who possess social breeding and conscience. In this sense Vantloo is the embodiment of the serpent in paradise. His character symbolizes all that is responsible for the corruption of the idyllic world of the Valley. The townspeople’s attitude – they only “whisper” about Vantloo but never directly question him – implicates them as aiding and abetting his infamous rise in the town’s social structure. In other words, Vantloo’s shenanigans remain unchecked *because* they are *tolerated* by townspeople who, on the one hand, benefit from them and, on the other, embrace a false idol as a result of uncertain economic times and political turmoil in the country.

Vantloo’s character is introduced for the first time in *Stormwrack* (1980: 55–57) where the narrator describes how it came about that two Templar Lodges were established in the town – one for the location people and another, the Ebenezer Lodge for “European teetotallers”. (The Good Templars was an international temperance society, which used the Freemasons as an organizational model. They established lodges, where members met in order to promote temperance in society. Vantloo’s

eminence in the organization would lend him moral stature in the town. Note the references to a “Cause” and a “mission” in the quotation below. In South Africa the Good Templars established a separate branch of “True Templars” for black people, hence the two lodges in the same town (Minde 1975: 2.)

In the passage below some interesting clues are given as to the beginnings of Vantloo’s life of masquerade and pretence – how he has shrewdly ingratiated himself to the townspeople and how they are inclined to allow his money to speak for him.

[T]he ‘Ebenezer’ [templar lodge], functioned more steadily. Its chief protagonist was a young attorney’s clerk, one Elias Vantloo, already regarded as a very astute and clever youngster who had risen from obscure beginnings to a position which qualified him to be looked upon as one of the inhabitants who counted. No one quite understood how he had managed to do so. He had matriculated at an early age from the Village school before the time of Mr Mance-Bisley’s headmastership, gained a scholarship, and gone away. He had returned to take up a position as head-clerk in van Deren’s office, and it was whispered that he was really the junior partner in the business. He was a deferential, treble-voiced young man, good-looking and well-dressed, liberal and persuasive, and a favourite on the tennis court where he played a good game. He now manifested a keen interest in Mr Silverbottom’s mission, acted as secretary to the committee, and was elected one of the Lodge officers. Mrs Mance-Bisley and Mrs Uhlmann found his assistance invaluable, especially when it was accompanied by a generous donation towards the funds of the two Lodges. The gold filigree for the regalia was expensive, and the first subscriptions did not entirely cover the expenses. Mr Vantloo came forward with an offer to bear the whole expense, which was thankfully accepted. Henceforward, he was an important and influential member of the Lodge, and Mr Silverbottom felt that in him the Cause had secured a worthy defender and a staunch friend.

In addition to his other character flaws, Elias Vantloo is a pretender and a hypocrite. Because he wants to conceal his drinking habit, he advertises his so-called commitment to teetotalism. The dubious moral foundations of town society is foregrounded by the fact that the anomalies of Vantloo’s character cause no more than a few eyebrows to be raised in the town. The villagers’ indifference is equalled only by Vantloo’s self-importance. The narrator explains:

To an outsider Elias Vantloo’s loyalty to his lodge was one of the puzzling characteristics of a personality which represented many *anomalies*. Convivial by temperament, a lover of good material things, and a man of the world, Elias was the last person one would have thought capable of riding a hobby to the death of a harmless habit. Everyone in the Village and the district, with the exception of those few who, like him, had sworn to forsake alcohol, took wine or brandy in moderation. Some of the farmers made wine and distilled their

own brandy; Elias himself held mortgages on farms whose owners depended on their vineyards for their livelihood. That the Village knew, but *no one dreamed of questioning* the elder's sincerity in denouncing strong drink as the root of all evil. Perhaps because he had known, from the first, that *no one would delve too deeply into matters in which public interest found no great pleasure in speculating*, Elias had persisted in his policy of teetotalism (37–38; my emphases).

This passage illustrates the morally bankrupt, self-seeking character of Vantloo who, while being a staunch pillar of the lodge, conceals his drinking habit. In this regard Leipoldt exposes not only Vantloo's, but also the villagers' hypocrisy.

Elias Vantloo manages to turn every situation in his favour. As mentioned, the reader meets him for the first time in *Stormwrack* (1980: 157). In this novel Vantloo is a young attorney. When martial law is proclaimed in the district, one of the older inhabitants of the district, Martin Rekker, is mistakenly imprisoned for treason. His friend, Andrew Quakerley, approaches Vantloo for legal assistance. Vantloo is insensitive to the tragic human situation of a Valley stalwart being held by British forces for the sole reason that a Boer commando has abducted his son. Vantloo is quick to remind Quakerley that legal assistance will cost him money. It is telling that Quakerley acknowledges a sort of indifferent reciprocation between them. The narrator comments: "Quakerley did not like the young attorney, but he recognized his cleverness, and Elias was indebted to him for many small favours" (157). The reader is left in the dark as to the nature of the favours mentioned and cannot but feel a shadow of doubt creeping over Quakerley's presumed clean record in the Village. His attitude is nonetheless disappointingly in tune with the rest of the Village folk when it comes to Elias Vantloo.

Another example of Elias Vantloo's opportunism is mentioned both in *Afgode* and *The Mask*. His offering transport services to the British forces in the Village may perhaps not have been frowned upon as such (if one considers that sentiments in the town at the outbreak of the Boer War was predominantly pro-British), had Elias not since made an about-turn in his political affiliations and become a *volksvriend* (friend of the *volk*) as Gys van Stal's partner, Simon, claims in *Afgode* (11). (The character of Elias in the novel is modelled on that of Gys in the earlier play.) In *The Mask* the

narrator explains what a political turncoat Vantloo is and how smoothly he has changed political direction to suit his own ends:

In the pre Union days he had been regarded as one of the upholders of the South African party, which had supplanted the Bond party of pre-war days, and after the consummation of that hasty and ill-advised fusion of diverse interests and opposing ideals, which he had wholeheartedly supported and championed on the public platform, he had remained staunch to his party until his shrewdness had made him discern that the political vanes were veering in another direction. Then he had boldly declared himself for Nationalism, for he was wise enough, and knew his people well enough, to prognosticate what such a slogan would mean in a district which but ten years before had been engulfed in the throes of a struggle which had left scars that were still painful and sensitive. Through his influence the district had returned one of the first Nationalist candidates to parliament, and the pendulum had swung over so far that his old party no longer possessed the vestige of a hope of regaining the seat (4–5).

What is significant, however, is not so much Elias's course of action *per se*, but the hypocrisy with which he pursues it. He has no scruples about cheating and lying when opportunities to increase his wealth beckon. Of course, being a man of learning, he manages to hoodwink the villagers by hiding his true nature under a mask of rhetoric, outward respectability, and feigned humility. The narrator remarks: "In his youth he had learned the advantages of disguising his feelings where such a disguise was of benefit to him, and now, in his prosperity, he still aped a humility he really despised but on occasion found exceedingly useful" (3). Also "useful" are his connections through marriage with one of the best families in the district. Considering his wife's family fortune, Vantloo regards this union as an "investment". At the death of his mother-in-law, a trust fund is established for her grandchild, Santa – a trust that Elias is the unworthy custodian of, as we learn later in the story.

The first part of *The Mask* contains a pervasive ironic tone, which is one of the strong points of the novel, stylistically speaking. Leipoldt's irony ranges from understatement and subtle mockery to acerbic sarcasm and barbed satire. Initially, his mocking tone is somewhat constrained when he "enlightens" the reader about the social pecking order and the basis thereof in the town: first, the magistrate because he is the direct government representative in the town, second, the Dutch Reformed Church parson and third, Elias, the town attorney. However, Leipoldt's contempt for a hierarchical social structure based on conventional perceptions of "importance" –

which he emphatically states was “generally agreed” (1) upon and collectively accepted as an unwritten rule in town – is, although mild at this point, clearly evident. When he proceeds to expound Elias’s background and the underlying features of his character, Leipoldt’s tongue-in cheek critique picks up momentum. For example, the narrator says: “Elias had bought the house of old Martin Rekker, the church house of the family in the Village, and had found it a profitable investment, if only as *an advertisement*” (3; my emphasis). Vantloo’s *modus operandi* to establish himself as an esteemed member of society, is sarcastically commented on as follows: “[H]is time had been occupied solely in consolidating his business and social position, and by his assiduous devotion to his office he had gained the reputation of being a *solid man*” (4; my emphasis). The narrator goes on to say that Vantloo’s “humble attitude” (5) had won him the townspeople’s appreciation. “No wonder”, the narrator sarcastically comments, “that the district regarded Uncle Elias as one of its principal men, one of its most trusted and beloved citizens, fashioned of good gold without a carat of alloy, Christian in his humbleness of spirit and exalted in his conception of public and communal duty” (5–6). The “pure gold” imagery evokes the Biblical golden calf which, for all its metallurgical purity, was a mere idol. On a broader scale, this image suggests that the Nationalist leaders are false prophets and idols and that the people follow them because they have lost their moral equilibrium and are too confused and anchorless to be critical.

Vantloo, as mentioned, secretly indulges in alcohol. He claims it to be medicine prescribed for high blood pressure by a Cape Town doctor and attempts to conceal the smell with peppermints that he keeps handy. Ayah Mina, the housemaid, knows this because she is the one whose duty it is to fill up the “medicine bottle”. Elias assumes that her inferior position will prevent her from speaking out against her master. A strong sense of dramatic irony prevails when insights about Vantloo’s true character is shared with the reader. The latter is positioned as an informed bystander as opposed to Vantloo’s unsuspecting victims and oblivious admirers in the Village. In this manner the scene is set for the dramatic climax of the novel.

It is ironic that Ayah Mina eventually sets the process in motion to bring Vantloo to a fall. She is filled with a deep hatred of her master (“black to his heart’s core” (42), she mutters, as she cleans his medicine glass) for he is the father of her child, Sophy,

who is dying of consumption in the location – a situation that his position in the town does not afford him to pay attention to. The reader learns: “She, Mina, knew more than people did, and she knew that the old master was very indifferently good, even though the old mistress made an idol of him and thought that butter would not melt in his mouth” (11). It turns out that Vantloo’s wife, Maria, has known about the child all along, but has kept quiet for her husband’s sake. His daughter, Santa, however, idolizes him to the end. Her disillusionment is, therefore, the greater when she discovers her mistake. Santa is highly intelligent, but when it comes to her father, she remains in a state of irrational denial. Her delusional adoration prevents her, a qualified doctor, even from recognizing the smell of alcohol on his breath. She embodies the collective mindset of the villagers who do not comprehend that they are nurturing a serpent in their bosoms, an idol unworthy of their adoration.

Through Santa’s character the reader gains insight into the origins and nature of the sort of blind worship that *allows* leaders with feet of clay to cheat and dupe their followers under a *mask* of pretence. In many respects Santa’s attitudes reflect the townsfolk’s whose value systems have gone awry as a result of socio-political indoctrination. Santa’s inherent naiveté and immaturity render her receptive to the nationalist political indoctrination that is starting to gain a foothold in the town (and the country). Leipoldt makes a particularly strong point about the dangers of political propaganda through Santa’s character. He demonstrates that it is not only simple, uneducated folk who are susceptible to exploitation by political leaders. Santa’s impressionability is rendered ironic by her having trained overseas and her habits such as smoking, drinking and wearing fashions common among “emancipated” women of the time. The narrator observes that Santa is – in her misguided devotion to her father and mollycoddling, patronizing attitude towards her mother (who is in fact the stronger character) – “serenely oblivious to the fact that she was *typifying the community’s attitude* towards the two” (16; my emphasis). Leipoldt suggests that Maria Vantloo, in contrast to her daughter, is the more “emancipated” woman. Her history in the Valley district is interesting for the way that it reflects the powerful impact of ideological repression on the private lives of citizens (such as Maria Vantloo):

Almost thirty year ago she had come to live in the Village, a newly wedded woman, with a disposition that was not quite that of which her neighbours had

cordially approved. They made allowances, Old “Thunder” Gerster’s daughter had been educated at a girls seminary, somewhere near the capital, and had learned to play the piano, to talk English fluently, and to adopt English fashions and manners. Formerly that would have been accounted so much in her favour, but feeling had hardened in the Village by the time she had married [...] Many things had encouraged that lamentable change, small things for the most part, but none the less of importance from the point of view of those who disliked the old ways of life and thought and whose nationalism was as intolerant as it was crabbed. The church had been responsible for something of this change of feeling, even though its influence had been exerted comparatively late. It had introduced a stern Scottish Calvinistic outlook upon daily life, looking askance at pleasure, anathematising dances as of the Devil and denying the cultural value of aesthetic factors, encouraging a distorted and extravagant conception of sex. In such an environment Maria Gerster’s worldly vivacity found few defenders, and soon languished for want of sympathetic support. In time Mrs. Vantloo *acquiesced* in public opinion. She *conformed* in all things [...] (15; my emphases)

In contrast to her mother whose broad liberalism is based on a long tradition of genteel pioneering stock, Santa’s character embodies the negative influence that ideological indoctrination has exerted on her generation. This aspect comes to the fore in long-winded conversations with Mr Mabuis (the grandson of old Blikkies Mabuis, a *Stormwrack* character) who is on a visit from Argentina where he lives. He is a man of the world who regards the political situation in South Africa with objective maturity. In a most diplomatic manner, he attempts to convince Santa that her extreme patriotism amounts to foolishness. Mabuis is Leipoldt’s mouthpiece in the novel. This is evident when he insists that racial segregation is an *unnatural* state of affairs. Santa does not agree and Mabuis accuses her of merely “repeating the catch phrases of the day” (50) in her defense of an ideology that has appropriated not only the Afrikaner’s cultural aspirations (issues such as language) but also religion. His condemnation of a church, which preaches neighbourly love, but allows itself to be manipulated by racists, is quite severe. Mabuis says: “[H]as the church ever practised what it preaches? Does it not give its members, the entire community here, a daily lesson in hypocrisy and dissemblance? [...] The church exists here as a potent factor in stifling discussions and inculcating intolerance [...]” (61).

Mabuis advocates conciliation and toleration between races and stresses that they should learn from past lessons. Leipoldt’s ideal for a peaceful South Africa, as explicated in *Chameleon on the Gallows*, is slipping away as Mabuis confirms: “You

had the status of a civilized community, [...] You had a constitution, here in the old colony, which gave every man an equal chance. Now you have a constitution that favours one class, one race, at the expense of the other. That is hardly civilised" (53). Leipoldt uses the character of Mabuis to suggest a link between the disastrous effect of the divisive Boer War and the intolerant policies that have followed in its wake. Mabuis further points out the calamitous effect of the war on farmers, many of whom have become poor-whites:

The farm, like so many others in the district, had suffered severely during the war. The homestead had been looted, and part of the outbuildings destroyed but long before it had become the scene of some of that desultory skirmishing between the regular forces and the Boer commandos which had brought so much misery to the district, it had been sold, and since then it had had more than one owner. It was now occupied by a holder who found it extremely difficult to get a living out of the exhausted wheat lands, which had never been properly replenished with the necessary fertilising constituents that generations of tillers, for a hundred years or more, had extracted from the soil by successive crops (54).

Mabuis is a perceptive observer who puts his finger on all the economic (and ethical) ramifications of the ideologically driven politics of the post-War years in South Africa. For example, he points out the foolishness of antagonising the black work force in the country through racism (128).

Santa stubbornly remains unmoved by Mabuis's mature arguments. His views are those of a liberal-minded gentleman whose egalitarian outlook not only reflects a deep human understanding, but also are startlingly visionary. As mentioned above, Mabuis represents the author's ideas. The former's voice unfortunately goes unheeded. Mabuis returns to his adopted country knowing that there is nothing that he can do to change the direction that white South Africans have chosen. His farewell words to the Burens are prophetic:

[...] and if any time I find that you are thinking of reforming yourselves and putting you house in order, why then I might perhaps come over to lend you a hand. *But I am afraid that day is far off.* You are too self-centred yet, and you are still too personal in your likes and dislikes to try and find out what you have in common with the other man. That is not the way one develops a country [...] (131; my emphasis)

Leipoldt suggests that the exclusive and confrontational nationalistic ideology that has caused the Great Trek and the establishment of the Boer Republics in the North has

culminated in the Boer War, the “stormwrack”. This has given rise to the intolerant attitudes highlighted in *The Mask*, which would dominate South African politics in the twentieth century, so that the ideals embodied in the early parts of the trilogy – ideals of tolerance, civilization, accommodation and compassion – are shown to be defeated and submerged, ultimately jeopardizing the integrity, morality and future of South African society.

Conclusion

As mentioned, the character of Mabuis in *The Mask* appears to articulate Leipoldt’s views. Unfortunately, in the fictional as in the historical world his insight and foresight are not appreciated. The villagers’ attitude to Vantloo’s hypocrisy, their blindness to the basic rottenness of his character is a symptom of hypocritical self-indulgence for their part – an impulse to believe what they choose and to forget and ignore what could be an inconvenient moral indictment. More important are the broader implications of townsmen’s foibles, in other words Leipoldt’s allegorical suggestion that moral confusion is caused by political-historical turmoil in the country. Leipoldt is at pains to present Santa as the product of nationalist indoctrination, the extent of which is all too clear in one of her responses to Mabuis:

“Sentiment does count, Mr Mabuis,” interrupted Santa vigorously. “Especially with us. If you knew more about your country, you would agree with me that it is sentiment – pure sentiment and nothing else – that has brought about the present state of affairs. It is because the old party, your party – for I suppose you are SAP, for only a SAP would talk like that – made no allowances for sentiment, because it thought, like you, that something else counts, [...]” (62).

Leipoldt’s tacit denunciation of Santa’s lack of vision – and, by implication, everyone in the town who has helped put the National Party in power and who overrides issues of morality and integrity by radical, patriotic “sentiment” – is obvious.

Leipoldt’s English novel triptych, therefore, presents an absorbing portrait of a period, which deserves attention for more than its historical interest alone. He skilfully exploits the allegorical-referential possibilities of the small-town microcosm to comment on the country as a whole. He exposes the problems in South African society with regard to the actual/ideal dichotomy developed by Kearney in his work, *Representing Dissension: Riot, Rebellion and Resistance in the South African English*

Novel (2003), by showing how his ideal of a liberal, tolerant, compassionate society was debased to a divisive, intolerant society, driven by prejudice and resentment.

In other words, Leipoldt's Valley trilogy is a "writing back" of history, tracing the historical road to the unsatisfactory present of the 1930s. In this sense, Kearney's model of an ideal society is represented in a retrospective manner. However, it appears that Leipoldt does not completely discount the possibility of a return to the ideal that he has sketched in the first novel of his trilogy. In this regard, Maria Vantloo's forgiveness of her husband's sins may be seen as emblematic of conditions of possibility for the future. In the renouncement of personal pride and in unconditional love and forgiveness, lies the kernel of restoration – as Maria explains to Santa: "You never loved anyone but yourself, child. [...] both pity and admiration came from your own pride [...] You will learn to love, and then you will understand. Not now. Now you only judge, and your charity is not great enough to make you a judge" (127). The redemptive power of acts of unconditional forgiveness (such as Maria Vantloo's) in a morally sick society is a key theme in Alan Paton's novel, *Too Late the Phalarope* of which a discussion follows.

Chapter 4: *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) by Alan Paton

Historical Contextualization

The historical information that follows serves as a context for the novels *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) by Alan Paton and *Willemsebos* (the censored and uncensored versions were posthumously published respectively in 1977 and 1998). These novels focus on a more formalized institutionalization of racial segregation. Therefore, a brief history of the emergence of an official apartheid policy in South Africa is offered in order to contextualize issues addressed in the novels.

As mentioned, it is historically incorrect to say that Afrikaners introduced the racial ideology of “apartheid” (*separateness*) when the National Party came to power in 1948. The flippant adage often bandied by Afrikaners, “We did not invent apartheid, we merely perfected it”, is actually close to the truth. Towards the end of the nineteenth century British officialdom in South Africa was increasingly under pressure from the mining companies to change their policies with regard to the indigenous population. In this regard S. Terreblanche (2002: 251) states:

After the discovery of gold [...] the mercantile and financial elite shifted their financial interests from the Cape to the Rand gold mines. This meant that the Cape liberals gained a vested interest in the mining industry, whose profitability depended on cheap African labour. On the basis of this material interest the elite changed its view on the economic and political role of the African peasantry. The mining revolution transformed the Cape economy quite drastically, and the growing demand for migrant labour undermined the peasant economy in the Eastern Cape and began to turn [this region] into a labour reservoir. At the beginning of the 1890s the mercantile elite [...] supported [mining magnate and Cape prime minister] Cecil John Rhodes's Anti-squatting Act (1892), his Franchise and Ballot Act (1892), and his Glen Grey Act (1894) in the Cape parliament. The purpose of the anti-squatting and Glen Grey acts was to hasten the process of proletarianisation in the Eastern Cape. [...] [I]nstead of remaining loyal to its liberal ideologies, the mercantile and financial elite became the champion of the retribalisation of the Africans in ‘native reserves’ under the control of mostly corrupt chiefs, who now had to fulfil the double function of social control in the ‘reserves’ and collaboration with white employers.

When South Africa became a Union in 1910, black sharecroppers on farms were becoming a problem for many white people. Whites believed blacks were a threat to their survival on the land (Terreblanche 2002: 248). A plethora of laws, heeding white farmers' concerns, followed. The Natives' Land Act (1913), for example, defined

areas of black ownership outside of which blacks could neither purchase nor rent land. Following the land expropriation in terms of the Natives' Land Act, there were serious concerns about *beswarting van die platteland* (the blackening of the countryside) – a demographical feature evident in the population ratio in country towns and the neighbouring black location areas. In an essay titled “A taste of freedom: capitalist development and the response to the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union in the Transvaal countryside” (in Bozzoli, B. (ed.): 133) Helen Bradford comments:

Many of those evicted fled to the neighbouring reserves, which also provided much of the casual farm labour. But they had grave problems in obtaining land there: according to a Lydenburg chief in 1930, ‘There was no room in the locations for the natives who had been chased off private farms.’ Poverty was certainly the norm in these overcrowded reserves.

(In Leipoldt’s *The Mask*, discussed in Chapter 2, the medical doctor, Santa Vantloo discovers that diseases such as tuberculosis result from unsanitary, overcrowded conditions when she treats Ayah Mina’s child in the dorp location.) Louis Botha, the Union Prime Minister (cited in Giliomee: 312), commented on this problem: “The natives have come to our towns unprovided for. They have picked up our diseases, and have found our white civilisation a curse to them ... The Native question is [...] large”.

The rapid urbanization of poor Afrikaners who often resided in mixed slums, gave rise to widespread fears of sexual activity across the colour bar. According to Miemie Rothman, a pioneer of women’s writing in Afrikaans and a leader of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroueevereniging (a Christian women’s organization involved in welfare work among poor whites), the survival of the Afrikaner volk depended on becoming “[...] consciously white and consciously Afrikaner” (in Giliomee: 344). The creation of an exclusive Afrikaner national self-consciousness had also been the credo of the all-white, exclusively male Afrikaner Broederbond founded in 1918.¹⁷

Black people’s views about the strengthening of racial segregation in South Africa, is evident from the writings of Sol Plaatje (cited in *English in Africa* 1997: 4(1): 85), one of the founder members of the African National Congress. He comments (in an article titled “The mote and the beam: an epic on sex-relationship ‘twixt white and black in British South Africa” in *New York: Young’s Book Exchange*, 1921):

History does not condemn Christianity because some of its adherents were criminals, nor the Puritans because some of them burned witches. But white writers on this subject are apt to condemn us all for the sins of a few; and, in doing so, they forget that before the European invasion there were no prostitutes in South Africa. Again, they forget that members of their own favoured race whom white juries refused to convict, have saddled hundreds of native women with nameless babies and we do not blame clean-living whites for the sins of the erring few. Moreover, they are too apt to overlook the fact that fancy salaries, free education and preferential treatment have not succeeded in keeping white people's fingers off other people's goods.

I do not for a moment deny the existence of a criminal class among Natives, especially along the Witwatersrand gold reef. Every race in the world has its criminals, and no human effort has yet succeeded in ridding society of crime; but, in South Africa, thousands of Natives have been sent to prison with hard labour for such innocuous peccadilloes as "walking on the pavement," [...] "looking at the shop windows," "riding in the ordinary railway carriages" instead of in the native compartment – which is not always found on the train. *All these are artificial crimes manufactured by the authorities, [....]* (my emphasis).

Increasing fears of the possible tainting of the Afrikaner's racial purity led to the 1927 Immorality Act no.5, which forbade sexual contact between whites and blacks. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 extended the 1927 act to lawfully forbid all marriages between whites people and those not deemed white. The Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 outlawed carnal intercourse between a white and a non-white (Giliomee 2003: 504). In this regard Alan Paton's biographer, Peter Alexander (1995: 264) comments:

It was becoming increasingly clear that the rightward lurch of the white electorate in 1948 was not an aberration, but the beginning of an era. And that apartheid era was marked by a rapid strengthening of the laws dividing South African whites from other South Africans. Once [Hendrik] Verwoerd took up the post of Minister of Native Affairs on 18 October 1950, the complex of interlocking laws designed to keep power in the hands of whites was rapidly strengthened and systematized.

Before the Mixed Marriages Act could be enforced, the race group of every person had necessarily to be established in law; hence the Population Registration Act of 1950, which required every citizen to register his or her "race" with humiliating tests designed to expose persons of mixed race claiming to be white.¹⁸ People of different races were also not allowed to live in the same rural or urban areas. The Group Areas Act of 1950 uprooted many thousands of Indian, black and coloured people and

moved them to new, often underdeveloped and inferior areas (such as town location areas).

Hermann Giliomee (2003: 505) details the miseries resulting from legal prosecution under the race laws: “[P]olice used binoculars, tape recorders and cameras, burst into bedrooms, and instructed district surgeons to examine the genitals of suspects”. (This sort of police action is severely mocked by Herman Charles Bosman in his satirical novel, *Willemsdorp* of which a discussion follows in the next chapter.) Giliomee (505) continues: “The offenders caught included not only ordinary people but also church ministers, school teachers, and even a private secretary to a prime minister. By 1985 some 11 500 people had been convicted and many more had been charged. Facing widespread ostracism, some white offenders committed suicide or left the country”.

In his article titled, “Legality and criminality in Alan Paton’s *Too Late the Phalarope*”, Patrick Lenta (2008: 68–69) explains why Paton disapproved of the National Party’s legal entrenchment of racial discrimination in South Africa after it had come to power in 1948:

As an upholder of the British liberal tradition, Alan Paton was a passionate and lifelong supporter of the Rule of Law. His understanding of the Rule of Law as a principle designed to safeguard citizens against arbitrary governance resembles the formulation of that principle by the English constitutionalist A. V. Dicey: the rights of citizens are to be determined by legal rules rather than by arbitrary decisions of state officials; no punishment is legitimate other than that resulting from the decision of a court of law, and all individuals, regardless of rank and status, are subject to the law.

Lenta (69) continues to describe how Paton’s second novel represents his disillusionment with the way that the National Party’s policies entrenched ideologically inspired violations of the Rule of Law:

In his first novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), written immediately before the National Party’s ascent to power in 1948, Paton’s support for the legal system as animated by the ideal of the Rule of Law is reflected in his reverential depiction of the figure of the judge and the courtroom. *Too Late the Phalarope*, written between 1951 and 1952, shortly after the National Party’s election victory in 1948, does not reflect a similar respectful attitude towards

the legal system. It was becoming increasingly apparent to Paton that he National Party victory had inaugurated a period that he would come to characterise as “the grave erosion of the Rule of Law”. His second novel reflects his growing conviction that South African law’s enforcement of the norms of Afrikaner Calvinism – what he would later refer to as “the monstrosity known as Christian Nationalism” – generated an opposition between the legal system on the one hand and the Rule of Law on the other.

If one examines *Too Late the Phalarope* in the light of Kearney’s actual/ideal orientation with regard to the study of historical novels, it appears that Paton was acutely aware of “the gap between the actual and ideal society” (Kearney 2003: xv). I shall demonstrate that the value of Paton’s second novel lies not only in the historically accurate¹⁹ manner that Paton presents the collapse of the ideal and the concomitant human drama resulting from ideological hegemony during the Union period in South Africa, but also how he envisions its restoration.

Introduction

But a town, like a text and any human artefact, can be read if the reader knows the language; and [...] when deciphered tells a dark tale of conquest, racial hatred, and displacement. Alexander, P. 1995. *Alan Paton: A Biography* (1)

In my view, liberal principles of the kind Paton espoused have helped make possible the near miraculous rapprochement of black and white in South Africa

Driver, J. 1994. “Curmudgeonly courage”. *Times Literary Supplement*. 2 September (22))

The belief that man’s most important possession is his nationality, that nationality is the only thing that gives meaning and purpose to his life, is entirely irreconcilable with the Christian belief that man’s most important possession is his humanity, and that his dignity comes, not from his nation, but from the fact that he is made in the image of his Creator? You can’t have it both ways.

Paton, A. 1976. “South Africa on a collision course”. *The Argus*. 25 Aug. (25)

Sol Plaatje's reference above to *artificial* criminalization in an *unnatural* society is an apt background for my discussion of Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope*, since the novel dramatizes the human consequences in a society, which *manufactures* artificial crimes and artificial criminals. The novel paints a picture of human and personal tragedy and lays bare the moral depravity and hypocrisy of the Union period South African society.

In her 1996 article titled, "Rereading Rooke and Paton: *Mittee* and *Too Late the Phalarope*", Margaret Lenta (89) observes that Alan Paton's biography by Peter Alexander (1994) has suggested that it is time to reconsider the author's work. She goes on to say that Alexander's book reveals the complexity of Paton's personality, the combination of strengths and weaknesses, as well as an at times painful personal history that contributes to his character as an author. Alexander's biography does indeed offer meticulously researched commentary on and information about Paton's life and work that is invaluable to the researcher.

Alan Paton was born in Pietermaritzburg, in the British colony of Natal, on 11 January 1903. He was one of four children whose lives were dominated by their authoritarian Scottish-born father, James. The Paton children were seldom allowed to leave the house except for walks in the countryside accompanied by their father. Alan's love of South African birdlife was kindled on these trips. Ornithology became a lifelong hobby for him. Austin Roberts's guide, *Birds of Southern Africa* was to play an important part in his second novel *Too Late the Phalarope*. Paton began his working life as a teacher, first at Ixopo High School and then at his old school, Maritzburg College. In 1928 he married a widow, Dorrie Lusted with whom he had a fraught union. Throughout their marriage Dorrie remained torn between her late husband's memories and her loyalty to Paton. It is likely that Paton modelled the character of the sexually cold Nella van Vlaanderen in *Too Late the Phalarope* on his wife. In this respect Alexander (266) states: "One of the chief themes of the novel was one of the chief failings of Paton's marriage: the lack of communication which he felt plagued his relations with Dorrie".

In 1935 Paton and his wife moved to Johannesburg after he was appointed headmaster at a Johannesburg reformatory for black juvenile offenders. He held the post at Diepkloof Reformatory for 13 years and it was during this period that he wrote his

famous novel *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948). The novel was such a success here and abroad that Paton was able to retire in order to focus on his political ambitions and his writing. Since 1949 the idea of his second novel *Too Late the Phalarope* had been germinating in his mind. However, it would take some years to complete and publish the novel. In the year of its publication (1953), Paton co-founded the South African Liberal Party and was involved in its service until it was disbanded in 1968 largely due to the Political Interference Act, which prohibited multiracial party membership. Paton subsequently devoted himself to writing (Alexander 1995: 1–392 *passim*).

In the light of the overall critical neglect that Paton's second novel has suffered, Alexander's reference (269–270) to reviews that *Too Late the Phalarope* received at the time of its first publication in 1953 in America are valuable. He says:

When an author's first novel has had rave reviews, a second book is often coldly received, as if the critics felt a need to reassert balance. Paton must have feared this would be his fate after the astonishing success of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, but he need not have worried. [...] [T]he American reviewers sang in chorus. 'Alan Paton's Second Masterpiece', announced the New York *Commonwealth*, and its critic, Harold C. Gardiner, went on to describe the new novel as 'even more impressive than *Cry the Beloved Country*'. The *Los Angeles Times* agreed: 'New Alan Paton Novel Surpasses Early Work', it proclaimed. 'A Novel of Universal Meaning', said the *Christian Science Monitor*, describing the book as telling 'in terms of simple dignity and great power the ageless story of man's conflict with evil'. 'Paton Novel a Mountain Among Foothills of Current Fiction', was the *Washington Star*'s headline, and it went on to call the book 'beautiful' and 'heartrending'.

Alexander (270) cites a negative review by Alfred Kazin in the *New York Times Book Review*, which described Paton's style as too "biblical", and his characters as "types". Kazin, however, was in the minority. As far as South African critics are concerned, Alexander comments that they "recognized the extent to which this was a book aimed specifically at Paton's homeland". "It is a book to be read here and now, especially in South Africa", wrote Geoffrey Durrant in the *Natal Witness*, "a work of great penetration and honesty, a genuinely serious and moving book in a time when serious writing is regrettably rare" (in Alexander: 270).

After the publication of his second novel, Paton turned his attention to politics and the fulfilment of his dream to devote himself entirely to the liberal cause in South Africa. This may have been a contributing factor with regard to the book's slow descent into

near oblivion, despite its initial warm reception. J.A. Kearney discusses *Cry, the Beloved Country* at some length but does not mention *Too Late the Phalarope* in his book, *Representing Dissension: Riot, Rebellion, and Resistance in the South African English Novel*. Michael Chapman (2003: 119), however, discusses the novel briefly. He regards the novel's examination of psychological repression and inter-racial sex in a small Afrikaner community as part of "a sharp reaction to Afrikaner dominance".

I am convinced that Paton's second novel firmly locates him, together with Leipoldt, Black and Bosman, as an important dissident writer in South African literature. André Brink (1983: 10) defines the latter as follows:

[The dissident writer's] struggle is not just *against* what is evil in the Afrikaner, but *for* what he perceives to be his potential for good. In other words, it is not just a struggle aimed at the liberation of Blacks from oppression by whites, but also a struggle for the liberation of the Afrikaner from the ideology in which he has come to negate his better self.

Although praise has generally prevailed in the reception of Paton's work, it should be mentioned that certain detractors, especially Marxist critics, have taken a sceptical view of his liberal-humanist "power of love" philosophy. Stephen Watson's criticism in his article "*Cry the Beloved Country* and the failure of liberal vision", for instance, is based on Terry Eagleton's ideas with regard to the main tenets of the novel genre, specifically, with what the latter calls the novel's "internal dissonance" – a problematic situation that, he says, the rest of the text seeks to solve. Discussing *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Watson (1982: 35), with an apparent disregard or dismissal of the peculiarly Christian premise of Paton's liberalism, rails against Paton's suggestion of love as the solution to the novel's internal dissonance: "Of course", he says "this is useless; the problem has not been caused by a lack of love in South Africa, and therefore to prescribe an antidote of love for it is simply naïve and beside the point".

In a footnote Watson continues:

Paton creates exactly the same form of mystification in his later novel, *Too Late the Phalarope*. Apart from the fact that it also uses a spurious form of tragedy (the Immorality Act is no substitute for the gods), Paton also sees the problem here as being a tyranny of fear and a lack of love. He does not seem to realize that the rigid Afrikaner Calvinist mentality that he portrays in this novel (and which is exemplified by Pieter van Vlaanderen's father), its lack of warmth and spontaneity, its many obsessional traits (such as love of discipline and order, which manifests itself in strict parents and, particularly, in authoritarian fathers)

operates as a defence mechanism among the ruling whites, especially the Afrikaners, against a basic national anxiety, arising from a basic national insecurity. In other words, the Calvinist gives evidence of an obsessional and authoritarian national character in an attempt to compensate for an abnormally high level of anxiety originating in a deep sense of national insecurity. His rigid nature, therefore, is due as much to his *political* position in South Africa as to any supposedly inherent traits. But in *Too Late the Phalarope* Paton, through the mouth-piece of Tante Sophie, suggests that the tragedy might have been avoided if sufficient love had been forthcoming. This might, of course, have been true. But in so far as the novel is a study of Afrikaner Calvinism in general, it is to be doubted whether the love, the true love as opposed to the twisted, which he advocates is any solution at all. Once again Paton is attempting to solve what is at root a *political* problem through personal love (43).

Paul Rich's criticism echoes Watson. In an article titled "Liberal realism in South African fiction, 1948–1966", the former remarks that *Too Late the Phalarope* is a move away from the themes of Paton's earlier work. In this novel, Rich (1985: 60) proposes, "Paton explores the psychological landscape of the white settler mind". Rich, however, levels criticism against what he dubs "the depoliticized hope" (58) of Paton's novels. In a similar vein to Watson, he opines that in 1948 when Dr. D.F. Malan defeated the United Party and led the Nationalists to a deepening of racial and class cleavages in the South African political system, the ideals – "the moral rhetoric of Paton's own ethical liberalism", as Rich (62) disparagingly terms it – that Paton championed in his novels, looked "increasingly irrelevant".

In a discussion of *Cry, the Beloved Country* Kearney (2003: 188), on the other hand, voices a compelling defence of Paton's liberal ideals and the relevance of his fictional themes to the realities of South African society. He counters Paton's detractors in saying that the author's vision is "too practical and wide-ranging to be satisfied with nostalgic pipe-dreams". With regard to criticism formulated from a retrospective position – against the supposed insufficiently radical stance towards the political status quo of early politically dissident writers such as Leipoldt, Paton, Black and Bosman – it may be valuable to consider the situation that Kearney (190) describes as "the dilemma of white liberals who would like to be able to help, but whose wish for reform is undermined by their fear". Paton who (after the publication of *Cry, the Beloved Country*), was constantly followed by the Security Police, remained true to his liberal principles. He nevertheless must have experienced fear for his and his family's safety.

This situation led, as Kearney notes, to Paton’s “indignation at the way blind fear becomes a ruling principle of life for many whites” (190).

Watson, Rich and other sceptics could not predict that the sustained moral leadership of liberals such as Paton would be a strong influence on the change of heart and attitudes that eventually brought about a new dispensation in South African politics. For Paton the devout Christian, the reconciling and saving force of love were not only a personal but also an ideological tenet and, therefore, appropriate as an instrument to address the “internal dissonance” (referred to by Watson and Eagleton) of lovelessness in the novel. Liberals such as Paton set an example for individual conciliatory gestures of personal love such as Nelson Mandela’s forgiveness of his wrongdoers. Paton unfortunately did not live to see the fulfilment of his vision for South African society. He died in 1988, a few years before Mandela was released from jail. It is, however, safe to assume that Paton would have approved of the proceedings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (headed by Archbishop Tutu, with its Christian framework of confession and absolution) for the possibilities for redemption and healing that it opened up in a morally sick society. In this regard Carol Tyler Fox proposes (in her article titled “Punishment, forgiveness, and the Rule of Law: a vision for conflict resolution in Alan Paton’s *Too Late the Phalarope*” 2005: 702) : “[...] reading *Too Late the Phalarope* now, a half-century after its initial publication, one perceives that in it Paton was advocating an approach which has recently been taken – and which has in fact improved the chances for harmony in twenty-first century South Africa, and potentially elsewhere in the world”. Paton’s liberal vision for a common society is nowhere more poignantly dramatized than in *Too Late the Phalarope* with its enduring message of hope and salvation.

In her article mentioned earlier, Myrtle Hooper (29) examines the manner in which texts may “invite ethical responses” and quotes Michael Marais as saying: “politics begins as ethics”. This ideal appears to be pertinent to the South African situation where, as Hooper (28) says, the fabric of civil society has broken down over the years. This has occurred through and has manifested in poverty, unemployment, disenfranchisement, segregation, and dislocation. The legislation of morality removed responsibility for ethical action out of the domain of ordinary people and lodged it in the tainted hands of the state. Through the evocation of small-town society during the

Union period in South Africa, *Too Late the Phalarope* (and the other novels selected for this study) exposes the personal effects of a morally repressive society and seek ultimately to elicit an ethically responsible response from the reader.

The novel's universal message that possibilities for forgiveness and restoration should never be ruled out is powerful. Paton's autobiography (1988: 47) states that the direct inspiration for *Too Late the Phalarope* was a newspaper report about a wife's forgiveness following her husband's trial for the contravention of the Immorality Act in 1950. He writes as follows about the poignant aspects of the court proceedings:

What moved me deeply was that the policeman's wife sat in court throughout the trial, and by her demeanour showed that she had forgiven [her husband.] [...] Acts of infidelity are as common in South Africa as in any country in the world, and such acts of forgiveness are also not unknown. But the forgiving of a white man – and especially an Afrikaner – by his wife when the act of infidelity had been committed with a black woman has an emotional and moral quality about it that is unknown in any other country in the world.

The tragedy surrounding the criminalization under the Immorality Act of Paton's protagonist, police lieutenant Pieter van Vlaanderen's adultery with a coloured woman, and his wife Nella's subsequent forgiveness, was partly inspired by the trial described above (although, as mentioned earlier, *Too Late the Phalarope* also contains echoes from Paton's own troubled life story).

Margaret Lenta's observations regarding the need to reconsider historically neglected works such as *Too Late the Phalarope* are in agreement with my own. In the mentioned article, her critical focus, however, falls mainly on feminist issues emanating from Paton's supposed misrepresentation of the coloured woman, Stephanie, with whom Pieter van Vlaanderen commits adultery in the novel. In criticizing male attitudes in an historical novel, Lenta uses what Cherry Clayton (1985: 32) dubs "the hindsight of modern feminism [which] often speaks from a position of enlightened strength which is more rhetorical than real". I shall argue that Paton has not deliberately silenced Stephanie's voice, but that he demonstrates her misfortunes as an inevitable by-product of the hegemonic social structures of small-town politics. As Andries Wessels (2000: 250) proposes in a discussion of Pauline Smith's *The Beadle*, a gender situation may be used in a broader sense "to highlight or illustrate the power structures at work [...]"'. In fact, Paton's reference to "a good deal of lightness"

(14) in Stephanie's complexion, is a further indictment of the bigotry of the white sector of a society of which her colour reveals her to be a product. Therefore, both the characters Pieter van Vlaanderen and Stephanie (and, ironically, the racist patriarch Jakob van Vlaanderen) are tragic victims of ideologically repressive racial attitudes in a typical Union period South African town.

In *Too Late the Phalarope* Alan Paton develops (similar to Black and Leipoldt) a trenchant critique of the “unnatural” character of the morally twisted society in the South African small town – and implicitly, in the broader national context. Through the evocation of nature (the phalarope is a migrant shorebird) in the title of the novel, Paton draws from the harmonious natural world *outside* the dorp to endorse his criticism of the unnatural, morally warped society constructed by man *within*. Paton counterpoints (as Paul Rich (60, 64) suggests), the psychological landscape of the white settler mind and the breakdown of social values, on the one hand, and the natural world of fauna and flora as a repository of harmony and Edenic calm and a focus of moral cohesion, on the other. Incidentally, Old Quakerley’s beautiful garden in *Stormwrack*, the first novel of Leipoldt’s *Valley* trilogy, symbolically evokes a similar naturalistic ideal that is destroyed by political upheaval, in that case the Boer War.

The small town – the stage of tragedy

Paton’s fictional examination of the artificial nature, the “constructedness” of the ideologically repressed South African dorp community, is skilfully supported by the structure of the novel, which resembles a Greek tragedy. Alexander (265–266) comments on this interesting stylistic device:

Too Late the Phalarope is an elaborately and consciously constructed novel, which moves to its conclusion with all the inevitability of a Greek tragedy. And, in fact, it shares a number of links with Greek tragedy, from the heroic protagonist who is brought down by a tragic flaw, to the use of a narrator who constantly comments on the action and predicts what is to come.

The most notable aspect of Paton’s careful structuring of the novel is how he skilfully utilizes his narrative frame in order to develop his critique of societal structures of repression (I shall return to this aspect later).

Paton's evocation of the town as a stage is implied on the novel's structural level, which is reminiscent of a Greek tragedy. For example, a "stage set" effect is created by the description of Pieter van Vlaanderen's walks to his office – he always uses the same route. This effect is further enhanced by the one-dimensional description of the street front of Van Vlaanderen's house ("with a narrow closed-in stoep, and coloured diamond panes at each end of it, set into the wall"(15)).²⁰ More importantly, a symbolic parallel is achieved, i.e. the foregrounding of the small town as a microcosm of the broader society. The small town is the "stage" on which the social drama of the Union period in South Africa is set. Ultimately, these effects underline the ideological claustrophobia of the nation's collective mind.

Paton's fictional locale, Venterspan, is a typical South African town in layout and character. When the story begins, police lieutenant Pieter van Vlaanderen is on a night patrol in Pretorius Street, the street leading to the black location (seemingly suggesting that a dorp policeman's troubles are most likely to emanate from that direction). The narrator, Aunt Sophie, emphasizes the small-scale dimensions of the town's layout as well as the darkness (which – the reader soon learns – is emblematic of the town's "heart of darkness"):

[...] there are no lights [in Pretorius Street] because there are no lights in any streets in Venterspan. The only lights at all, except those in the houses, are in Van Onselen Street, the tarred road that goes north through the grass country to Johannesburg, and south to Natal and Zululand, and these lights came from Abraham Kaplan's hotel, the Royal, and Matthew Kaplan's store, the Southern Transvaal Trading Company, and Labuschagne's service station. (11)

In the tiny town of Venterspan, Pieter van Vlaanderen is a public figure ("a man of authority in the police, second only to the captain (25)") that dare not let his guard down because his every move is watched in the "fish bowl" of the *platteland* dorp. Aunt Sophie emphasizes the town's physical isolation when she mentions that it is a thoroughfare for travellers to other places. In the following passage she metaphorically extends this image in a juxtaposition of moral stagnation, on the one hand, and the freedom of the liberated mind, on the other, when she compares the traffic moving *through* the town to the Sunday traffic to the Dutch Reformed church in Van Onselen Street:

And there is another Sunday traffic too, that travels the big road that runs north to Johannesburg and south to Natal and Zululand. They bang the doors in the stillness, and start up their cars at the service station with a great noise of engines that can be heard in the church, and is to some a cause of anger and affront. White women get out of the cars there, laughing and smoking, wearing black glasses as though they were afraid of God's sun; and they wear trousers too, green and yellow and plum-coloured, such as no white woman should wear in a street, where all the black people watch to see what you wear and do (67-68).

This passage deftly exposes the underlying hypocrisies of the *platteland* mindset, fictionally personified by Aunt Sophie, who is Pieter's aunt on his father, Jakob van Vlaanderen's side. She is a physically disabled spinster who lives with Jakob and his wife on their farm in the Venterspan district. Sophie cares deeply for her nephew, Pieter, whose gentleness of character appeals to her. Paton depicts the character of Aunt Sophie as a woman with intuitive sensibilities as well as an "outsider" point of view due to her physical otherness. She says: "[...] in my heart I am like any other woman, and because I am apart, so living apart and watching I have learned to know the meaning of unnoticed things, of a pulse that beats suddenly, and a glance that moves from here to there because it wishes to rest on some quite other place" (9). However, Aunt Sophie, for all her endearing qualities, is an ambivalent persona. Her worldview oscillates between criticisms of the follies of neighbours, on the one hand, and displaying the same prejudices they do, on the other. Through her character's emotional turmoil (she experiences occasional pangs of guilt indicating that she may be aware of the apparent incongruities of her character), Paton foregrounds the moral schizophrenia of Sophie's social milieu and demonstrates how difficult it is to break out of a culturally conditioned mould. The above passage implies that knowing what other people wear and do (even while attending a church service!), is the sick sort of curiosity that exemplifies townsfolk's busybody mentality. The irony that Aunt Sophie is probably more aware than the black people (mentioned in the quotation above) of what transpires on the town streets, underlines the moral ambivalence of her character.

In *Too Late the Phalarope* townspeople's meddling in each other's lives reaches a dramatic climax after Pieter van Vlaanderen has had sexual intercourse with the coloured woman Stephanie. He receives a scrap of paper on which the sentence, "I saw you" is scribbled. This propels him into a frenzy of fear because, as a police officer, he is acutely aware of the grave implications that the possible public disclosure

of his contravention of the Immorality Act may have. It turns out that the note has nothing to do with Van Vlaanderen's nocturnal meeting with Stephanie. After a bad day at work on that same day he had gone to the hotel to have a drink with his cousin, Anna. He had not wanted to go home because his family were away on vacation. The note, Pieter finds out later, is the work of the prankster, Japie Grobler who has seen him and Anna at the hotel!

Small town and farm

The cultural tensions that appear to exist between South African farm and dorp/small-town societies are dramatized in *Too Late the Phalarope*. Pieter van Vlaanderen, who lives in the dorp, and his patriarch father who presides over the *familieplaas*, represent this dichotomy in the novel. However, Paton is at pains – in his critique of moral prejudice – to point out that both farm and dorp societies are implicated in broader hegemonic power patterns marked, as Belinda Bozzoli (21) suggests, “by the uneven capacity of the white ruling classes to subordinate black culture”.

Paton exposes not only the ills of small-town society, but also skilfully debunks the mythical foundations of the frontier tradition associated with the South African farm milieu. Pieter van Vlaanderen, the protagonist in *Too Late the Phalarope*, was born on the Van Vlaanderen *familieplaas* where his patriarch father, Jakob, still holds sway. As mentioned, in the South African frontier tradition as well as in the fictional representation thereof in the early *plaasroman* tradition (of the Afrikaans literary canon, in particular), the farm occupies an “elevated” position. In the opening pages of *Too Late the Phalarope* the narrator puts the reader in the picture: “The whole town was dark and silent, except for the barking of some dog, and the sound of ten o’clock striking from the tower of the church. The mist had gone, and *the stars shone down* on the grass country, *on the farms of his nation and people*” (20; my emphases). The ostensibly neutral description of nature – as the narrator proceeds to fill in the canvas – accrues an ironic undertone. The reader is subtly prompted to spot the anomalies and contradictions – the cracks, so to speak – in the moral foundations of the frontier myth:

[...] the stars shone down on the farms of his nation and people,
Buitenvverwachten and Nooitgedacht, Weltevreden and Dankbaarheid [Dutch farm names meaning “above expectation”, “unexpected”, “contentment”, “gratitude”], on the whole countryside that they had bought with years of blood

and sacrifice; for they had trekked from the British government with its officials and its missionaries and its laws that made a black man as good as his master, and had trekked into a continent, dangerous and trackless, where wild beasts and savage men, grim and waterless plains, had given way before their fierce will to be separate and survive. Then out of the harsh world of rock and stone they had come to the grass country, all green and smiling, and had given to it the names of peace and thankfulness. They had built their houses and their churches; and as God had chosen them for a people, so did they choose him for their God, cherishing their separateness that was now His Will. They set their conquered enemies apart, ruling them with unsmiling justice, declaring ‘no equality in Church or State’, and making the *iron law* [the Immorality Act] that no white man might touch a black woman, nor might any white woman be touched by a black man. And to go against this law, of a people of rock and stone in a land of rock and stone, was to be broken and destroyed (20–21; my emphasis).

Paton’s exposé of the morally dubious foundations of the South African frontier tradition is reminiscent of Olive Schreiner’s short story, “Eighteen-ninety-nine” (written in 1906), which Jean Marquard (1981: 21) calls “the most sombre account of Boer history in the entire canon of South African fiction”. Schreiner’s story evokes similar images of veld and firmament to Paton’s description above: “It was a warm night: the stars shone down through the thick soft air of the Northern Transvaal into the dark earth, where a little daub-and-wattle house of two rooms lay among the long, grassy slopes” (79). In the story’s conclusion Schreiner poignantly debunks the romantic notion that the soil has been bought with blood by those who have fought and died for it.

In *Too Late the Phalarope*, Paton, who was deeply religious, problematizes the conventions of the Trekker master discourse according to which colonial oppression denied the Afrikaners a national identity and compelled a dissident group to seek self-determination in the hinterland. Their urge to escape the colonial yoke and their subsequent conquering of “heathen tribes” was cast in the mould of the Old Testamentary exodus of the Israelites, “God’s chosen people”. Paton’s narrator, Aunt Sophie, reveals that this belief is preached from the pulpit: “The dominee often reminded us that our great book came from the Jews, and that we too were a people of Israel, who suffered and died to win the Holy Land [...]” (27). In Schreiner’s story there is even a suggestion that the Afrikaner’s racially superior notions presume that a Messianic figure may rise from Boer stock! The grandmother character tells her grandson’s wife about a vision that is distinctly reminiscent of the angel Gabriel’s

message to Joseph in the Bible: “My daughter, [...] A wonderful thing has happened to me. As I stood out in the starlight it was as though a voice came down to me and spoke. The child which will be born of you tonight will be a man-child and he will live to do great things for his land and for his people” (43).

In the Afrikaans literary canon of the time the ideology of ethnic exclusivity based on Darwinian social hierarchies – which gave rise to the “iron law” mentioned earlier – generally appeared without a hint of irony. For example, in the novel *Na Vaste Gange* (1944) by the Afrikaans writer M.E.R. (Miemie Rothman), an Afrikaans woman, Marianna, weds an Indian man. However, the writer apparently does not dramatize racial conciliation, but sets up a scenario from which she may demonstrate the “inevitability” of a breakdown of such relations. After Marianna’s divorce from Sitanath Kundu, she proposes that he too regarded their union as a problem:

He said that since the earliest times the Asiatic nations have believed that it is natural for every nation to preserve its purity, in the same manner that every person desires to be an individual. And their reasons have been the same as ours and all advanced nations who co-habit with barbarians; they must protect what they have gained through the ages [...] their savouring of everything that has been achieved remains and grows to some sort of religion (83–84; own translation).²¹

It should be mentioned that parallels between Old Testamentary notions of pre-ordination and racial purity, on the one hand, and the South African *erfplaas*, on the other, was not a mere figment of the poetic imagination. If these ideas appeared in fiction, they reflected the historical reality of nascent Afrikaner nationalism during the Union era and beyond. This is evident from many public statements during this time. The following extract is an example. It is titled “Die betekenis van die Gereformeerde Kerk vir die ontwikkeling van die Afrikaanse volkslewe” written by Prof. L.J. du Plessis (259–260) as a contribution to the 1959 centenary edition of one of the three Calvinistic denominations in South Africa, the *Gereformeerde Kerk*, in South Africa. He proposes:

The Israelitic analogy, supported by the *Gereformeerde Kerk*, means that the Afrikaner nation were, in the same manner as the people of Israel, ordained by God for a particular historical calling, i.e. the christianisation and civilisation of Southern Africa. It must, therefore, preserve its identity amongst other nations, European or non-European (own translation).²²

The above passage prominently foregrounds the Afrikaners' joining of religion, on the one hand, and cultural identity and nationalism, on the other. The term "Christian Nationalism" was commonly used, for example, in the education policy of the National Party. In other words, a separate cultural identity is inspired – and, ostensibly justified – by Biblical dogma. (Most intriguing, however, is the obtrusive omission of the New Testamentary evangelical message illustrated in Jesus' parables, which debunk the "elect race" myth and moral prejudice based on an exclusive national identity.) Prof. du Plessis goes on to reveal how the ideological manipulation of Biblical dogma operates:

[...] that means that the Afrikaner nation has a calling which should be heeded in faith. In its commerce with other nations it should focus on the preservation of its own identity. This identity necessarily excludes being subsumed by another European or a non-European nation. It further implies the preservation of traditional Afrikaner forms and institutions, for example faith in a divine calling based on the scriptures, language and culture, republican government, Christian-National state policy and *race segregation* (260; my emphasis).²³

Not everyone in South Africa supported racially exclusive ideas. Alan Paton (1976: 25), for example, exposes Afrikaner nationalism's human irrationality and the essentially un-Christian nature of its separatist ideology in an article titled, "I Fear for the Future". He says: "The Afrikaner Nationalist has a quibble that he does not discriminate, he only differentiates, but no-one understands this except himself. [...] The supreme irrational axiom is that you can develop separately – that you can, in fact, compel by law to develop separately – the dozen or more races that inhabit one and the same piece of land." In *Too Late the Phalarope* Paton exposes the selective appropriation of Old Testamentary dogma i.e. that God forbade the Israelites to mix with heathen nations, which resulted in the "iron law": "[...] that no white man might touch a black woman, nor might any white woman be touched by a black man" (20). This quotation from the novel refers to the 1927 Immorality Act. For Paton, who devoted his life to the eradication of racism, the glaring irony and the moral inversion of such a misnomer (Immorality Act) was self-evident. In the opening scenes of *Too Late the Phalarope* he prepares the stage for the tragedy that moral injustice seems inevitably to invite.

Town, location and Paton's frame narrative

If an uneasy cultural relationship existed between South African farms and towns, it was the location areas that rendered visible social imbalances in South African society most acutely. The placement of location areas *outside* South African towns reflected the broader national picture of racial segregation in the country. Paton dramatizes the marginalization and the socio-economic disenfranchisement of the black population of Venterspan when he explains that the black chief, Maduna, and his people were subjugated by whites a hundred years before and placed in a reserve/location where they were lawfully obliged to live:

Here the black people lived their lives in a separate world, in the round grass huts with their small fields of maize and beans and sweet potatoes. Some say it would be better if they stayed there altogether, for then they would be protected against *the evils of our civilisation*; but the truth is they cannot stay there, for their small fields cannot keep them, and they must come to work for food and clothes. They go in their thousands to Johannesburg and Durban, nearly all the men, and every young man and woman, and there learn many new things [...] Yet though this so-called separate world has been so changed by us, though the English missionaries are there with their school and hospital, though so many of its able bodied men and so many of its young women are away, though the brave tribal dress gives way more and more to white people's cast-off clothes, though Maduna's great-great-grandson has a motor-car, yet it is a separate world all the same, and of its joys and sorrows no one knows at all (50; my emphasis).

In the above passage Paton invokes a parallel between the dorp microcosm and the broader South African picture when he implicates small-town society in “the evils of our civilisation”. Lack of infrastructure and sanitation in the location/reserve areas led to the outbreak of epidemics such as smallpox and tuberculosis. Paton’s characters, Pieter van Vlaanderen and his mother, treat smallpox patients in the location while Leipoldt’s character, Santa, helps out with an outbreak of tuberculosis in *The Mask*. Ironically, in *Too Late the Phalarope*, Venterspan’s Social Welfare Officer, Japie Grobler, fails to take his work seriously. When he arrives in town and orders a *klonkie* (a young black boy) to carry his suitcases, Aunt Sophie laconically remarks: “[...] that's what we got you here for, to stop things like that” upon which he retorts: “I'm not in the office yet [...]” (62).

On the farms racial discrimination is rife too. Aunt Sophie reminisces: “It was our custom to allow our boys to play with the black boys, but not our girls with their girls. But after a certain age it stopped, not by law but by custom, and *the growing white boy*

became the master" (24; my emphasis). Paton's critique of racist attitudes such as these, is often conveyed in a skilful ironic interplay between himself, the frame narrator and Aunt Sophie, the inside narrator. In this manner he exposes her and the broader community's double standards. In other words, he often "allows" Aunt Sophie to "incriminate" herself, for example when contradictory expressions of human empathy and racial bias appear in the same sentence. When she describes Pieter's character, she says: "The boy was gentle and eager to please, tender to women and children, *even* the black children on the farm" (7–8; my emphasis). In another passage, a similar example of self-incrimination appears: "It was my sister-in law who made it so that we would look after black children as well as white children. She *even* had a committee of the black people in the location and would go down and sit at the same table with them there in one of the houses, and they all smiling and pleased, though of course *she would not have sat with them in the town*" (58; my emphases). When Sophie talks about the black kitchen hands, Izak and Lena on Jakob's farm, she states: "*for all their blackness* [they] were good, Christian souls" (96; my emphasis).

In this manner Paton creates ironic tension between his own and the (racist) views of his unreliable narrator, Aunt Sophie. This is an interesting stylistic device, which, in my opinion, renders invalid critique of Paton's so-called uncritical attitudes towards the treatment of black and coloured people in the novel.²⁴ Paton, in fact, artfully sets up an ironic dissonance between the narrative frames of the story. In other words, he effectively creates a distance between his views and that of small-town society (represented by his narrator, Aunt Sophie) who "silences" black people. Paton exposes these attitudes as by-products of the socio-political climate in the country. The community's silencing of black characters are revealed in the way that Aunt Sophie refers to black men merely as "boys" and children as "klonkies" and the fact that she neglects to mention (or, perhaps, does not care to know) Stephanie's family name.

Paton's liberal worldview and his selfless humanitarian work in a reformatory for black delinquents are well documented. Therefore, it is strange indeed that some commentators should accuse him of conceiving a novel that might be construed as racist. Margaret Lenta, for example, proposes: "*Too Late the Phalarope* has a strong and single focus on the protagonist, to the extent of obscuring the viewpoint of his victim ... [Paton] had compassion for the silenced [black people], but no real belief that

they could be made to speak” (103). Michael Chapman (2003: 232) asserts that the coloured woman, Stephanie, remains “little more than a plot device”. These critics appear to overlook Paton’s skilful use of irony in *Too Late the Phalarope* to foreground his abhorrence of racism (in contrast to his narrator, Aunt Sophie). On the other hand, his portrayal of black and coloured characters as marginal and voiceless is a realistic reflection of the wider realities of the Union period South African society. Therefore, Stephanie is not, as Lenta intimates, Pieter van Vlaanderen’s victim, but rather a victim of broader socio-political hegemonies.

Pieter van Vlaanderen, a tragic hero

The opening lines of *Too Late the Phalarope* suggest Paton’s intention to cast his story in the mould of classical tragedy. A lament spoken by the first person narrator is strongly reminiscent of the chorus in a Greek tragedy. Aunt Sohie bemoans the tragic downfall of her beloved nephew:

Perhaps I could have saved him, with only a word, two words, out of my mouth. Perhaps I could have saved us all. But I never spoke them. Strange it is that one could run crying to the house of a man that one loved, to save him from danger, and that he could say to one, *have I not told you not to come to this house?* And strange it is that one should withdraw, silent and shamed (7).

The portentous effect of Shakespearian dramatic irony is extended from the chorus-like opening of *Too Late the Phalarope* to the main narrative. This creates an imminent sense of doom and instils in the reader a profound awareness of the gravity with which Paton regards his material.

Aunt Sophie’s possession of Pieter van Vlaanderen’s journal – given to her after his arrest – enables her to interweave her narrative with some of his most private thoughts culled from the journal. In other words, Sophie’s narrative is presented in a flashback style, which utilizes Pieter’s diary as a tool to create dramatic tension in the manner of the classical tragedy. (Pieter’s diary entries are also emblematic of his isolation in a community to whom he cannot openly communicate his most personal thoughts.) For example, Pieter’s journal relates a story about a white boy, Dick, whom Pieter accosts while he apparently attempts to make his way to the black location under the cover of night. Pieter’s warning to the boy is ominously prophetic:

The police have had instructions to enforce the Immorality Act without fear or favour. Whether you're old or young, rich or poor, respected or nobody, whether you're a Cabinet Minister or a *predikant* or a headmaster or a tramp, if you touch a black woman and you're discovered, nothing'll save you (17).

The portentous aspect of this statement becomes clear, after Van Vlaanderen's arrest, in Aunt Sophie's refrain:

For once a charge is made, a charge is made; and once a thing is written down, it will not be unwritten. And a word can be written down that will destroy a man and his house and his kindred, and there is no power of God or man or State, nor any Angel, not anything present or to come, nor any height, nor any depth, nor any other creature that can save them, when once the word is written down (230).

Pieter's prayer after the encounter with young Dick compounds the dramatic-ironic effect when he begs God to forgive the boy ("O God wees hom genadig, Here Jesus wees hom genadig" (21)) and, at the same time, asks forgiveness for himself ("O God wees my genadig, Here Jesus wees my genadig" (21)). At this point he already knows that he has fallen and what his fate would be.

From the outset of the novel Paton reveals the dualism and complexities of Pieter van Vlaanderen's character, which is modelled on the traditional tragic hero.

Uncomfortable in the mould in which society has cast him and even uneasier with his own outward conformation to its strictures, Van Vlaanderen is a tormented being whose constant struggle with inner demons portends no good in the repressive "fish bowl" society of Venterspan.

The references in *Too Late the Phalarope* to Van Vlaanderen's black moods are distinctly reminiscent of Elizabethan playwrights' employment of the medieval humours in their reinvention of classical tragedy. Many of William Shakespeare's tragic heroes are portrayed as unhappily disposed to "black bile" or "black gall". The word, "swartgalligheid" – Paton uses the Afrikaans word to describe Van Vlaanderen's temperament – is a direct translation thereof. According to Renaissance physicians, man's ideal temperament consisted of a proper mixture of the four "humours": melancholy, phlegm, blood and choler. If any one of these humours dominated in a man's physical constitution, that particular weakness was supposedly reflected in his character. In 1594 Peter de la Primaudaye wrote (*The French Academy*: London 1594, cited in the notes to *William Shakespeare's Hamlet: A Norton*

Critical Edition: 110): “[...] if there be excess of the melancholic humour, the natures of such are sad, still hard to please, suspicious, conceited, obstinate, some more and some less”. Instability of man’s humours struck a false chord in the world, which (according to Renaissance philosophy) was supposed to reflect the natural order of God’s creation.

Tragic heroes such as Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Romeo, and Coriolanus are examples of choleric-melancholic characters. Despite their fateful disposition to self-destruction, they possess inherently heroic qualities that are characteristic of the classical tragic hero: the higher the pedestal, the more spectacular the fall from grace. However interesting similarities between Paton’s novel and the classical tragedy are, it should be mentioned that Paton explores, turns around, and gives his own twist to the stylistic patterns and conventions of classical tragedy. I shall demonstrate how he establishes, *in order to ironize*, the hallmarks of the tragic genre, the more powerful, and poignant to render his critique of morally questionable social abnormalities during the Union period in South Africa.

First, hubris or personal pride, which usually contributes to the classical tragic hero’s fall, is in *Too Late the Phalarope* not associated with Pieter van Vlaanderen but rather with society. (Because Jakob van Vlaanderen’s character, rather than Pieter’s, is emblematic of the broader societal picture, he may, in fact, be regarded as the tragic hero of the novel.) In this regard Edward Callan (1982: 36) points out: “Sophie’s view of racial arrogance has affinities with the Greek concept of *hybris* – the special manifestation of pride that incurs tragic retribution. *Hybris* is the arrogation by men of attributes proper only to the gods, and tragedy is the inevitable destruction meted out to *hybris*”. The arrogance and pride of a community which reserves the right to “play God” by carrying out “justice” in accordance with a man-made “iron law” (the Immorality Act) invites tragic retribution against itself.

References in *Too Late the Phalarope* to Van Vlaanderen’s “black gall” evoke the classical tragic hero, but Paton is at pains to demonstrate that his protagonist’s dark moods are directly attributed to ideological pressures under which he labours in the community. Pieter’s personality is actually perfectly balanced – more so, ironically, than most of the other characters in the novel. In contemporary times a man such as Van Vlaanderen would probably be regarded as being “in touch with his feminine

side”. Paton makes it clear that the tragic circumstance of Van Vlaanderen’s downfall evolves from the *socially perceived* incongruities of his psyche. Society cannot understand:

[...] a strange son, who had all his father’s will and strength, and could outride and outshoot them all, yet had all the gentleness of a girl, and strange unusual thoughts in his mind, and a passion for books and learning, and a passion for the flowers of veld and kloof, so that he would bring them into the house and hold them in his hands, as though there were some deep meaning that he was finding in them. *Had he been one or the other, I think his father would have understood him better, but he was both* (8; my emphasis).

This passage evidently suggests that Van Vlaanderen does not conform to the mould of the stereotypical Afrikaner male as personified by his father. In this respect it is interesting that negative reviews of *Too Late the Phalarope* mention Paton’s so-called “stereotyping” of his Afrikaner characters. Paul Rich considers Paton’s portrayal of the Afrikaner mind as “one completely dominated by a deadening history and religion”. He proposes: “the novel does little to move beyond the more conventional English South African and international stereotype of the “traditional” Afrikaner mentality” (60).

It appears, however, that Paton’s characterization *deliberately* foregrounds society’s stereotypical demands with regard to strictly demarcated gender patterns and cultural behaviour. In this regard C.N. van der Merwe (1990: 116), in a discussion of stereotypes in literature, observes that they may be a realistic representation of a society, which demands the sacrifice of individuality to the service of the nation. He explains the context (as represented in literature) in which such behavioural patterns may prevail: “They normally occur during a period of strife that does not allow one group to sympathize with another. It is also possible that a process of stagnation and superficialisation consumes personal individuality to the extent that nothing but a stereotyped pattern remains for the author to observe”.²⁵

Personal reminiscences of an ideologically repressive society are presumably the best source to confirm that Paton’s fictional representation of Afrikaner puritanism is on target. In this regard the Afrikaans author and songwriter Koos Kombuis (2005: 15) writes about growing up in a political dispensation based on, what he dubs, “Calvinisme-gekoppel-aan-politieke-mag” (Calvinism-linked-to-political-power) and

associated societal manifestations such as sexual repression. He goes on: “The National Party committed a sin which was as spurious as racial prejudice towards black people; it was the repression of sexuality, joy and creativity of its own children. My generation suffered the consequences and today’s young people still carry the burden”.²⁶

In the microcosmic fictional milieu of Venterspan, Paton evokes the same narrowminded, Calvinistically inspired class divisions, gender roles and sexual repression that Kombuis refers to. These strictly demarcated social codes deserve closer attention since they form the context within which Pieter van Vlaanderen’s tragedy develops. Stereotypical norms with regard to male and female roles in society are brought into clear focus in *Too Late the Phalarope*, especially through the small-town characters of Jakob van Vlaanderen, his wife and Pieter’s wife, Nella.

Pieter’s father is a typical Afrikaner patriarch presiding over the *familieplaas* handed down the generations of the Van Vlaanderen bloodline (of European origin, as the name suggests). Patriarchal societies are of course not exclusive to Afrikaner culture. (Alexander (9) suggests that Paton has styled the character of Jakob van Vlaanderen on that of his father whose tyranny and narrow religious attitudes (he belonged to the Christadelphians, a puritanical, fundamentalist sect) cultivated in the young Paton a deep abhorrence of authoritarianism).

The fact that land ownership in the South African hinterland was firmly grounded on notions of heredity as well as Old Testament Biblical mythology is suggested by the cherished place accorded by Jakob van Vlaanderen to the family Bible. Aunt Sophie relates: “After dinner when my brother had read from the great Bible that our great ancestor Andries van Vlaanderen had brought from the Cape on the Great Trek of 1836, he prayed and gave thanks to the Creator [...]” (33). Jakob van Vlaanderen represents every trait of the Afrikaner frontier mentality that Paton so loathes because the core tenets of its racially exclusive creed go against the very grain of the New Testament’s evangelical message. The Old Testamentary evocation of Jakob van Vlaanderen’s first name is, therefore, no coincidence. (Neither is the fact that Pieter chooses to break with his family’s farming tradition by living in town. Although his father temporarily disowns him after his joining the army, it is unlikely in any case that a person of his sensibilities would have carried on in the family tradition.)

Jakob van Vlaanderen, named after one of the patriarchs of Israel, is a patriarch of his family and people. An uninterrupted bloodline that goes back to his Dutch ancestry is, as mentioned, also evident from the family name. He is, as Marijke van Vuuren (9) indicates “[...] an influential man in the district, and an upholder of the qualities and values Paton ascribes to the Afrikaner man”. When Jakob is asked about the point of living, his reply is characteristic: “[He] said in a voice of thunder, the point of living is to serve the Lord your God, and to uphold the honour of your church and language and people, [...]” (89). Jakob places God and the Church before all else. His self-assuredness and his moral authority are emphasized by his “voice of thunder”. Jakob’s character epitomizes the human aberration of social behaviour controlled by religious dogma. It is by strict religious codes and the “iron law” already mentioned that Jakob, as the representative of the “people of rock and stone” (21), would judge his own son. And the consequence of breaking this law, the reader is told, is to be “broken and destroyed” (10). Jakob van Vlaanderen’s connection with Afrikaner nationalism is complete and irreversible. His fictional persona is strongly reminiscent of the broader Afrikaner leadership at the time whose fanaticism, which, in essence, comprised institutionalized inhumanity, was erroneously justified on Biblical grounds.

To return to other societal manifestations of ideological repression, it is suggested in Paton’s novel that Pieter van Vlaanderen’s lust for the coloured woman, Stephanie partly stems from his wife, Nella’s sexual withdrawal from him. When he realizes that he is beginning to yield to temptation, he entreats his wife to be sexually more responsive towards him. However, she continues to skirt the issue because she does not know how to free herself from the culturally repressive mould of her upbringing. Herman Giliomee (376) documents the degenerative tendency in the Afrikaner woman’s identity, from pioneering woman (during the frontier era) to repressed conformist. He bemoans the fact that “they became politically conservative and took little part in the public agitation for the franchise for women. They resigned themselves to the judgement of men, who deemed competition on public bodies (except in women’s organizations) not suitable roles for women [...]”.

In *Too Late the Phalarope* Nella’s character stands in stark contrast to her husband, Pieter’s. He is a man of the world, well read, and well travelled. He is respected in the community and has received accolades for his bravery during the war as well as

his prowess on the sports field. Nella's townswoman character, however, appears to be in tune with the broader trends regarding female identity during the Union period in South African society. Aunt Sophie comments: "But she was the country girl, quiet and shy and chaste, as most of our country girls are. She was frightened of Johannesburg, and of the *evil things that men and women do*, even of staying in a hotel. She was frightened even of the laughter that came out of the Royal Bar, where men like her father and brothers were jesting a little coarse and rough. Therefore when [Pieter] in his extremity asked for more of her love, she shrank from him, thinking it was the coarseness of a man" (47; my emphasis). Aunt Sophie underlines that Nella should take part of the blame for Pieter's downfall when she says: "Then the hard hand of Fate struck her across the face, and shocked her into knowledge" (47).

Knowledge and human insight, however, appears to be on the outside of a small-town girl's insulated frame of reference. So too, does knowledge of the outside world where liberated women (such as those stopping for petrol at the service station in town) have apparently begun to free themselves from the chauvinism and gender stereotyping associated with small-town culture. Nella obviously also subscribes to the Sodom-and Gomorrah label that cities such as Johannesburg have gained in the *platteland*. Her naiveté and conservatism is matched only by her racial prejudice and hypocrisy as is evident from her conversation with Pieter when he tells her about the Dick incident: "And he could see in the darkness her shock and her revulsion. And she was silent until she said, to think he was in this house" (22). The contrast between Nella and Pieter's characters is underlined once more when Pieter expresses forgiveness towards Dick.

Notwithstanding Aunt Sophie's conviction that all South African country girls are like Nella, to deduce that puritanical sexually repressive attitudes associated with strict Calvinism was an exclusive feature of Afrikaner society, would be a mistake. Repressive gender roles were very much alive elsewhere. For example, Thomas Hardy's novels lay bare the hypocrisy of a rigid, class-conscious English society in which women were expected to conform to restrictive, puritanical gender codes. It appears that sexual repression is a symptom of hegemonic patterns of power. With regard to the ideological entrenchment of gender stereotypes in society, Teresa de Lauretis reiterates Michel Foucault's arguments in his *History of Sexuality*:

[S]exuality, commonly thought to be a *natural* as well as a private, intimate matter, is in fact completely *constructed* in culture according to the political aims of the society's dominant class. [...T]he prohibitions and regulations pertaining to sexual behaviors, whether spoken by religious, legal or scientific authorities [...] have produced it, and continue to produce it, in the sense in which industrial machinery produces goods or commodities, and in so doing also produces social relations (12; my emphases).

De Lauretis (12–13) gives an overview of the historical origins of these hegemonic gender discourses, which were implemented through pedagogy, medicine, demography, and economics. They were anchored or supported by the institutions of the state, and became especially focused on the family. She cites Foucault as saying: “This technology made sex not only a secular concern but a concern of the state as well; to be more exact, sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance”.

Therefore, returning now to *Too Late the Phalarope*, as Afrikaner nationalism began to gain a stronger foothold within society, concomitant degenerative tendencies in the Afrikaner woman's cultural identity became evident. The two characters, Pieter's mother, Mina, and his wife, Nella, are examples of this phenomenon. Pieter's mother is a frontierswoman at heart and, although gentle, displays leadership and resolve in matters such as charity in the community. She has a subtle way of influencing her husband and it is also suggested that, in contrast to Nella, she fulfils her husband's sexual needs because he boasts that he has never coveted another woman. Nella's coldness towards her husband is one of “the hurts of the world” (32) that cause Pieter's black moods. In *Too Late the Phalarope* Paton develops a psychological examination of the destruction wrought by society on the “gentle man”, Pieter van Vlaanderen whose black moods result from his armouring himself against emotional pain. These hurts and ills, Paton emphasizes, are linked to the morally warped society that Van Vlaanderen is a member of and with which he feels increasingly at odds. Aunt Sophie, the narrator who is able to share Pieter's emotional distress because she is given his journals when he is arrested for contravening the Immorality Act, says: “[H]e was in the black mood, what we call the *swartgalligheid*, which is the black gall. And the heart is black too, *and the world is black* (133: my emphases)”. While Aunt Sophie's lament is in tune with the Calvinistic doctrine of original sin and the human heart's inclination towards impurity or “blackness”, Paton is at pains in *Too Late the Phalarope* to demonstrate how an unnatural ideology can make the world black with

its morally aberrant, social codes and unforgiving fire-and-brimstone religious practices. With regard to the conventions of the traditional tragic genre in the novel, Marijke van Vuuren (in her paper titled “Paton’s *Too Late the Phalarope*: commentary” 2001: 16) reiterates that Pieter van Vlaanderen and his family’s “destruction” is given tragic proportions. However, she says, the question remains:

whether Pieter van Vlaanderen’s flaw – his desire for a woman of another race – is one which would be universally acknowledged as a weakness of character. His society destroys him, not because he has committed adultery, not because he has broken a law, but because the particular law that he has broken is the ‘iron law’ – a taboo on sexual relations across racial boundaries. Because of this, an act which otherwise would have caused hurt, damage, and a measure of disgrace, but which could have been repaired, is now said to cause disaster and complete, irreparable destruction.

The overarching irony that Paton makes clear is that, in terms of his ideal for a common society, Pieter van Vlaanderen for all his faults and eccentricities is a “normal” human being. In other words, he is *constructed* as abnormal, and ultimately tragic, by the “iron law” of an uncompromising society with false values! In this regard Van Vuuren (16–17) continues:

Therefore the factor that gives tragic proportions to Pieter’s fall, that makes it a disaster, is the attitude of his society to Pieter’s error – it is the code of his particular society that makes a tragedy of Pieter’s error, and it is only because of this code, which is not universal but is confined in the novel to this society, that Pieter’s weakness is seen in such a serious light as to become a fatal flaw. Paton therefore implicitly draws the attention to this code, the obsession with racial purity which was to give rise to apartheid legislation [in South Africa].

Pieter van Vlaanderen attempts to conform to dorp society’s stereotypical codes – with some notable exceptions. The first of these, his political allegiance, raises eyebrows in the context of the nascent nationalistic sentiments of the dorp. It is important at this point to reiterate that some fictional accounts of political turmoil during the Union period in South Africa reveal the reality that Afrikaners were by no means a homogeneous people. Historical evidence of a divided national consciousness – for example, the Cape Rebellion during the Boer War when British subjects demonstrated their sympathies with the Boer republics; also when so-called “hanskakies” and “joiners” supported Lord Milner’s war effort against their own people in that war, and

also when the 1914 Rebellion divided the Boer ranks for or against the South African invasion of German South West Africa – acquires, in the fictions examined in this study, personalized dimensions in the communal milieu of the small town. *Too Late the Phalarope* is set in the years after World War 1. Pieter van Vlaanderen takes the “red oath” with the other volunteers who join General Smuts’s army against the Germans in South West Africa. Pieter, wearing the army’s orange tab on his shoulder straps, returns from the war having been promoted to the rank of lieutenant. He now outranks his former superior, Sergeant Steyn, whose jealousy precipitates events leading to Pieter’s downfall. It is ironic that Pieter’s duties as a town policeman include the enforcement of the Immorality Act (1927), which he transgresses – an act that brings about his destruction and that of his family.

In an incident told by his narrator, Aunt Sophie, Paton makes the reader acutely aware of the moral injustice in a society, which marginalizes and stigmatizes “people of colour”. It clearly demonstrates the wider, truly tragic, consequences of an evil system into which the minds of its members have been indoctrinated to such a degree that, in order to obey the “iron law,” they are ready to sacrifice expressions of human compassion. This incident (Van Vuuren (20) claims it is based on an actual event) concerns a certain Smith who is sentenced to death for the murder of a black woman whom he had impregnated. Aunt Sophie remarks that fear had made Smith and his wife, who appeared to have planned the murder together, commit the deed. She makes an important point regarding their fear of prosecution under the “iron law” i.e. the Immorality Act – which made them commit a deed “which they had never thought of all their lives” (41) – as she imagines what would have happened under “normal” circumstances: “No one would have murdered the girl out of greed, for she had nothing; nor out of jealousy, for she had no lovers; nor out of anger, for she was submissive and gentle by nature. Therefore it was done from fear. And if a man of her own race and colour had made her with child, he would not have been afraid and murdered her, but would have gone shamefaced to her father, to confess and make reparation, as was their custom” (41). This illustrates how the repressed values of society “civilize” individuals who might otherwise have led normal lives. It is notable that the irony contained in Aunt Sophie’s “what-if”- parallel (in a somewhat condescending manner she sketches a similar situation between a *black* man and a *black* woman which suggests that there still lingers some doubt in her mind about

sexual commerce between *white* and *black*) demonstrates that she hovers on the brink of enlightenment, yet ultimately, remains a product of the small-town mindset.

Another incident, in which Paton painfully exposes racism, concerns the case of Pieter van Vlaanderen's university friend, Moffie, who tells of the scene of a car accident at night. He helps to carry an injured woman from the car and when a light goes on, he notices that she is a Malay at which he drops her body and walks away because, he says, “the touch of such a person [is] abhorrent (120)”. Moffie nevertheless recognizes his behaviour as culturally adapted. He says: “[...] many Afrikaners are the same (120)”. Aunt Sophie's response, “to have such a horror is to be safe” (121), suggests that Pieter's downfall may have been prevented had he been similarly conditioned. Paton underlines that the “flaw” leading to Pieter's fall, is no flaw at all – the evil lies with Moffie and his kind, whose racism safeguards them against “temptation”. The error of Moffie's thinking is exposed in the fact that Pieter and his mother work tirelessly to help the victims of the smallpox epidemic in the location – a compassionate gesture which was frowned upon by the larger community during the Union period.

Conclusion: Paton's vision for forgiveness

In *Too Late the Phalarope* Paton, like Leipoldt, Black and Bosman, evokes an allegorical-referential critique of South African society during the Union period. Paton, however, draws the reader's attention to characters in the dorp, Venterspan, who, because of their marginal position in small-town society, represent an alternative to the conformity and hegemony associated with Afrikaner nationalism – and, therefore, symbolizes a vision of redemption in society. One of them is the minister of the Venterspan's Dutch Reformed Church. Paton's reference to him as the “new” *dominee* contrasts his character to the “old” *dominee* in more than one way. Not only is he the “old” *dominee*'s successor, but he also represents ideas that are “new” to the morally stifled dorp community. (He stands in contrast to the “old school” Dutch Reformed and *Gereformeerde* ministers in the country personified by the Reverend van Heerden in Stephen Black's *The Dorp*.) This is evident from Aunt Sophie's reportage of Venterspan's new minister's inaugural sermon (69–70) in which he does

not hesitate to confront the town community’s religious bigotry and formalism. Aunt Sophie, who once again confirms her own rootedness in this mindset, reports that it is an unwritten rule in town that “the whole *white* town and countryside” should attend church on Sunday – even *Mevrou* Badenhorst who is so completely deaf! Yet, she says, the English-speaking people such as the Jewish Kaplan brothers and the Afrikaners who belong to the Apostolics were “exceptions to the rule”.

The gist of the young *dominee*’s inaugural sermon, according to Aunt Sophie, is:

[...] about backsliders and backsiding, not those who backslid out of the Church he said, but those who backslid inside it, crucifying the Lord anew, praising Him with their lips but denying Him the true praise of their hearts and lives. And he invited us to judge ourselves, because the Lord had called him to be a shepherd not a judge, and to ask ourselves if these things were true of us; whether we perhaps were held in honour of men and in the market place, but within were full of darkness (69–70).

The *dominee*’s message, however, ends on a positive note. By the same token that the typical townsman may represent what “history, and war, and narrow parents and poverty, and sickness, and sickness of soul” have done to the nation, such a man might turn and take his part again in “God’s plan for the world”, so that, the *dominee* says, “through a man, himself healed and refreshed, might flow a stream of living water to refresh us all, his home, his town, his people, and the world” (70). The *dominee*’s focus on the transforming powers of God’s love is yet another example of Paton’s subversion of the idea of fate in the Greek tragedy. It encapsulates Paton’s own New Testamentary view of the religious atonement doctrine.

Unfortunately, although Pieter van Vlaanderen feels an emotional connection with the young *dominee*, the latter’s attempts to ingratiate himself with Pieter whom he regards as a hero – something that Pieter is embarrassed about and feels unworthy of – leads to the forfeiture of a possible soul mate that could have helped him. Pieter’s self-loathing goes beyond the nature of his transgression. He does not realize that the young *dominee* would not have turned his back on him. The latter’s sermons clearly demonstrate a deep belief in the New Testamentary doctrine of forgiveness and salvation. However, Pieter (after his intercourse with Stephanie) is so burdened with guilt that he forgets the core principles of his own religion. In this regard Aunt Sophie reminisces: “For he had a vision that a trumpet had been blown in heaven, and that the

Lord Most High had ordered the closing of the doors, that no prayer may enter in from such a man,” (147). Pieter’s preoccupation with a Lady Macbethian cleansing of his body and clothes after his intercourse with Stephanie, suggests that he cannot think clearly about his situation:

Then he went to the kitchen, and built a fire in the stove, and put the tins of water on. He put his overcoat and clothes on chairs before the fire, and found some scent that Nella had left, to take away the stink of the *kakiebos*. [...] Then he took the tins of water and poored them into the bath and washed himself from head to foot, especially the parts of his shame” (152–154).

Of course, as an officer of the law, Pieter is sorely aware of the inevitable fate that awaits those who are discovered transgressing the “iron law” (Immorality Act).

Someone whom Pieter regards as a soul mate is Kappie (Matthew Kaplan’s nickname) because they share a love of music and philately. Aunt Sophie informs the reader that Kappie and his brother Abraham, the owner of the Royal Hotel, are Jews. The manner in which she “defends” their position in town reveals much about townsmen’s patronizing “tolerance” of other cultures: “For we Afrikaners of Venterspan were not against the Jews, [...] nor do we think that all shops should be in Afrikaners’ hands. We never had any boycotts or secret plans against the Jews. [...]” (27). It is therefore ironic that Kappie is one of the few people who, after Pieter’s fall, do not judge him. Paton seemingly suggests that Kappie’s capacity for forgiveness is emblematic of the hope that appears to lie *outside* the exclusive Afrikaner culture represented by the small-town microcosm.

Englishmen such as Pieter van Vlaanderen’s superior, Captain Massingham are, like Jews, regarded as marginal characters in the dorp milieu. At the beginning of the novel the captain is introduced to the reader as “an austere man that never laughed or smiled that one could see” (25). Aunt Sophie explains the reason – besides his nationality – for the captain’s apparent withdrawal from main stream dorp culture: “His only son had been crawling through a fence with a gun, [...] and had blown his head off; and his wife had died soon after, of a broken heart, they said. Now he lived with his mother in Venterspan, [...]” (25). The captain, it seems, is a man whose personal trials have sobered him to the extent of excluding himself from the frivolities and superficialities of small-town society. However, when faced with Pieter’s

dilemma, he reveals an empathetic insight into the real issues surrounding the impact of human tragedy.

The humanity of the captain's conduct, although he is a representative of the law in South Africa, stresses Paton's message about the courage that is required to speak out against the kind of moral injustice that characterized the political dispensation during the Union period. Massingham's moral courage and non-conformity – although, in his official capacity he is forced to let the law run its course – is confirmed in a conversation with Nella's father. Sophie relates the incident when:

[T]he captain told the story of all, and when he had finished, the fierce old man struck the arm of his chair and said, I would shoot him like a dog. Then because no one spoke, he said to the captain, wouldn't you? And the captain said, no. – You wouldn't? – No. – But he offended against the race.

Then the captain said trembling, *meneer*, as a policeman I know an offence against the law, and as a Christian I know an offence against God; but I do not know an offence against the race. [...] *Meneer*, said the captain, if man takes unto himself God's right to punish, then he must also take upon himself God's promise to restore. [...] (246–247)

Nowhere else in the novel is Paton's indictment of ideological repression more severe. In the character of Captain Massingham he counterposes the pre-eminence of "race" and man-made laws associated with the preservation of national ideals, on the one hand, to Christian values of forgiveness and restoration, on the other. In fact, as Leanne Van Dyk (in her paper titled "Vision and Imagination in Atonement Doctrine" 1993: 5) suggests: Captain Massingham is Paton's "main agent for forgiveness and reconciliation".

Paton's vision for atonement and forgiveness in a society where moral injustice rules, is implicit in the title of the novel. However, the healing process required to restore balance in such a society – symbolized by the Phalarope bird image from nature – is juxtaposed with the "too late" aspect of the title. At face value, the novel's title, therefore, may appear to suggest that Paton takes a pessimistic view of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles in the path of a just and equal society in South Africa. Such a reading, however, is not compatible with Paton's well-documented belief in the core values of Christianity i.e. forgiveness and salvation. In this regard Fox (702) asserts: "Analysis of the story's events according to theories of tragedy, punishment,

forgiveness [...] yields understanding of how the novel's conclusion, though somber, can be seen as a satisfying resolution of some of the problems it raises". It is, therefore, necessary to return to the text in order to trace the trajectory by which Paton arrives at an optimistic vision for a society ostensibly fraught with hopelessness, hatred, misunderstanding and failed relationships.

The relationship between Pieter van Vlaanderen and his father, Jakob, is marked by a series of failed attempts from either side to become reconciled. The implications of their estrangement carry resonances of broader societal imbalances and maladies, which hold little promise for restoration. The racial pride of the oppressor (fictionally represented by Jakob) has struck root and grown beyond a point of potential reconciliation with the oppressed (Pieter). Paton dramatizes, through the character of Jakob, that human pride taints and inhibits the oppressor's capacity for sympathy and remedy – and, ultimately contributes to the futile, "too late"- aspect of attempts to reverse the damage.

Pieter, as a young boy, starts a stamp collection of which his father disapproves because in the latter's mind it reveals his son's appreciation for things of beauty. This is supposedly contrary to perceived notions of masculinity of the typical Afrikaner man. Aunt Sophie highlights the inherent contradictions in the characters of men like Jakob and how this contrasts to Pieter's character: "[M]y own brother, who never touched but one woman in his life, can be coarse and rough himself. And it is a strange thing that his son never jested coarse and rough, and no one jested with him coarse and rough [...]" (107).

Jakob's confusion and inability to understand a persona in which traditionally male interests such as horse riding and rugby (at which Pieter excels) may live together with artistic interests such as music and stamp collecting, compels him to patronize his son and demean his hobbies in order to validate his own and other townsmen's cultural one-dimensionality. Jakob's removal of the boy, Pieter's stamp collection on the pretext that it hampers his schoolwork, and his subsequent return thereof is the first in a series of instances of emotional bullying followed by unsuccessful (Pieter refuses to take back the stamp collection) apologetic gestures between father and son.

The tragic trajectory of Pieter and Jakob's fraught relationship may have ended with events surrounding the Phalarope incident – however, sadly, it transpires *too late!*

Pieter, having suffered rebuffs on previous occasions when giving birthday presents to his father, takes an extraordinarily bold step in the presentation of a book to the man who reads only The Book (the Bible). Jakob's suppressed but barely concealed excitement at receiving the book, *The Birds of South Africa* is heart-warmingly promising:

He sat for a while looking at the kingfishers, with some kind of silence come over him, [...] He opened the book, and when he saw how white and shining were the pages, he put it down again, and wiped his hands on the table napkin. Then he took out his spectacles, and took one of Nella's big handkerchiefs, and wiped the spectacles, bending down over them, and taking his time, like a man taken off his guard, and wanting a moment to recover. Then he put on his spectacles and opened the book, [...] (92–93)

Jakob reciprocates in an equally uncharacteristic manner. Although still reluctant to allow himself openly to show affection towards Pieter, he invites him to a picnic in the veld on the pretext of pointing out an “error” in the bird manual. When father and son see the bird together, Pieter is moved to tears when Jakob rests his hand on his shoulder. However, the former cannot show his feelings because he knows that it is too late – he has already moved beyond society’s redemption because of his transgression of the “iron law”.

When Jakob subsequently hears of his son’s confession to a transgression of the Immorality Act, he disowns Pieter and erases his name from the family Bible from amongst those of generations of Van Vlaanderens. This is an act through which Jakob, according to Van Vuuren (25), “not only removes his son from the family, but symbolically cancels out his birth [...]. She proposes: “To remove a name from the Book which suggests the Biblical Book of Life, may even imply a denial of salvation”. This is a catastrophic event – a complete and irreversible fall from grace, and it is strongly suggestive of the traditional tragedy. While it is true that the classical tragedy ultimately aims to evoke some sort of cathartic response from the reader, the power of Paton’s message lies in the manner in which he challenges – and extends to a higher level of meaning – obvious parallels between the traditional tragic hero and Pieter van Vlaanderen. In this regard Jakob’s reading from the Bible, after he crosses out his son’s name, is significant. He reads the following verses from Psalm 109:

When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become sin; Let his days be few; and let another take his office; Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow; Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg; and let them seek their bread also out of their desolated places; Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labour; Let there be none to extend mercy upon him; neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children; Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out; Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out; Let them be before the Lord continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth; Because that he remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he may even slay the broken in heart (236).

When Jakob finds it impossible to pray after this reading, the reader, as Fox (719) suggests, “is invited to realize that the man who “remembered not to show mercy”, is not Pieter but Jakob”. In fact, towards the end of the novel it becomes clear that Jakob and everything that he represents, is truly and inevitably tragic and that the “total destruction” – Sophie often repeats these words throughout the novel – that Pieter’s deed has supposedly brought on the entire family, is something that they have brought upon themselves. Jakob, Fox (721) proposes, is “the most completely destroyed because he is the most completely representative of the Afrikaner *hubris* which enforces its pitiless laws out of pride and fear for dilution of its power, rather than reasons of justice in the interest of all people”. Paton’s message is unequivocal: the small-town society of the novel – and the national society it evokes – is essentially evil and its claims to Christianity, a travesty.

As mentioned, Paton ironizes and subverts the conventions of fate and retribution of the classical tragedy in the concluding chapter of *Too Late the Phalarope*. In this regard Fox (711) remarks:

Paton respects the society’s right to enforce its laws through the strategies of denunciation and deterrence, even when he disapproves of the laws themselves as misguided or worse; but *he represents the retributive responses as immoral and/or self-destructive*. The most positive responses to wrongdoing in Paton’s view are those which focus on the restoration of the offender through rehabilitation and forgiveness.

The possibility of the impossible in a society, whose moral folly has corrupted almost every soul, is offered as a small but distinct glimmer of hope in *Too Late the Phalarope*’s conclusion. Hope for restoration and renewal is enacted through Paton’s female characters, Pieter’s mother, his wife, and Aunt Sophie. They represent an

alternative for the morally warped values that Jakob represents. After Pieter's arrest, his mother first chooses to remain loyal to her husband's wish not to have any contact with Pieter. However, she declares (in conversation with Sophie who chooses to go to Pieter): "God is both Lover and Judge of men, and it is His commandment that we join Him in loving, but to judge we are forbidden". Mina (Pieter's mother) sends Sophie with the following deeply moving message of love to Pieter and Nella:

You will say both to my son and to my daughter that my love is multiplied, and although I am shut off from them by the door of a house, all the doors of my heart are open; I will remember them by day and by night, till I am permitted to go to my rest [...] And you will say to my son, [...] that though he may suffer under the law, there is no law that can cut him off from our love, nor from the love of his friends. His life is God's and mine and yours, and his wife's and children's, and all his friends'; and he will therefore cherish it and not despair" (238–239).

In the last chapter the power of love is suggested when Sophie reports Nella's change of heart after a talk with Mina. She says: "[...] the girl came back, silent but steadfast, borne on the strong deep river of this woman's love, that sustained us all" (251).

Pieter's mother therefore represents a small group of townspeople whose inherent reserves of compassion based on an understanding of the New Testamentary doctrine, provide a foil for the morally warped attitudes of society. In them lie the seeds of a vision filled with possibilities. However, Paton suggests that, for the time being, the only escape from the ideological repression represented by the Union period South African small town is a physical move outside of its mentally claustrophobic frame. Aunt Sophie reports that Pieter's family "will go to some other country, far from us all" (252). Sophie voices a prophetic vision that in the future all may change for the nation who turns "to the holy task of pardon, that the body of the Lord might not be wounded twice, and virtue come of *our* offences" (255; my emphasis).

Chapter 5: *Willemsdorp* (1998), Herman Charles Bosman's dorp satire

Introduction

Herman Charles Bosman (1905–1951) was born in Kuils River in the former Cape Colony but he lived in the Transvaal for most of his life. Educated at the University of the Witwatersrand, he was sent as a novice teacher to the Marico District in what was then the Western Transvaal. Bosman is best known for his short stories, in particular his Oom Schalk Lourens stories, which was inspired by his experiences in the Marico. His sojourn there was abruptly terminated after six months when he was arrested and imprisoned for the murder of his stepbrother. The incident occurred while he was spending the July school holidays with his mother and her second husband in Johannesburg. A tussle broke out between the young Herman and his stepbrother. Bosman shot the latter with a hunting rifle. The fact that Bosman, after his release from prison some three years later, was able to write more than sixty short stories in which the inhabitants of the Groot Marico backwater come alive in the most vivid manner, attests to the fruitful nature of his imagination. *Mafeking Road*, Bosman's best-known volume of Oom Schalk stories, carries the singular distinction of not having been out of print since its first publication in 1947 (Gray 2005: 16).

Bosman's literary legacy consists of various short story volumes, polemical writings, poetry, and novels that were republished by the Cape Town publishing house Human & Rousseau in anticipation of the centenary celebration of his birth in 2005. The editors responsible for these collections were Professors Stephen Gray and Craig MacKenzie of the University of Johannesburg. Gray and MacKenzie embarked on the great task of ordering and restoring Bosman's oeuvre. (Carelessly edited and haphazardly collected earlier volumes were only part of the challenge.) The volume titled *Verborgte Skatte* (2001) contained Bosman's most important Afrikaans writing: short stories, poetry, and polemical pieces. Bosman was born into an Afrikaans family with imperial sympathies and he was educated in English. He apparently rediscovered his Afrikaans roots when he married an Afrikaans teacher, Helena Stegmann in 1944. She encouraged him to dust off his Afrikaans and he started writing in his mother tongue with enthusiasm. He was full of praise for the creative possibilities of the language and called it a "distinctively South African, native of the soil" vernacular (*The South African Opinion*. April 1944: 25). Most of his Afrikaans short stories

appeared in popular journals such as *Die Ruiter*, *Die Brandwag* and *On/Op Parade*. Although many of these stories were Afrikaans versions of previously written English stories, some – for example, the masterly “Unto dust” (titled “Tot stof” in Afrikaans) – were first written in Afrikaans. (The original Afrikaans version appeared in *On Parade* on 21 December 1948 and again in 2001 in The Anniversary Edition volume *Verborgen Skatte*).

The most remarkable aspect of Bosman’s Afrikaans writing was how he positioned himself culturally as Afrikaner storyteller. It seemed that Bosman was acutely aware of the sensibilities of his target readership and enjoyed playing to it. Even when he translated from English into Afrikaans, Bosman made crafty cultural shifts with regard to his satirical commentary – skills that, in my opinion, firmly locate him in the company of prominent bilingual South African authors such as Louis Leipoldt, Uys Krige and André Brink. Yet the Afrikaans literary establishment, even today, does not recognize Bosman. For example, not one of Bosman’s Afrikaans short stories have been included in Daniël Hugo’s volume of short stories *Tydskrif, ’n Herontmoeting met Vroeë Afrikaans Kortverhaalskrywers* (2001).

In the course of my reacquaintance with Herman Charles Bosman’s short stories I also read his two dorp novels, *Willemisdorp* and *Jacaranda in the Night* for the first time. The editions of these works preceded *Verborgen Skatte* in the Anniversary Series. Stephen Gray’s insightful foreword to *Jacaranda in the Night* kindled my interest in Bosman’s impulse to write two small-town novels, which were stylistically and thematically different from his short stories. (The possibility came to mind that the small-town milieu might have held a similar attraction to Bosman’s contemporaries in South African literature.) With the exception of “A Bekkersdal marathon” (*Idle Talk: Voorkamer Stories* I.1999: 22–26) and “Rivier-af verkoop” (*Verborgen Skatte* 2001: 89–92) all Bosman’s short stories, numbering more than one hundred, take the South African farm as their setting. The piece cited (in chapter 1) titled “The Dorps of South Africa” which appeared in *The South African Opinion* is an important clue to Bosman’s interest in the literary possibilities presented by the small-town milieu.

Bosman’s dorp piece follows his residence in the Northern Transvaal town of Pietersburg where he was employed as the editor of *The Zoutpansberg Review and Mining Journal*. His sojourn in Pietersburg was the inspiration for his first novel

Jacaranda in the Night (1947). Stephen Gray, the author of the most recent and comprehensive biography of Bosman titled *Life Sentence* (2005), edited and introduced the Anniversary Edition of *Jacaranda in the Night* (2000). This particular edition of Bosman's first novel displays a similar thoroughness of research and a desire to preserve his legacy as carefully and responsibly as possible (an achievement, incidentally, of the Anniversary Project as a whole). It is, therefore, useful briefly to consider Gray's valuable account of the novel's history:

The years of Bosman's life leading up to the publication of *Jacaranda in the Night* are worth tracing in some detail for the light that they shed on his text. Finding more than freelance work as a journalist in South Africa after his repatriation from Europe early in the Second World War could not have been easy [...] Bosman was resident in Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal (living rather scandalously together with his second wife, Ella, and his wife-to-be, Helena); [...] Highlights of his stint on *The Zoutpansberg Review* were the midyear South African general election, which saw General Smuts returned to power with a landslide victory [...] (Gray 2005:10)

In addition to the playful scrambling of names (Helena/ Lena; Herman Charles/ Charlie; Herman Bosman/ Hendrik Huysmans), it is clear that the characters of the teacher, Lena Cordier, and newspaper editor, Charlie Hendricks, in *Willemisdorp* as well as Hannah Theron and Hendrik Huysmans in *Jacaranda in the Night* are respectively based on Helena Stegmann and Herman Bosman's Pietersburg experience.²⁷

The many interesting pieces that Bosman wrote for the Pietersburg weekly, *The Zoutpansberg Review*, bear testimony of his belief in the enduring qualities of the human spirit. One of these is titled “The Post-war World” and reads:

What is of the moment is that man's *elan vital* has not been killed by the unparalleled calamities into which the four corners of the earth have been plunged. The indomitable optimism that is human nature never seems to manifest more strongly than in times like these. Amid what appear to be overwhelming disasters there continues to reside in mankind a sure instinct which sees, in cosmic convulsions, not the tragic finish of a world but the physical violence of a new creation (Bosman, H.C. 2003 (Anniversary Edition) *My Life and Opinions*: 106).

The message that, despite all the darkness in the world, the human spirit endures, runs like a shining thread through Bosman's entire oeuvre.

APB publishers published *Jacaranda in the Night* in 1947. It was Bosman's first published book-length work. Its reception, however, was not all that favourable. Contemporaneous reviewers (in Gray 2000: 17–18) slated the novel for flaws such as melodrama, sentimentality, and sordidness. Bosman, however, was not ready to give up on the novel form. He wrote his second novel *Willemisdorp* about which Gray (2000: 22) remarks: “*Willemisdorp* is a rare instance of a major writer taking stock of an earlier work in order to get it right once and for all. While *Willemisdorp* turned out to be his masterpiece, *Jacaranda in the Night* was the depth-sample without which the panorama would not have cleared”.

Unfortunately *Willemisdorp* was not published during Bosman's lifetime. In a *Mail & Guardian* article Gray (1997: 32) relates the interesting history of the *Willemisdorp* manuscript, which was written for the American market (hence Americanisms such as “negro” for “black” and “green grass” for “dagga” (cannabis) in the text):

At the end of 1947 Alan Paton commended [Bosman's short story volume *Mafeking Road* (1947)] in *The New York Times Book Review*. A talent-scout at Harper and Bros headhunted Bosman in Johannesburg, but by June 1949 had rejected the book together with *Cold Stone Jug* and *Jacaranda in the Night*. Bosman's next move was to acquire a US agent Margaret Macpherson, who had links with Harcourt Brace [Publishers]. By October 10 1951, she had agreed to lead their attempt on the US market with the promised new novel. Her author never received her letter; he had died in Edenvale Hospital on October 14. He left no will, so [his wife], Helena could not proceed until she had bought back his papers at a public auction. Joseph Jones, [a scout from the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin], acquired them from her [...] and by 1975 an American doctoral student Vivienne Mawson had sorted them. That was when it became clear that *Willemisdorp* had indeed been completed.

When Human & Rousseau agreed to publish the *Willemisdorp* manuscript in 1977, Bosman's widow agreed to certain cuts in the text. (These omissions included graphic descriptions of police brutality.) In 1998 the full, uncut *Willemisdorp* text appeared in print for the first time as part of the Anniversary Series. In the introductory notes to the latter edition, Gray explains that two versions of the manuscript are held in the archives of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, Texas. “Version A” is the more astringent, revised format of “Version B”. He goes on to lavish praise on the way that Bosman was able to “pull the rather inert Version B together and propel it forward into the finished work” (9).

Given the background and reception of Bosman's two small-town novels, *Jacaranda in the Night* and *Willemisdorp*, the latter text was the obvious choice for this study. *Volksblad* reviewer, Wilhelm Grüter, who attended school in Pietersburg in the 1950's, suggests that the novel's evocation of the dorp's atmosphere is "almost tangible". More important, he says, is the novel's "revelation of the nation's consciousness" (1999: 8; my emphasis).

Both manuscripts – *Jacaranda in the Night* and *Willemisdorp* – reached completion during or shortly after Bosman's sojourn in Pietersburg. In addition to reflecting demographic shifts that were taking place in South African society (from farm to town and city), the novels represent an interesting shift in writerly focus and style. As mentioned, all Bosman's short stories, with the exception of "A Bekkersdal marathon" and "Sold down the river", are set in the farming communities of South Africa. In these stories criticism of idealized notions of the South African frontier (particularly in the early Afrikaans literary canon) are relayed through Bosman's mouthpiece character, Oom Schalk Lourens. This is achieved through an interesting frame narrative technique, which allows the author to distance himself from his narrator's traditionalism. Bosman undercuts the mythical pillars of farm tradition and reveals all the goings-on beneath the placid surface of pastoralism: laziness, hypocrisy, religious bigotry, child abuse and miscegenation, to name but a few. He lays bare the farm milieu in a way that sets him apart from most of his contemporaries. His satire, in fact, appears to foreshadow the work of a group of South African writers (referred to in chapter 1) who are known as the "Sestigers" (writers of the 1960s).

As mentioned, Bosman's short stories mirror demographical shifts in South African society that occurred during the first half of the 20th century. The depopulation of the farms as a result of economical pressures is realistically portrayed in some of the later Oom Schalk Lourens stories such as "Seed-time and Harvest" (*SAO* 3.10 Dec. 1946) and "Cometh Comet" (*Trek* 12.6 Jun. 1948). These stories also represent the first signs of a shift in Bosman's fictional focus – from farm to dorp and city. Even when Bosman revisited his Groot Marico fictional haunt shortly before his death in his *Voorkamer* series of short stories, he had disposed of his stalwart storyteller, Oom Schalk Lourens, suggesting that the latter had been part of a dying breed of *takhare* (backvelders). The *Voorkamer* conversation pieces reflect a new order of change and

technological development, which, in reality, was gradually replacing the frontier tradition in South Africa. *Voorkamer* stories such as “Psycho-analysis” and “Go-slow strike” attest to the fact that Oom Schalk’s world had irrevocably been replaced and that all that remained were nostalgic reminiscences of the olden days.

The *Voorkamer* conversation pieces furthermore demonstrate Bosman’s move away from his trademark narrative technique, presumably not only because Oom Schalk and his ilk were long gone, but also to allow his own voice to emerge more directly. (The tone of Bosman’s anonymous narrator who is also one of the *voorkamer* denizens resembles Bosman’s own). Bosman’s light-hearted (if tragi-comic) lampooning of the farm and its inhabitants (in his short stories) is replaced in his novels by a dark satire of South African society during the Union period. In *Willemisdorp* Bosman holds up a mirror to small-town society in order to reveal a (rather unpleasant) picture of the nation.

In an article titled “Herman Charles Bosman’s reading of landscape in *Willemisdorp*” Irmgard Schopen (193: 15) states: “The landscape [in *Willemisdorp*] has become a terrifying and inescapable symbol of [the white man’s] inability to confront the uneasy paradox of his presence in Africa”. For Bosman – unlike many of his contemporaries (particularly of the Afrikaans literary establishment) – the South African dorp does not represent the pastoral domesticity of colonial settlement, but rather an ideological blight on the surrounding landscape. In a discussion of the anti-pastoralism in Olive Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm*, J.M Coetzee touches on similar aspects of the domestication of the African landscape, which he describes as “the alienness of European culture in Africa” and “smallness in the midst of vastness” (1986: 2).

Bosman links the isolation of the South African small-town milieu to the Boers’ desire to settle out of reach of the British government. In the first chapter of *Willemisdorp* the omniscient narrator describes the small settlement and, what he dubs, “the Boers’ schizophrenia [...] of trying to adapt the rigid tenets of their Calvinistic creed to the spacious demands made by life on the African veld” (14). He goes on: “But through it all there is still the tawny grass of the Highveld. And there is Willemisdorp, a small town in the Northern Transvaal, almost a hundred years old. *It is bleak in character*” (15; my emphasis). In other words, the bleakness of Willemisdorp’s character is linked

to its history. Bosman's jaundiced view of the frontier tradition in Africa, is clearly suggested in the opening lines of the novel:

Walking along that street, Charlie Hendricks felt that it had not changed very much since the time the Voortrekkers laid it out to be the main street, Kotze Street having long since taken its place. And for more years than anybody could remember Willemisdorp had ceased to be the chief town of the Northern Transvaal. But it seemed as though some of those houses of sun-dried brick had in their time faced on to a wagon trail. The weather-beaten facades of other buildings spoke of a time when around them there was just open veld, with here and there a thorn tree, with here and there a hippo (75).²⁸

The African landscape is the meaningful repository of sad memories. The Boers who had trekked did not succeed in settling out of reach of British rule. In the first chapter of *Willemisdorp*, the narrator puts the reader in the picture:

Today, to the descendants of those Boers, the tremendous yellow veldtes of the Highveld are more than stretches of soil to grow mealies on. They are the scenes where old commandos rode. Memories of vanished freedom die hard. And in each small town there is a Boer War cemetery: women and children of the concentration camps lie there. Time does not heal all wounds (14).

A gruelling drama about the psychological consequences of the white man's relationship with the African landscape unfolds in *Willemisdorp*'s plot. Gone is the "African romance" of Bosman's earlier work. Incidentally, the title that he personally preferred to the one that his publisher decided upon (*Mafeking Road*) for his first volume of Marico short stories was *Starlight on the Veld* (Rosenberg 1976: 195). In many of these stories a mystical preoccupation with the moon, the stars and all things beautiful on the veld prevails. Bosman's "romanticism", however, never fitted definitions of high romanticism. In this respect David Medalie (1994: 83) comments: "It is a sort of a thin mixture of the Aesthetes and the Decadents, of Baudelaire and Poe and Wilde, whose hieratic notions of the artist clearly appealed to Bosman. His romanticism is thus deliberately derivative [...] and the trick of it often seems to lie in unsettling the reader who traces its familiar lines".

In *Willemisdorp* there is no trace of any romanticism. It appears as though Bosman has let loose the wrath of the African landscape on the hapless inhabitants of his imaginary community of Afrikaners with their bleak character and bad karma. In a *Sunday Times* review of *Willemisdorp* Neil Pendock (1999: 15) comments on Bosman's departure from the writing style of his earlier work. He proposes: "Bosman's book is

at his blackest, with all the themes he alluded to in his short stories laid bare: suicide, drug dependency, betrayal and murder [...] Quite a different perspective from Oom Schalk Lourens taking another sip of Jerepigo on his stoep”. The Afrikaans author Hennie Aucamp’s (1980: 16) views of Bosman’s style are similar to Pendock’s. He notes:

It appears that Bosman was developing a new style and worldview because a certain emotion that was always present in Bosman, has all of a sudden deepened – *disillusionment*. This does not necessarily represent an artistic loss. It means that Bosman has left behind a romanticism that sometimes can be false. In *Willemisdorp* Bosman comes closest to an Olympic distancing act, which empowers him to judge most incisively about the human condition. He echoes many great artists through the ages in saying that we are in an “imperfect world”.

Willemisdorp may also be read as an example of “writing against” the traditional African adventure novel such as Sir Henry Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines*. These novels base their storylines on, as Michael Chapman (130–131) suggests: “[T]he chivalric quest, in which Victorian gentlemen, some with Nordic features, accomplish their heroic deeds in an Africa that remains a laboratory for the proving of British manhood rather than a real place”. He continues to say that the conventions of behaviour in these stories are rarely open to serious investigation in terms of class, race, or gender.

In *Willemisdorp*, by contrast, Bosman does not baulk at serious investigations into societal foibles and idiosyncrasies. The isolated South African small town is for him the ideal focal point on which to train his satirical eye in order to dissect the society that it represents. Although *Willemisdorp* contains many humorous gems reminiscent of Oom Schalk Lourens’s voice, its satire is hard-hitting and ruthless. Bosman exposes the small-town milieu as a repository of moral perversion – a mirror of all that is wrong with South African society on the eve of Apartheid. Bosman is at pains to demonstrate that moral aberrations associated with the town milieu is symptomatic of the ills of Afrikaner nationalist hegemony in the country. *Willemisdorp* is depicted as a microcosmic space whose confined physical dimensions represent the ideological imprisonment (from which there appears to be no escape) of the nation’s mind. The following passage demonstrates Bosman’s veld-versus-small-town symbolism:

[Charlie Hendricks] was already just about to cross that ill-defined area serving as a borderline between that plateau-high-up Willemisdorp and the slope-of-the-escarpment bushveld that led to Kleinberg. He was between the desert and the sown. [...] On the road that his car had brought him, he was just about midway between the two. On the dark, tortuous road along which he had been led by his brain, he was in pretty wild country – betwixt and between. On his left hand was sanity, on his right madness. Or was it the other way round. He wasn't quite sure now, any more (203).

Bosman focuses on the emblematic aspects of his main character's existential anxiety of being caught up in an inescapable ideological time warp. There are, incidentally, many similarities between *Willemisdorp* and *Too Late the Phalarope* with regard to commentary on the natural/unnatural tensions within the social milieu. The selection of Bosman's novel to conclude this study, however, is not only chronologically apt (the uncensored manuscript version was published in 1998), but it also represents a climactic aspect of this study. Although Leipoldt, Black, and Paton's novels are historically and artistically significant, Bosman's fearless dorp satire takes an unrivalled position among its contemporaries.

In this regard Stephen Gray (1997: 1) remarks: "The 25 years' delay had knocked *Willemisdorp* from the position it should have held alongside the greats with which it shared so much – *Cry the Beloved Country* (the lure of the big city) and Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* (collapse of the colonial psyche in the bush)". If *Willemisdorp* had been timeously published, its strong political content would have placed it in the company of novels such as William Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe*, which, at the time of its publication, was regarded as highly contentious and reactionary. There are, incidentally, many interesting similarities between the two novels. Plomer's own summation of his novel (1943: 186) ("to present in a fictional form partly satirical, partly lyrical, partly fantastic, some of my own impressions of life in Africa and to externalise the turmoil of feelings that they had aroused in me [...] a violent ejaculation, a protest, a nightmare, a phantasmagoria [....]" (1943: 186)) may equally apply to *Willemisdorp*. Both Plomer and Bosman bore no illusions about the lack of easy answers to the basic questions of the white man's existence in Africa. These writers' bold confrontations with the nightmares of the white man in Africa stand out in an era when others "peeped at [them] from between the fingers of two horrified hands" (as Chapman (178) refers to Sarah Gertrude Millin's writing).

As mentioned, *Willemisdorp* was first published in 1977 with certain significant cuts in the text. This appears to be no coincidence. The year 1977, as *Sunday Times* journalist, Neil Pendock (1999: 15) remembers, was “the dark night of apartheid after Soweto had exploded [and when there was] a clampdown on the press. *World* and *Weekend World* were closed down and their editors placed in ‘preventative detention’”. In this regard Stephen Gray (2000: 216) comments: “These cuts all have to do with painful revelations of illegal brutality on the part of the South African police. Omitting them effectively got rid of all the swinging exposure Bosman intended of such routine practices. An element of tyranny, of menace, simply disappeared from the book – which to say the least is unfortunate”. It is not surprising, therefore, that when the 1977 edition of *Willemisdorp* appeared, an observant newspaper reviewer, Ia van Zyl of *Die Suidwester* (1978: 9) remarked that the novel appears to have a “fragmentary effect”. She nevertheless goes on to compliment Bosman on his “witty characterization and brilliantly humorous description [which] makes this small-town drama well worth reading”. Other reviews include Jos Baker’s (1978: 8) in *The Cape Times*. He discusses *Willemisdorp* together with J.M Coetzee’s *In the Heart of the Country*, Hans Hofmeyr’s *The Short Story of Disa* and Peter Wilhelm’s *The Dark Wood* as examples of South African novels that explore a familiar theme. He praises these writers for risking the inherent danger of banning by writing about sex across the colour line, which at the time was forbidden by legislation. Hennie Aucamp’s review of *Willemisdorp* in *Beeld* (1980: 10) is equally complimentary. He stresses the universality of Bosman’s insight into the human condition: “The novel demonstrates” he says, “the dark powers at work in every human being (own translation; 10)”. He hails the contemporaneous and timeless qualities of the text and the novel’s exploration of the politically conditioned Afrikaner psyche, as unequalled in South African literature. Aucamp, whose own short stories are often set in the *platteland*, further emphasizes Bosman’s use of landscape as a powerful metaphor with cosmic dimensions. A *Volksblad* reviewer (A. van Zyl 1978: 15) highlights Bosman’s deep empathy with the realities of human weaknesses and foibles in *Willemisdorp*. The small-town, Willemisdorp, she says, effectively becomes a symbol of man’s mental isolation. She positions Bosman’s novel with celebrated Afrikaans Sestiger (writers of the 1960’s) novelist, Etienne Leroux. She goes on: “It is a book about man’s entrapment in the circumstances of a cruelly organized society.

Bosman's word craft succeeds in exploring fine nuances and various levels of meaning" (own translation).

In the light of the general praise that the first edition of *Willemisdorp* received, it is not surprising that, when the uncut Anniversary Edition appeared in 1998, the novel was praised even more glowingly. Moreover, in the New South Africa it may now take its rightful place as a significant precursor of politically engaged protest literature. In this regard Neil Pendock (1999: 15) remarks: "The casual brutality and sadism of [the police] are now restored to the story and, in a terrifying way, it is almost as if *Willemisdorp* foreshadows the truth commission report or one of the handful of recent books which deal with the barbarity of apartheid, like Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull*." Pendock regards the novel as outstanding at a time in South Africa when local novels were few and far between. Stephanie Nieuwoudt (1998: 7) calls the novel "a masterpiece" and a key text in South African literature. Wilhelm Grütter (*Die Burger*, 7 April 1999:9) views the text as an important contribution to the relatively small body of politically engaged literature of the Union period in South Africa. He regards the compelling manner in which the novel illuminates the mood of the time, as its main strength.

It is a fair prediction that *Willemisdorp* – as it becomes more widely read and studied – will take its rightful place as one of the key texts in South African literature – a course to which I am honoured to contribute.

Willemisdorp as a mirror of society

Nothing was what it seemed. Only the tea and koeksisters were truly, inalienably themselves.

(*The Elusive Moth* by Ingrid Winterbach (82))

It's a horrible moment. [...] Centuries of history drop away: the forest itself is staring at him – into him – with a dark face, lined and worn and old, marinated in ancient contempt. The face belongs here. Adam is the intruder, alien and unwanted; the single element in the scene that doesn't fit.

(*The Impostor* by Damon Galgut (68))

In his 1945 essay in *The South African Opinion* titled “Dorps of South Africa” Bosman comments:

[A] dorp is unquestionably the best place in which to study life at close hand. Because it is all in slow motion you don't miss the significant details. And you get a complete picture, circumscribed by that frame which cuts off the village from the rest of the world. What is more important though is the deception of village life that calls for closer inspection: All that restfulness is only on the surface. Underneath, there is ferment. (In Bosman H.C. 2002 (Anniversary Edition). *A Cask of Jerepigo*: 85).

Few of Bosman's contemporaries referred to dorp/small-town society in such harsh terms as “deception” and “ferment”. Bosman, however, was drawn to the undercurrents in the typical South African town. For him the closed-off physical aspect – “the frame which cuts off the village from the rest of the world” (85) – of the typical South African *platteland* village, makes the perfect allegorical setting in which to unmask the “deception” and “ferment” of the broader social picture. In *Willemisdorp* Bosman's satirical critique targets the ills associated with narrow Calvinism and rising Afrikaner nationalism during the Union period. It is no coincidence that Bosman's fictional town in *Willemisdorp*'s prequel, *Jacaranda in the Night* is named Kalvyn. According to the blurb on the cover of the 1947-edition, the latter novel deals with “the stress and emotional compulsions pervading the inner lives of the inhabitants of a small Transvaal town” (cited in Gray 2000. Introduction to the Anniversary Edition of *Jacaranda in the Night*: 15). *Willemisdorp*, as mentioned, is the outcome of Bosman's reworking of *Jacaranda in the Night*, which had not been

well received. In the second novel Bosman nevertheless focuses on similar thematic aspects, i.e. the psychological pressures on characters whom as a result of mental imprisonment and ideological repression (symbolized by the small-town frame), make the wrong choices in life. As mentioned, Bosman's small-town characters' trials and tribulations are symptomatic of wider social ills associated with the politically troubled national consciousness during the Union period in South Africa.

In *Willemisdorp* Bosman emphasizes similar effects on the human psyche of *unnatural* ideological strictures as Paton does in *Too Late the Phalarope*. Both novels are concerned with the personal psychological effects of ideologically inspired social norms, which, during the Union period in South Africa, were entrenched in racially discriminatory laws such as The Immorality Act.²⁹ However, although these writers' social critique is fundamentally similar, their fictional styles are markedly different. While Paton's religious background is evident in the decorum of his style, Bosman slaughters holy cows as he lays bare society's evils in shocking detail. When Paton switches to satirical mode, it is with some gentleness. Bosman's satire in contrast is so severe that it led to cuts to the text in the 1977 edition of *Willemisdorp*. The atmosphere in the novel is bleak. Almost all the characters in *Willemisdorp* are portrayed as the bearers of bad karma and victims of their unnaturally repressed social environment. Their deviant behaviour, Bosman suggests, is directly attributable to their not being able to exist as free and natural individuals in the ideologically repressed small-town milieu. He represents, like no South African author before him, the dorp as a symbolic cesspool of all that is wrong with society as a whole.

Willemisdorp is set in a small town in the Northern Transvaal province of the Union of South Africa just before the fateful 1948 election, which carried Dr D.F. Malan's National Party to power. The main protagonist, Charlie Hendricks (who is, as has been indicated, a fictional representation of Bosman, the journalist) arrives in Willemisdorp to take up the position of editor of the *Northern Transvaal News*. It is published twice weekly and boasts of being "the most influential newspaper in the Transvaal outside of Johannesburg and Pretoria [...]” (15). The newspaper promotes the interests of the Union Party (read United Party). The reader is informed that this organ should not be confused with *Die Noordelike Transvaal Nuus*, the vehicle of the Volksparty (read National Party), which claims to be "the most influential Northern

Transvaal organ of public opinion outside of the Johannesburg and Pretoria dailies”(15 –16). The Willemisdorpers are preparing for a by-election in which the Union Party representative, Robert E. Constable and the Volksparty candidate, Dap van Zyl, will contest the Willemisdorp parliamentary seat.

The Volksparty fights the election on racial politics. This is evident from the questions with which Constable is bombarded during a political meeting in the Town Hall.

Volksparty hecklers protest against the “liberal” Union Party policy, which favours giving non-whites the vote. Constable, however, finds himself in a somewhat weak position because his nomination for the vacancy in the Willemisdorp constituency has been accomplished through “string-pulling at the Pretoria headquarters of the Union Party” as a result of which “a good few loyal Union Party supporters in Willemisdorp who had themselves hoped to receive the nomination were, understandably, sore” (18). This type of corruption is revealed to be commonplace in the dorp where hypocritical attitudes and behaviour for the part of the so-called stalwarts of society appear to be the order of the day. Bosman’s revelations about the idiosyncrasies of dorp politics – irrespective of the political party – is reminiscent of Stephen Black’s *The Dorp*.

Willemisdorp’s narrator sarcastically comments on the townspeople’s behaviour at the meeting: “You could sense a certain degree of poise about them and, *almost breeding*” (my emphasis; 19). Breeding, for the majority of the Willemisdorpers, however, appears not to translate to poise or manners or anything abstract, but rather literally to racial purity and dominance.³⁰

Attitudes of racial superiority are, however, not the only kind of prejudice in Willemisdorp. The codes according to which the social hierarchy among the white male population operate, is another telling example. Membership of the Willemisdorp Club is an important status symbol, because: “[I]t was only if you were a pretty important person in the professional, commercial, industrial religious, social or educational life of the town that you could become a member of the Willemisdorp Club.” In a sarcastic aside, the narrator adds: “The fact that the literary, artistic, philosophical, musical side of human activity was not represented served only to impart a tone to the club” (87).

A man who strongly supports notions of racial exclusivity is Johannes Erasmus, principal of the Willemisdorp Afrikaans-medium primary school. As Erasmus and his

wife, Malie, are walking home from the political meeting, he suggests that the coloured children playing in the street are the result of “having an RAF camp in the area during the war” (22). Malie, his wife, offers a corrective view: “We had some half-castes before the English air force came though” (22). Like many Afrikaners of the time, Johannes, though he has made good in his profession, comes from a humble background. His inferiority complex – which he tries to hide behind a facade of self-assuredness – haunts him and causes him to suffer spells of depression and melancholy. At another level, Erasmus’s state of mind is emblematic of the demoralized Afrikaner psyche after the Boer War. It appears that racially superior attitudes were, for many Afrikaners, a means of compensating for the humiliation suffered during the war and the Rebellion.

However, when it comes to a possible tainting of Willemisdorp’s white image, Erasmus need not have fretted. Police detective Sergeant Brits keeps a close watch on the exclusive race laws of the Union Government. It is indeed through the character of Sergeant Brits that Bosman delivers his sharpest and darkest satire. After the political meeting in the town hall, newspaper editor, Charlie Hendricks, encounters the inimitable Sergeant Brits on the pavement outside. The latter enlightens Hendricks as to the reasons for his flashing his torch over “suspicious” footprints. The so-called evidence he puts forward against white men who presumably consort with a coloured prostitute is trenchantly satirical:

Yus, it’s a white man, I’m sure, [...] walking there with that kaffir woman, side by side. The nigger woman’s footprints I’ll know anywhere in Africa. She’s one of the nigger women in this town as I suspects of sleeping with white men. She’s got three pairs of shoes. [...] That shoe there might perhaps not be a white man’s shoe. You doesn’t always know. Although I gets a feeling it’s not a kaffir’s shoe. I don’t mean yus because it’s new and it isn’t fixed up underneath with a piece of motor car tyre. You got some kaffirs today wearing smart shoes, smarter’n any shoes I got to wear. And you also gets white men with their toes sticking out of their boots (32).

When Detective Sergeant Brits reports to his superior, Commandant Roelf Kolyn, Bosman’s lampooning of the dorp’s law bearers is in full sway. Kolyn reiterates a previous order to “clean up” the town because, “We don’t want Willemisdorp to get a bad name. Remember that Cape senator that got arrested some years ago for sleeping with a nigger woman? Well, the village where that happened never heard the end of it. [...] We don’t want that sort of thing to happen here” (41). Brits reassures his superior

that he is competent for the task at hand. On the matter of his police training and experience, the inspector proudly reports:

“Of the white men, yes sir, I would say that in South West I was the best,” Brits said. “But there was a Bushman there what hadn’t any clothes on but a copper ring in his nose that could follow a trail what was without a lie three months old. And we also had a trained baboon there that had just no clothes on at all, and that was also better than me. Not much better, I won’t say, mind you” (42).

Bosman’s satire above is distinctly reminiscent of his short story mouthpiece, Oom Schalk Lourens’s “tall” stories.³¹

Although the police officer is the butt of Bosman’s ridicule, the humour – whilst it deconstructs the evils of the establishment that Brits represents – ominously foregrounds it. Kolyn’s instructions are to watch the white males in the community and if anyone is suspected of consorting with black women, that one should be “fixed”. The narrator sarcastically clarifies this innuendo: “They both knew what Brits meant without his having had to use the ugly word ‘frame-up’” (43). (Passages later in the novel where the two policemen graphically embroider on the details of police “frame-ups” were deleted from the 1977 edition of the text). Sergeant Brits diligently sets off to carry out his instructions to issue warnings to the white males in Willemisdorp.

In addition to highlighting the absurdity of policing the equally absurd Immorality Act, Bosman demonstrates how the cat-among-the-pigeons effect of Brits’s visits plays out. By this means, attention is drawn to the full extent of, on the one hand, the dark undercurrents in the dorp and, on the other, how repressive social dynamics impact on the minds of townsmen such as the main protagonist, Charlie Hendricks (the newspaper editor), Cyril Stein (the school board secretary), Dap van Zyl (the Volksparty candidate), Johannes Erasmus (the headmaster) and his brother Krisjan. Bosman poses the ironic perspective that from a moral point of view, much worse than the contravention of the Immorality Act is going on under the smooth patina of small-town society.

Jack Brummer, mining commissioner and one-time rugby star is the first on Sergeant Brits’s list. When Brummer’s secretary, Mavis Clark, announces Brits, Brummer

breaks into a sweat of panic. He knows he has much to hide from the long arm of the law. First there is the issue of his impregnation of the schoolteacher, Lena Cordier. Then there is the “dirty work going on in the bush, among [the] prospectors and miners” (50). It is suggested that Brummer’s knowledge of these crimes (“claim jumping” and “salting claims”) points to complicity on his part and, possibly, the taking of bribes. However, it turns out that Sergeant Brits is completely oblivious to the shenanigans of Willemsdorp’s “real” criminals. Bosman’s ironic-satirical treatment of Brits’s character actually expose the latter – the representative of the Union Government’s police force – to be the worst type of criminal: corrupt and rotten to the core! For example, Brits’s rounds yield an unexpected number of bribes, from, amongst others, the town butcher. The narrator sarcastically remarks that this particular visit is concluded rather swiftly because “[...] rather than waste unnecessary words in a language that was strange to [the butcher], he made the detective a small present. It was something you could understand in any language” (72).

As Brits proceeds with his witch hunt, it becomes increasingly ridiculous. The scene, describing his visit to the Anglican priest, the Reverend Thorwell Macey, glaringly shows up Brits and the system that he represents. There is a total breakdown of communication between the stiff-upper-lip English clergyman and the Afrikaans-speaking officer. Bosman cleverly plays on mispronunciations and misunderstandings of words such as “dirty”, “filthy” and “stink”. When Detective Sergeant Brits announces: “I just come here to do my dutty (sic.)”, the priest responds: “You can be as dirty as you like, my good man, [...] But please not here. [...] So I’ll be grateful if you’ll – er – go and do your dirty somewhere else” (73). When Brits calls a contravention of the Tielman Roos Act (read: Immorality Act) “filthy”, Macey understands him to denigrate the law itself. He says: “Yes, it is truly disgusting, [...] It is in one word, vile. [...] It’s a beastly disgrace [...] to any country’s statutes, a law like that. It’s about the most iniquitous Act I’ve ever heard of. [...] I think it – it stinks” (74).³²

Cyril Stein, the director of the school board is the next white male targeted by Detective Sergeant Brits. There are many reasons why Stein does not fit into dorp society not least of which is the fact that he is a Jew. Similar to the character Kappie in *Too Late the Phalarope*, his character symbolizes marginality in society.

Historically, Afrikaner nationalism – which was fast becoming the mainstream ideology in the country – tended to ignore the rights and aspirations of other nationalities. Bosman highlights the folly of these attitudes when Cyril Stein explains his predicament to Charlie Hendricks:

You know, I've been here quite a few years, [...] I've got the job through my uncle, who's quite a big noise in the Education Department. But I don't think I've really adapted myself to this place, and I don't think I ever shall. Take my name now – Stein. It's not really Jewish, you know. As a matter of fact, I think it's just another way of spelling Steyn. The last president of the Orange Free State Republic had the same name. And he was a Boer, all right. Wasn't he now? (26)

Because neither Stein's appearance nor his personality fit the iconic dorp mould, townspeople find excuses to label him as different and to treat him accordingly. As Hendricks observes: “[there was] something out of the ordinary in his appearance ... something artistic in a town where everybody was cut more or less to the same pattern of conventionality” (27). Bosman highlights the narrowness of townsmen’s behavioural frame of reference that holds conformity as the norm and manifestations of difference or marginality as deviant. Even Krisjan Erasmus whose application for the position of a driver depends on Stein’s approval, condescends to him when he realizes that Stein’s “different” appearance does not conform to the dorp’s standards for a man of “importance”: “Krisjan Erasmus was not only surprised at Cyril Stein’s appearance. He was disappointed beyond measure. He had expected to see somebody looking like a boss – somebody imposing and solid and with an air of authority” (67). Cyril Stein is, ironically, one of only a few townsmen who possess a “solid” human spirit. He is, for example, in favour of the school-feeding scheme being extended to native children. Bosman’s denouncement of hypocritical attitudes concerning the keeping up of appearances and pretence in order to gain the “respect” of the community is clearly implied through his portrayal of the hapless school board secretary who is caught up in a web of misunderstanding and prejudice.

Cyril Stein knows that he does not and will never measure up to the demands of an exacting community. He smokes dagga (cannabis) to still the pain. It is ironic that his position as school board secretary, which has been acquired – as everybody appears to know – through the pulling of strings by his uncle, apparently gains him the dubious honour of Sergeant Brits’s trust. When Brits visits Stein in his office, the differences

between the two men's characters are sharply contrasted. Stein's wit and intelligence enables him to play the fool with Brits who does not catch on. Before he leaves, Brits delivers his message about the enforcement of the provisions of the Tielman Roos Act. "Oh, that's all right" Cyril Stein replies. 'I don't need to worry about that. I've given up sleeping with Coloured women. I've found something better. I get more of a kick out of smoking dagga, instead.' [...] (86) Detective Sergeant Brits thinks that Stein is joking and bursts out laughing.

Cyril Stein is not joking at all. His marginal status in the dorp and his rejection by Lena Cordier indeed leads him to take solace in the smoking of dagga. As a matter of fact, his infatuation with Lena appears to be the only reason why he steers clear of the temptation provided by the coloured prostitute, Marjorie Jones, who frequents the block of flats where both he and Charlie Hendricks reside. When he encounters her on the stairs her physical beauty strikes him. His philosophical mood leads him to remark:

The African woman's backside, Cyril Stein was thinking to himself. It was like the shape of the African continent on the map. From the loins of the negro woman would spring all the future generations that would people the African continent. The white man would come and go. His brief sojourn and his passing would leave behind few traces. In the loins of the black woman the history and destiny of Africa were wrapped up. The white man would come and go and be forgotten. Africa, wombed in the negro woman's pelvis, was secure. Africa would go on forever (95).

This is an important observation in the context of one of *Willemse's* major themes i.e. the white man's relationship with the African landscape and its indigenes. Stephen Gray (38) proposes that all of South African literature is to some extent explained in terms of the pressures at work within, what he calls "a polymorphous frontier myth" (38). In a chapter in his *Southern African Literature* (1979) titled, "The frontier myth and the Hottentot eve", Gray explains that the real Khoi woman, Krotoa – named Eva by the first settlers – was the source of the legend. He says: "Her (the Hottentot Eve's) presence on the frontier lends the myth a quality of potential interchange, since she, as pastoral ambassadress, temptress, mediator and, ultimately miscegenator, comes to symbolize both the attractions and intractabilities of inland, that unknown terrain across the ever-shifting frontier" (38–39).

The challenge of unknown frontiers, however, is ambivalent. In this respect Irmgard Schopen (1993: 9) notes: "The land is perceived as a *tabula rasa* to be manipulated,

subjugated and accorded meaning, but simultaneously it challenges and resists these attempts. It goes without saying that the same applies to the land's indigenous population". Bosman's bleak view of the white man's future in Africa (voiced by Cyril Stein's character in the passage above) is strongly reminiscent of Stephen Black's prophecy in *The Dorp*:

"What about the natives of the country?" Ned asked. "They already outnumber us by five to one. In the past they fought each other; we were united. Today we fight each other while they are united. In twenty years' time they will be at least seven or eight to our one, strong and prosperous, with one idea. Give them a Chaka with modern ideas, or a Moshesh ... and where shall we be?"
(62)

Both Bosman and Black reveal startling insight into the intrinsic complexities at the root of white colonisers' relationship with the African landscape. They suggest that it boils down to facing the reality that the white man does not belong in Africa!

Like Jack Brummer and Cyril Stein, Charlie Hendricks, the newspaperman, receives a visit from the ubiquitous Sergeant Brits. Hendricks is an outsider character who tries to hide his troubles from the prying eyes of the community. It is ironic that Hendricks, an Afrikaner, is the editor of the English newspaper, the Northern Transvaal News, official organ of the Union Party. This incongruity appears to be emblematic of Hendricks's situation in the dorp. In this regard Jones, the newspaper's compositor, articulates a premonition regarding his boss's future: "I've seen 'em come and I've see 'em go. And I somehow don't give this Hendricks bloke too long here, either. Don't ask me why – I don't know. But it's just a feeling I've got. It's a feeling I've got in my waters" (53). Anticipatory scenes such as the latter form an interesting part of the novel's structure. In this manner Bosman stresses the inevitable fate of townsmen who feel uncomfortable with, yet cannot escape the repressive context of the dorp milieu. Bosman suggests that the emotional pressure that people experience in an unnatural, repressive atmosphere confuses their minds and compels them to make the wrong choices in life.

At the outset of the novel Hendricks is in low spirits because the only woman in town with whom he feels a connection, appears to ignore him. Hendricks does not know the real reason (her pregnancy) for ex-school teacher, Lena Cordier's behaviour and why she wants to leave her current position as editor of the *Transvaal News* women's

column. Hendricks's foul mood causes him to yield to temptation when the coloured prostitute, Marjorie Jones (the compositor Jones's illegitimate daughter), visits his flat. Afterwards he despises himself, tries in vain to analyze his behaviour, and finally attempts to run away from his conscience. In this regard Hennie Aucamp (1980: 16) comments: "Bosman's probing of the psychology of the white Afrikaner who, conditioned by society, nevertheless succumbs to the temptation of sexual intercourse with a black woman, is unrivalled in South African literature" (own translation). In *Too Late the Phalarope* Alan Paton also explores the subject of cultural conditioning in the scenes where the protagonist, Pieter van Vlaanderen, performs a Lady Macbethian "cleansing" of his body after the deed that society deplores and legislates against.

Bosman foregrounds the subconscious effect of ideo-cultural indoctrination when the narrator remarks that, although the deed at first seems *natural* to Hendricks ("he could not detect that she was essentially different from a white girl (84)"), he had solved the problem as to how a white man had to act when a coloured girl came into his room. He couldn't offer her a chair, but he could the bed! Bosman's wry critique includes not only Charlie, but also all the white males in society who indulge in this sort of racial bigotry.

Hendricks is acutely aware of his double standards and the neurotic tension it causes in his mind. However, Bosman demonstrates how the strong tide of societal conventions can sweep aside human logic when Charlie ignores his guilt only to be tormented again. Hendricks's state of mind oscillates between his two personas: the broadminded liberal and the Calvinist Boer. His fascination with the lifestyle of the corundum diggers outside town is an example of how his liberal persona involuntarily reverts to the typical townsman's mindset. The picture of the white workers and their families' activities evoke familiar descriptions in literature of black men and women working:

There was a monotony about these camps. Tents and galvanised-iron huts. Fat, barefooted women and ragged children. Men in khaki shorts or disreputable-looking flannels making holes in the earth with pick and shovel. Their eldest sons helping them. [...] And the women carrying buckets to the spruit for water. And washing hanging on the line – their dresses pulling up and exposing their fat, white buttocks: for they had nothing on under their cotton frocks (114).

These scenes disturb Charlie because they jar with preconceived ideas about the type of labour that should be performed by “civilized” white people.

It is interesting that both characters, Hendricks and Van Vlaanderen (in *Too Late the Phalarope*), are portrayed as liberal-minded individuals whose frames of reference have been broadened by contact with the world outside the village. They are compassionate, “normal” human beings with whom the contemporary reader readily associates – more than with the so-called respectable characters in the novels. In fact, it is possible that Hendricks’s and Van Vlaanderen’s consciences are more responsive because they possess greater humanity. Yet, in both cases the power of their cultural conditioning painfully comes to the fore after the act of sexual intercourse across the colour bar. Charlie Hendricks realizes with shock that he is “far from being free of prejudice” (84). He confesses to himself that he is at heart a Boer. In a pivotal passage in the novel, the narrator’s voice interjects as follows:

He knew, of course. It wasn’t that there was anything wrong per se with his relations with Marjorie. At least, it was rotten, and all that. Stinking, and all that. But it wasn’t just *that*. He was, in spite of all kinds of liberal and even egalitarian views that he might hold, still, at heart, a Boer and a Calvinist. Charlie Hendricks knew that about himself. He was the editor of a Union Party newspaper. And intellectually he recoiled from the Volksparty tenets. But in his blood he was a Boer. And he was sleeping with a kaffir woman. The generations of Boer ancestry were stronger than he was. He felt a lost soul (135).

The last sentence encapsulates the degree of hopelessness in the heart of an individual who realizes that he is a victim. He wishes to break out of the ideological bonds that imprison him, but he knows he is powerless. He despises himself for simultaneously breaking and acquiescing to societal forces. His mental paranoia causes his self-image to be eroded; he becomes confused, makes wrong decisions, and eventually tries to run away from his conscience.

Flight is a key thematic element in the *Willemsdorp*. The Afrikaner’s mental schizophrenia is foregrounded in the poignant scenes that relate to this theme. Hendricks, in his mental anguish, attempts to find solace in nature. He drives outside town beyond all the structures (as Schopen (12) states) that signify man’s attempted control of the landscape: the “new concrete bridge”, “a barbed-wire fence” and “a deep cutting [where] the road to Kleinberg had been hacked through dense bush and

blasted down a mountainside" (92; my emphases). The italicised words in the text evoke a violent erasure of natural barriers. In other words, the man-made barriers with which the latter have been replaced are charged with a strong symbolical sense in terms of the agency that man has imprinted on the natural world. On the one hand he has created a safe haven – on farmsteads and in villages – for himself against the elements and the perils of the natural world. On the other, he has imprisoned himself in an unnatural milieu governed by restrictive moral barriers from which he desires to escape. Bosman's juxtaposition of the open veld and man-made settlement, as well as his exploration of the tensions represented by this dichotomy, is skilfully achieved in *Willemisdorp*. All that is represented by the limited small-town frame is offset against the alluring enigma of nature. Lengthy descriptions of unspoilt nature surrounding the town serve as a backdrop, which throws into stark relief the inconsequential human activities of the repressed little town.³³

When Charlie Hendricks flees into the open veld surrounding the town hoping to find solace for his troubled mind, he finds fear instead. A surreal, phantasmagorical nightmare besets him. The description of the bout of primal fear that Charlie Hendricks experiences in the veld is spine chilling:

And suddenly Charlie Hendricks grew frightened. In the air he breathed there seemed to be the smell of blood. But what frightened him was not the veld's blood smell. It seemed like a very ancient fear, something he could not define. The leaves of the prickly pear seemed ancestral. The fragments of weathered cowdung were timeless. The anthill had always been there, and always it had the same shade of grey" (92).

In an interesting intervention, the narrator at this point addresses the reader directly. He explains that the old Boers called Charlie's type of fear "*Ouma bangheid*" (grandmother fear). He continues:

[I]t is a terror not rooted in modernity, but it is something going back pretty far. But if that same old Boer has taken to you, he will also try and put you right, *winking* as he delivers himself of this statement. Why you get frightened, he will tell you, is because in that narrow opening in the bush, cut off from all human companionship, you actually meet yourself. You encounter yourself face to face, the wise old Boer will say, and before God, is not that the most frightening and spine chilling meeting that any man can have?" (93).

Schopen (13) suggests that the authorial mediation above is of crucial significance. She comments:

[T]he explanation is further mediated by the “wise old Boer” who imposes meaning on the experience, interpreting it as a moment of existential nakedness, an epiphanic encounter with the nightmare of the self. This explanation sustains the relationship between landscape and colonising self set up earlier – the landscape is silent and empty of meaning until a human construct is placed upon it.

In other words, ideological structures and strictures associated with narrow Calvinism are simultaneously the Afrikaner’s undoing and refuge. He attempts to take flight from the existential tensions that confuse him. However, in the veld, away from human intervention, he comes face to face with – and discovers that he cannot face – his bare soul. So, the threat of the landscape relates to man’s inability to confront the conflict within him, and the town ultimately represents a comforting moral barrier against and a place to hide from his conscience.

Charlie Hendricks’s fears intensify in a grisly manner when he visits a deep sinkhole, the Wondergat, outside town. Some commentators are intrigued by the manner that Bosman creates magnetism within the novel around the mystic Wondergat. Hennie Aucamp says: “The chilling descriptions of the Wondergat hark back to ancient times. It is strongly reminiscent of the Malabar Caves in *A Passage to India* [...] The Wondergat in itself lends cosmic dimensions to Charlie’s flight (the angry eye of God!) [...]” (own translation; 10). Hendricks accompanies Jack Brummer on a visit to the corundum diggings in the Willemisdorp district and shows him the Wondergat (a sinkhole in the veld). Hendricks is not prepared for the awkwardness of the experience. When he sees the barbed-wire fence, which encloses the hole, he attempts to set his mind at ease with familiar associations:

There might be a grave there, in the middle of that barbed-wire fence. Or there might be a monument there. That was the feeling you got from seeing a barbed-wire fence right on its own like that, in the bush, and away from all other barbed-wire fences, and enclosing an area the size of a small living-room. Charlie Hendricks’s curiosity was piqued. Something historical – to do with the Boer War, possibly, he thought. But before he had climbed the barbed-wire fence [...] he knew it wasn’t that (115).

Jack Brummer is unable to answer Hendricks’s questions about the geological origins of the deep Wondergat sinkhole. It, therefore, remains a mystical phenomenon – a sign of the mystery of the natural world (there is no concrete evidence that it was the

result of ancient mining activity) and a challenge to the limited consciousness of human agency represented by the dorp milieu.

The landscape's challenge, however, is ambivalent. This reading is underlined by another key theme in the novel – dagga smoking. The interesting manner in which Bosman equates dagga with women in *Willemisdorp* deserves attention. Dagga, which is a substance derived from a natural source, symbolizes both a threat and a promise to the white man in Africa. When Hendricks speaks to the coloured man, Josias, he misunderstands Josias's veiled references to the illicit produce that he peddles on the streets of Willemisdorp. Hendricks interprets Josias's slang term "Nellie Pope" for dagga, as a reference to a woman. Josias plays along with the accidental metaphor. He says that Nellie Pope has "a red head" and "a green dress" (64). "Nellie Pope" is a "natural" woman who offers an escape from the harsh realities of life – as both Hendricks and Stein discover. Dagga's promise, however, is an illusion. In reality dagga's organic chemicals are damaging to the human brain because they induce hallucination and schizophrenia. The novel demonstrates how these effects symbolically evoke the African landscape's "revenge": The novel's climactic conclusion (discussed later) powerfully demonstrates how the effects of smoking dagga and the white man's worst nightmares in Africa are fictionally paralleled.

Schopen (14) makes another interesting observation regarding the dagga theme in *Willemisdorp*: "Like miscegenation [dagga] threatens to blur the carefully defined distinction between the races. Officially dagga is only smoked by the indigenous population". The latter phenomenon is often referred to in the novel. For example when a whiff of dagga smoke is detected by the Zulu watchman outside Cyril Stein's flat, he wonders where it comes from and decides: "It must be the Native servant who tidied the flats [...] For there would be no other Native in the building at that hour. And, of course, no white man smoked that kind of leaf" (34). In other words, a white man smoking dagga is presumed to cross the line between "civilized" practice and "uncivilized" behaviour associated with indigenes whose lack of resources force them to use natural products such as dagga growing "wild like a weed everywhere" (as Sergeant Brits explains: 85). Hendricks's sarcastic remarks about dagga smoking sum up the community's attitudes in this regard. In a conversation with Stein he says:

I don't feel it's right that a white man should smoke dagga. Western Civilisation. We've got to set the Coloured races an example. You know what I mean – White superiority. If we start going for their degenerate practices like smoking dagga, the next is we'll be wearing a striped blanket with a top-hat, like a Bakwena chief, or we'll be drinking kaffir beer out of claypots (176)

Under pressure of the demands of town culture that requires conformity (if only outwardly) to a rigid set of rules associated with so-called civilized behaviour, Hendricks makes two wrong choices: he sleeps with a coloured woman *and* smokes dagga. "Thus," as Schopen (14) proposes, "the themes of miscegenation and dagga smoking act in tandem, as sources of threat and promise emanating from the landscape, and illustrate Willemsdorp's schizophrenic response to these challenges to narrow Calvinist morality".

As the plot develops in *Willemsdorp*, Bosman lays bare all the glaring ironies of the typical South African small-town milieu. He uses other characters – besides the outsider characters such as Cyril Stein and Charlie Hendricks – to demonstrate the neuroses of individuals caught up in a vicious circle of pretence spawned by society's ideologically repressive rules. As mentioned, Johannes Erasmus, the headmaster of the Willemsdorp Afrikaans-medium Primary School sees himself as one of the keepers of the racially segregated white identity of the town.

Both the brothers, Johannes and Krisjan, are telling examples of the tragic personal side effects of the kind of social posturing and pretence required to gain the approval of fellow townsmen in a typical South African Union period dorp. Krisjan, Johannes Erasmus's brother, feels inferior and embarrassed by the fact that he has to look to his brother to "pull strings" at the local school board to find him a job as a lorry driver. Krisjan must find alternative employment because he cannot make ends meet as a farmer's *bywoner* (sharecropper).

It is ironic, however, that Johannes himself has an inferiority complex. He too has acquired his position through dubious means. There is nevertheless more to his insecurities as regards his rank in the social hierarchy of the dorp. The brothers come from humble origins. Their father was a simple bushveld farmer who wore *veldskoens* (home made leather shoes). Johannes reflects on his childhood:

Johannes Erasmus's thoughts were centred on the little Western Transvaal farmhouse where he was born and where he had spent his childhood. He thought of his parents and brother. There was the kaffir path that he and his younger brother had walked along every afternoon back from the farm school. He was a good few years older than his brother (23).

A few pages further Bosman's summation of Johannes Erasmus's situation in the town paints a clear picture of his existential crisis:

Johannes Erasmus liked to think and feel that he had influence, that he was an important person, somebody to be reckoned with – not only in educational circles and in Willemstorp, but in a wider field. And yet, somehow, it always came down to this, that in local affairs he wasn't accorded much standing. Old Bayfield, the solicitor, for instance, carried much more prestige than he did. [...] That came out particularly at the Club. [T]hey regarded him as being *different*, somehow. As though he wasn't a man of the world, in the way that the others were men of the world. They looked on him as somebody cut off from the more manly and important sort of activities, just as though he was no more than a schoolmaster. [...] But, of course, [...] he really couldn't talk about how he used to take Toons Ferreira out for drinks in a Pretoria hotel. And how he got Toons Ferreira to arrange this and that for him – right over the heads of even some of the senior school inspectors (36).

The brothers' knowledge that they have little chance of being accepted as part of the dorp elite without an impressive family tree strip them of their dignity. When the School Board secretary, Cyril Stein, interviews Krisjan for the position of a lorry driver, Bosman delivers one of the most searing critiques of the folly of societal "correctness". Krisjan's insecurities are emphasized in the scene where the matter of dress etiquette is raised. British colonial customs concerning apparel, specifically hats, do not generally apply today. During the Union period in South Africa, however, strict rules governed the manner in which a gentleman was supposed to show respect – and by implication his own social refinement – in the way that he wore his hat in public. When Krisjan arrives at Cyril Stein's office for a job interview, he feels self-assured and at ease. However, when he discovers that he had forgotten to remove his hat as a sign of respect, his confidence evaporates. The narrator's long-winded, repetitive description of Krisjan's anxiety emphasizes the importance of etiquette and appearances in society. It also echoes an earlier description of the attire worn by members of the audience at the political meeting and Bosman's ironic comments on outward appearances associated with "breeding":

It was then that Krisjan Erasmus realised that he had been sitting with his hat on, all the time, sitting talking with his hat on in the office of the man who was giving him a job. His ears started turning red under the hat brim. He wanted to take his hat off straight away. But he felt it would be silly to do it now. He sat there in two minds, uncertain whether to take his hat off or to leave it on his head, seeing that it was already on his head, and had been there all the time. And now he came to think of it, it seemed to him as though Cyril Stein had been doing nothing but look at the hat that he had on his head from the moment he had come into the office (67).

The more the narrator harps on Krisjan's mental torture evolving from the hat episode, the more ludicrous it seems and the more the reader becomes aware of the folly at the root of the establishment's preoccupation with appearance. Sadly, Krisjan's humiliation is irreversible. He suspects that he has become the laughing stock of the town and that he will never be sufficiently socially refined to fit into town culture. The narrator makes a powerfully ironic comment: “[Krisjan] did not know that Cyril Stein was very favourably impressed with – and felt slightly inferior because of – the firm and straightforward manner in which that young fellow from the country gripped his hand” (68). The message is clear: society stands accused of the conflict in the mind of “the young fellow from the country”. His awareness of not being *au fait* with rules of etiquette erases the self-respect of an honest human being who, ironically, possesses more “breeding” than the well-dressed citizens of the dorp. Krisjan, however, will never realize this. His mind is confused and he perceives his lack of social skills as a serious personal shortcoming.

The tragic consequences of an inferiority complex that stems from the pressures of a social milieu in which a person's standing depends on the degree to which he conforms to standards of appearance and pretence, is poignantly highlighted at the end of the scene:

[Krisjan] flung the banana skin down on the pavement. Then he stopped and looked in at a shop that displayed bright-coloured ties.

A few moments later an elderly Zulu woman came past, carrying a bundle on her head. With her bare foot she stepped on the banana skin. She slithered, tried to save herself from falling, and then landed flat on her backside on the paving, her bundle ricocheting off a veranda pole into the gutter.

Krisjan laughed. He laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks. He laughed to hear the elderly black woman emit a long string of Zulu

swearwords. After she had risen to her feet and had retrieved her bundle, he was still laughing. In laughter the sense of his own humiliation in Cyril Stein's office was erased from his mind. Of all the inhabitants of Willemisdorp, white and black, there was none then that felt more at home in the town than did Krisjan Erasmus (68-69).

Thus it becomes clear that Krisjan's "initiation" into mainstream society is complete. His personal profile now conforms to dorp standards. His interest in a shop window's "bright-coloured ties" shows that he has come to realize the importance of appearance. As long as he wears a flashy tie, littering on the pavement does not matter. Neither does the fact that it causes black people harm. When a black person gets hurt, it is a mere matter of entertainment. Krisjan's feelings of social inadequacy in Cyril Stein's office are erased by his feelings of social superiority over the unfortunate Zulu woman. Bosman's exposé of South African society is shattering; Krisjan feels "at home" in a community with a shiny surface of pretence that conceals moral ferment and depravity. Like Charlie Hendricks and Cyril Stein, Krisjan Erasmus, however, remains aware of his inner conflicts. The mental confusion associated with the effects of societal pressures – which tends to alienate a person from his natural self – compels these characters to make the wrong choices in life. The greater the pangs of guilt that Krisjan experiences, the more he tries to dull his conscience by engaging in wanton sinning. He embarks on an adulterous relationship with Johannes's wife, Malie.

When Johannes discovers Malie and Krisjan's love affair, his thoughts significantly return to the idyllic scene of his and Krisjan's boyhood, just before he shoots himself:

That kaffir path over the veld that he used to walk along backwards and forwards from school, with his brother Krisjan walking beside him, came very vividly into his mind. A long, narrow path winding between the tufts of grass that were yellow in the winter and the sunshine. A path winding silently through the years. The wind blowing through the grass was muted. The noise of the insects in the grass was stilled (188).

Bosman draws a striking parallel between the natural innocence and perfection of the brothers' childhood footpath and the path on which life has led them. The corruption that society has wrought on the ideal human state, symbolized by nature, is strongly suggested by the words "muted" and "stilled" in the passage.

Meanwhile in Bosman's fictional small town, Willemisdorp, Dap van Zyl, Super-Afrikaner and Volksparty candidate, entertains high hopes of winning the district's by-

election. Growing nationalist sentiments appear to favour Van Zyl's chances of victory. The Union Party's chances are slim because of their policy, which promotes the extension of the vote to natives and Indians. Bosman's exposure of the inner workings of town politics is strongly reminiscent of Stephen Black's in *The Dorp*. Robert E. Constable, the Union party candidate, privately disagrees with his own party's racial policies. He suspects that they might be the result of a National Party conspiracy to discredit the Union Party!

Dap van Zyl is the main speaker at the Kruger Day celebrations in the neighbouring town Kleinberg. Charlie Hendricks travels to Kleinberg to report on the proceedings for the *Northern Transvaal News*. It appears that the Volksparty regards the birthday celebration of Paul Kruger, the last president of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (the Transvaal Republic), as an ideal opportunity for party political propaganda. It is fair to assume that Bosman clearly remembered the momentous centenary celebration of the Great Trek in 1938 when he wrote this particular chapter in *Willemisdorp*. He says:

Many of the men were in shirt-sleeves. Others wore suits of corduroy. The cut had been fashionable a century ago: those 'dopper' suits with embroidered jackets were worn in homage to the Voortrekkers and the Transvaal's historic past. A sprinkling of women had also come in Voortrekker costume – in sunbonnets that protruded brusquely from their foreheads and long wide skirts that descended to their shoes. An ox-wagon decorated with the flags of the long vanished Transvaal and Free State Republics was drawn up in the centre of the church square. It served as a plinth for the speakers (98–99).

Bosman's contemporary, Alan Paton (1980: 206–207) wrote in the same vein about his experience of these celebrations when a symbolic Great Trek consisting of ox-wagons from every region in South Africa gathered at the foundation stone of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria:

These symbolic treks evoked indescribable emotion. There was an upwelling of Afrikaner pride and sentiment such as South Africa had never known. [...] The wagons were met in every village and town by men and women in Voortrekker dress. Hundreds of streets were renamed in honour of the Great Trek and the Voortrekkers. [...] Prayers were said over the wagons, meat and *boerewors* were cooked over the fires, nostalgic Afrikaner *liedjies* were sung. Old men and women would weep, and reverently touch the tent of the wagon, [...] *Speeches were made of dedication and burning love, and history being what it was, many of these speeches told of past British sins [...]* (my emphasis)

The prominence of rhetoric in party political propaganda is evident from the narrator's description of Dap van Zyl's oratory skills: "Charlie Hendricks knew that Dap van Zyl was coming to the end of his speech. For he also recognised the peroration. 'Already there is the dawn of a new greatness, a new era, for the South African people, [...]' It was just the way his opponent, the Union Party candidate, Robert E. Constable, spoke" (99). Hendricks's cynicism exposes the emptiness of political rhetoric. He looks at the Kruger Day events with the typically patronizing detachment of a journalist who has seen it all. Yet, even he is not prepared for the full impact of political indoctrination. Soon Hendricks too is caught up in the swell of emotion: "In spite of the fact that he was on the other side – that he was a newspaper man in the employ of the Union Party – Charlie Hendricks felt a tightening at his throat. They were his people. That was how the men of his people had ridden to war half a century ago [....]" (99).

Bosman further highlights the carnivalesque aspect of the Kruger Day celebrations when he paints a caricatured picture of the crowd who appear to be susceptible to political indoctrination because they hanker after a bygone era that (they are made to believe) was grandiose and glorious. Politicians especially, are adept at utilizing cultural symbols and iconography to their own advantage. Dap van Zyl is no exception. In fact, he appears to be a step ahead of his lesser creative opponents. He has hired the theatrical company of Sarah Wessels-Wessels to enhance the atmosphere at the Kruger Day celebrations. Bosman's satirical exposé of politicians' habit of taking advantage of historical commemorations for political gain is masterful. He draws a parallel between the artificial world of a troupe of play-actors and the party political "road show" which is, in my opinion, unequalled in South African literature. During the Kruger Day celebrations, nobody (not even the journalist) is aware that Sarah Wessels-Wessels (with a false beard, suit and presidential sash) is performing the part of the late president of the Transvaal Province, Paul Kruger. Ironically, she is completely ignorant about national icons and their meaning ("[In Italy] they've got a cathedral with two thousand column things and a lion in front" (109)). She is also a woman of ill repute, "a pathological liar and an egomaniac" (110), by her own admission. Bosman implies that this description applies to most politicians. Moreover, he suggests that citizens who are indoctrinated by the charades of political opportunists such as Dap van Zyl are naive. At the end of the day a member of Sarah

Wessels-Wessels's theatrical company changes gramophone records midway through President Kruger's last message (an obvious reference to the way that political campaigners are wont to avail themselves of technological props) and waits for it to finish. Afterwards, the members of the theatrical company pack up their props (top hats, frock coats, false beards) into a motorcar and prepare to go to the hotel where Wessels-Wessels gets hopelessly drunk!

Bosman goes on to set Van Zyl up for a spectacular fall from grace at the climax of the novel. First he lets the reader see how "perfectly" Van Zyl fits the mould of the super-Afrikaner townsman. He is physically imposing, a family man (his wife, Eloise wearing a feathered hat in the latest fashion, unobtrusively yet supportively hovers on the periphery of her husband's glow), and a staunch patriot. However, his character's hypocrisy, which gradually becomes apparent, begs to be exposed. Therefore, whenever Van Zyl makes an appearance in the story, a pervasive ironic tone undermines his "flawless" image. For example, after entertaining the theatrical group that he has hired for the Kruger Day celebrations, the narrator remarks: "The politician, good though he was, couldn't compete with the actress when it came to sheer blah. In sheer hooey, Dap van Zyl the politician was outclassed" (109).

Dap van Zyl's character evokes a fictional parallel with National Party figures (e.g. Dr D. F. Malan and General Hertzog) in the Union of South Africa on the eve of the 1948 election when the National Party took over the government of South Africa. Propagandistic politics indeed required National Party leaders to correspond to stereotypical profiles of staunch, steadfast Afrikaners with a clear idea of the party's mission: to regain self-determination for the Afrikaner nation under a republican flag. The party organization expected these public figures to deliver a uniform message in order to strengthen ideas of nationalism and patriotism and to ultimately secure the majority of the public's support. The astounding 1948 election results indeed were proof of the success of a formidable propaganda machine.

The ignominious fate of Willemzdorp's idol, however, is emblematic of the germ of failure that was lurking within the rhetoric of the National Party – fictionally represented by the Volksparty in Willemzdorp. It is no surprise that Bosman illuminates South African society in Willemzdorp in a startlingly historically accurate and insightful manner. His journalistic pieces, literary commentary as well as

economic and political analyses, demonstrate that he was well informed about current affairs. At a time when repressive Christian Nationalism exacerbated the moral folly of white supremacist colonial ideologies, it required courage to speak out. The subject material of Bosman's fictional oeuvre bears proof of a sensitivity to the root causes of the "ferment", as he puts it, in society. It comes down, he suggests, to losing touch with one's sense of humanity. It is, therefore, inevitable that Bosman should demonstrate through Dap van Zyl's character the catastrophic consequences of the lack of humanity underlying the National Party's policies.

At the pinnacle of his success as a politician, Dap van Zyl comes to a fall. After having extorted a "confession" from the black man, Josias, Sergeant Brits arrests Van Zyl for the murder of the pregnant Marjorie Jones. Jones's dead body has been retrieved from the Wondergat. Charlie Hendricks receives a visit from Brits who requests him to report the events. Brits wants his own "outstanding service" to the town to be publicised as widely as possible. His bragging about the manner in which he has "put together" the case against Van Zyl is one of the most cutting critiques in early South African English literature of police *modus operandi*. Bosman's satire scorches through the travesty of justice that Sergeant Brits represents:

"Here's the facts, Mr Hendricks," the detective said. "A kaffir seen Dap van Zyl throw that coloured woman down the hole. He's not sure, quite, seeing how it was dark, him not too near at hand, and not anxious to get too near at hand. But we can fix that, I thinks. Yes, I thinks we can fix that. And there's that prospector Clinkwood. He's seen – oh well, it don't matter what he *seen*. But he reckons he'll identify that man" (193).

In other words, despite the lack of any real evidence against Van Zyl or anyone else, Brits is confident that the situation may easily be "fixed". Something that Brits mentions causes Hendricks to panic: A black man was found wearing a jacket that he has allegedly discovered near the Wondergat. It has a dry-cleaning tag inside which Brits has sent to his headquarters for identification. Hendricks knows that it is probably his jacket that he had left at the Wondergat site when he and Jack Brummer were there. He also knows that once Brits finds out the jacket belongs to him, he will become a prime suspect. Hendricks goes to his flat, packs all his belongings into his car, and drives out of town. When he stops for petrol, he smokes dagga. As he drives on, reality and the dagga trance become blurred. Hendricks muses:

For all he knew, with all the dagga he had been smoking, he might be imagining all this, that he had filled up his tank at the Indian store and that there were two four-gallon tins of petrol in the back of his car, and that he was on the run from the police. Perhaps he was really sitting in front of his desk, writing a leader (201).

As Hendricks leaves the Willemsdorp district behind and enters “wild country” (203), his mental confusion increases: “[He feels] betwixt and between. On his left hand was sanity, on his right madness. Or it was the other way round” (203). Schopen (15) notes that Hendricks’s bewilderment is yet another powerful symbolic manifestation of the schizophrenia at the heart of the white man’s relationship with the African landscape:

[H]is flight becomes both physical and psychological – his journey takes him far outside the comfortable moral barriers enclosing white society in the bush, his greatest nightmare. In his drug-induced state, the lines separating reality and illusion become blurred. The veld becomes a metaphor for Charlie’s mind, in which the opposing forces of veld and society are collapsed into a threatening chaos.

The terrifying emotions that Hendricks experiences on the veld are an intense, climactic version of the earlier “ouma bangheid” scene. Bosman’s dark, surrealistic picture of the firmament – the moon, the stars, the clouds, and the sun – turns romantic notions of nature upside down. Hendricks’s hallucination, in which the sun is central, dramatizes his guilty conscience. He realizes that his brain is “going funny on him” (204), but he cannot stop the absurd images:

[H]is brain had begun to think of the hot, semitropical sun as a pipe that God was smoking. That flaming circle in the sky was the glowing top of the pipe that God was smoking – that He was smoking dagga out of, as likely as not: else how could the world be as mad as it was if God wasn’t a drug addict? (204)

Afterwards, the sun is not God’s pipe anymore. It changes into God’s angry eye:

It was an Eye fixed on him. From that Eye he could not escape. Piece of impudence that Eye looking at him like that. Why couldn’t that Eye go and look at something else? Why couldn’t that Eye go and look at Detective Sergeant Brits instead, say? There would be a pretty fine collection of things that the Eye could go and look at Detective Sergeant Brits accusingly for (204).

Sergeant Brits indeed makes a reappearance in the story's surprise ending. Bosman's decision to write two endings for the novel attests to what we would now call his post-modernistic penchant for playing games with the reader. He thwarts conventional reading patterns, teases with elliptical and "twist-in-the-tail" endings, and turns literary genres upside down. *Willemsdorp*'s alternative ending, for example, is a brilliant send-up of the traditional detective story genre. It is also Charlie Hendricks's ultimate nightmare: he is irresistibly drawn to the Wondergat where Detective Brits, who has turned into a suave, well-spoken Sherlock Holmes type, arrests him for the murder of Marjorie Jones. However, it is possible that the metamorphosed Sergeant Brits is only part of Hendricks's drug-crazed, schizophrenic hallucinations. As Hendricks muses, "it might be that reality and dagga dream were one" (209). The novel's double ending (the one ending implies that Hendricks makes an escape to Johannesburg; the "alternative" ending describes his macabre "arrest"), therefore – in addition to showing off the author's stylistic genius – makes a final symbolic statement about the moral duplicity that typifies South African society at a particularly ignominious moment in history.

Conclusion

In his discussion of J.M.Coetzee's novel *In the Heart of the Country*, Itala Vivan (2000: 55) claims that Coetzee worked upon the materials of Olive Schreiner's imagination and revisited them intertextually. His remarks about these writers' representation of the white man's domestication of the African landscape (e.g. small-town settlements) are appropriate to my discussion of *Willemsdorp*.

Both these novels, Schreiner's and Coetzee's, suggest with their fiction the key to the protracted colonial drama of South Africa, resulting from an imprisonment of the original colonial dream of an open and free space: a dream of escape from the social, economic, and also physical constrictions of European civilisation. Yet such a dream would only end in failure. The search for freedom and absolute supremacy, the hunger for unlimited spaces, have resulted in a tragic trap – the double cage of apartheid – and the lonely separateness of Europeans who feel surrounded by a paranoia generating emptiness.

Bosman's similar representation of the white coloniser's paranoia comes to mind when André Brink (2003: 21) praises Coetzee's literary talents in an article titled

“Master of the Human Condition”. He offers his views on the writer’s literary relationship with the landscape:

Power and its abuses, and possible human responses to power; this is what determines so much of the landscape inhabited by Coetzee’s creatures. These landscapes may be geographical, even geological, in nature – desert and semi-desert, the open veld, the unsheltering sky – but even when the scene shifts to the city [...], it remains inhospitable and menacing.

In a similar vein Vivan (56) quotes a poem by contemporary South African poet, Sipho Sepamla that echoes Bosman’s vision in *Willemstorp* with regard to the white man’s place in Africa:

I have never had to say; this land is mine / this land has always been mine / it is named after me / This land defines its structure by me / its sweat and blood are salted by me / I’ve strained muscled yoked / on the turning wheel of this land / I am this land of mine / I’ve never asked for a portion / there’s never been a need to / I am the land (The Land,” in *The Soweto I Love*: 17)

In these words, says Vivan, “the poet’s sweeping word erases a whole body of colonial constructs – occupation, appropriation, legitimization [...]” (57).

In the light of the rather bleak outlook embodied by “the African woman” passage (quoted on p. 132 of this study) in *Willemstorp*, one may rightfully ask whether Bosman – in terms of Kearney’s actual/ideal model – has forsaken all hope for white society’s redemption. I do not think so. The value of Bosman’s work lies in the unique way that he utilizes oppressive spaces such as the South African small-town to open up new vistas on humanity. For Bosman the human condition is more complex than the terms of clear-cut binaries. He too is a “master of the human condition” in the manner that Brink describes Coetzee:

A particular density and intensity in the portrayal of the social context is achieved [...] But the social dimension only takes its full effect with the placement of the individual within it. It is through the vulnerable, exposed, individual woman or man that [he] demonstrates the full force of what it means to be human. [...] It is within the individual [...] that we discover the human condition. Not only the loneliness and yearning, the suffering and sadness of it, but also the rare moments of vision and fulfilment, in which resides, perhaps, the only hint of the sublime afforded us in a world of which we understand so little (2003: 21).

In a contribution to *the South African Opinion* (April 1944: 26)) Bosman delivers a plea for an indigenous South African literature. He defines culture as “an organic life force” and goes on to say: “That is the ultimate beauty of life. Man and his mortality and the dark surges passing through that strange and incredibly naked thing that is his heart”. These sentiments are echoed in the final passages of *Willemisdorp*:

The manner in which the people of the small town of Willemisdorp had their being was, on the surface, sufficiently placid. Under the surface it was an inferno; a maelstrom; a mad profluence, *as life should be*. It was rank with humanity, thick with humanity, heavy with lust, gusty with being (214; my emphasis).

Although Bosman severely critiques the moral wrongs of the South African Union period society in *Willemisdorp*, his deep empathy with mankind’s foibles and follies – which is, as mentioned, an outstanding feature of his work – comes to the fore in *Willemisdorp*’s final pages. As Craig Mackenzie states, (in his introduction to Bosman. H.C. 2000 (Anniversary Edition). “The Rooinek and Other Boer War Stories): “In all of us, Bosman appears to be saying, lies the potential for both nobility and ignominy, it all depends on circumstance”.

Willemisdorp attests to Bosman’s fascination with all the facets of humanity, good, or bad; and his belief that a glimmer of the sublime is present even in the darkest places. The novel is a testament to his literary credo explained to his protégé, Lionel Abrahams (2001: 7): “Write about what you know. Your material is humanity, reality, life. Truth to life is the only truth that matters. It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it. Life and God and art are one.”

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In international literature the umbrella term “regional literature” is used to group together texts that have a “regional” setting. According to Wium van Zyl (in his article on regional literature in *Literêre Terme en Teorieë*, 1992: 420–421) some problems have arisen from attempts to define regionalism in literature. He traces its historical development through various stages: from Virgil’s pastoral poetry (*Bucolica* (39 B.C.) and *Georgica* (47 B.C) to the work of Robert Burns (late 18th century) and Thomas Hardy (early 19th century) in Britain and the German *Heimatkunst* (art of the fatherland) of the 19th century and *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) literature of Nazi Germany. In many of these works rural living is idealized. Van Zyl continues to discuss the *American local color movement* (1865–1900) as an example of a similar trend to use regional elements in order to “embellish” or add interest to literary narrative. He mentions writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain and O. Henry and cites R.D. Rhode (1975: *Setting in the American Short Story of Local Color*, 1865–1900) as saying that regional settings in fiction may have greater significance than a mere backdrop function. A case in point is William Faulkner’s social realism, which, he says, shows greater “depth” of meaning. However, the latter should not be confused with literary “sectionalism” which Rhode defines as aggressively political and propagandistic. In sum, it appears that the classification “regional literature” has been proven inadequate to define the different sub-categories (e.g. travel interest, pastoral nostalgia, local colour, allegory, social commentary) that have been explored in literature with a localized setting.

To turn to the South African literary scene: Van Zyl notes that, as early as the 1830’s, Thomas Pringle has explored the “new region” in his writings. Andrew Geddes Bain’s dramatic sketch-in-song, *Kaatje Kekkelbek; or Life among the Hottentots* is, according to Michael Chapman (2003: 101), the first literary work in South Africa to capture localized speech on the stage. However, (Chapman says) “in Bain’s treatment of the problem, there is great delight in words, little delight in progressive ideas” (101). Socio-linguistic interest such as regional dialects and oral-style storytelling appears indeed to play an important role in regional literature here and elsewhere. Regional elements have remained prominent in South African literature in both the Afrikaans and English canons. In Afrikaans the works of A.A.J van Niekerk, C.G.S

de Villiers and Boerneef is called *kontreikuns* (regional/country art).³⁴ A similar (yet – as I have argued – in many ways different) tradition was present in the English literary canon.

The closest parallel to South Africa in world literature regarding the allegorical-referential treatment of small-town and farm locales – i.e. of ideologically repressive, microcosmic spaces – is probably to be found in the works of the writers of the American Deep South (similar histories of institutionalised racism appear to have inspired similar literary parallels) such as Harper Lee, William Faulkner and Toni Morrison. Lee's monumental work *To Kill a Mockingbird* is arguably the best-known example. In her exploration of the small-town psyche, much is revealed about the evil within society and the devastating effects of moral prejudice in a town that is a cesspool of hypocrisy and deeply rooted racial hatred. Similar themes crop up in the works of Faulkner. The pastoral microcosms of farm and town come under close scrutiny and are exposed as dark spheres of original sin and the corruption of the human ideal. In Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise*, “Paradise” is the ironic name of an isolated town in which racist double standards are exposed. At the other end of the globe, Australian author, Tim Winton's novel *The Turning*, set in a town in his home country, examines the compulsion that townsmen feel to return to their hometown. However, in Winton's relentless exploration of the human psyche under stress, the town is as unromantic as the bleak desolation of the western Australian landscape. The characters' “turning” to their hometown are mostly fruitless efforts to search for answers.

In 1944 Herman Charles Bosman commented on what he regarded as problem areas in the South African literary tradition. In an article in *The South African Opinion* (April 1944) he states:

The place for South African literature to take root is here. Here in Johannesburg. Here in South Africa. It must grow up from the granite of our pavements, from the sun-stricken soul of our veld. From either or from both: it doesn't matter which. It must be created here. It must be born here out of the minds and the blood of our writers. And it must here be transformed into the magic of the printed word [...] A common culture, virile with the warmth and mystery of the earth, is the strongest bond there is for knitting the heterogeneous elements composing a nation into a strong united whole. The love for a common intellectual heritage, sprung from the one soil, is the

greatest single unifying influence in a nation: *it is a chain whose links do not grow tarnished with the centuries* (25; my emphasis)

During his career as a journalist, writer and literary commentator Bosman often voiced ideals for a common indigenous literature. It appears that he was concerned about the lack of a uniquely creative approach in South African letters and criticism. Reluctance on the part of South African writers to break with, what Bosman dubs, “the tradition of colonial literature” (25) leads, according to him, to the production of “a mongrel product that has many outstanding merits, including brilliance”. However, Bosman says, it does not have “survival value as culture” (25).

In addition to having his own work published in South Africa, Bosman contributed to, as he states above, “transforming South African manuscripts into the magic of the printed word”. In 1952 he edited and published a collection of South African short stories titled *Veld-Trails and Pavements*. In the introduction (page unnumbered) Bosman sums up the impulse behind the collection:

Veld-Trails and Pavements is an anthology of South African short stories. They have been well selected and are intended to show the *trend and development* of those who are *creating a fund* of this type of literature for the country. They all indicate the wealth of material which South Africa offers [...] South African English writing is at the present moment passing through an interesting stage in its development from “colonial” literature into a nationally conscious art. In prose [...] we are beginning to witness the rise of an authentically South African school of letters. It is, above all else, incumbent on our writers to remain true to their *own environment* and traditions” (my emphases).

Bosman’s acute sense of place is evident from his own work and a similar sensibility can also be detected in the stories he selects for the collection by authors such as Olive Schreiner (“In a far-off world”), W.C. Scully (The white hecatomb”), Pauline Smith (“Desolation”) and Helen de Leeuw (“In the Malutis”). Life – these stories suggest – is locally contained on backwater veld-trails and on the pavements of small towns and cities. (Bosman’s views about the possibility of a “nationally conscious art” should not be interpreted as the promotion of an insular sort of parochialism. On the contrary, he proposes: “[Literature] must start off with depth. And it can’t go deep enough. Afterwards it can be enriched with the opulent splendours of other cultures” (26).)

With regard to the historical neglect of literary texts Bosman's comments above are interesting. Some of the salient points that he makes seem to me to pertain to the research problem which this study has addressed. Of special concern are Bosman's comments about a common intellectual heritage being "a *chain* whose links do not grow tarnished with the centuries" (my emphasis). In terms of creating a meaningful context for literary texts, his comments about trends and developments and the creation of a *fund* of literature for the country are valuable. Bosman suggests that for individual literary texts to weather the ravages of time, it is not sufficient that they possess literary merit on their own. Being part of a larger framework or grouping (suggested by the terms "chain" and "fund"), appears to increase literary texts' chances of survival.

These remarks point to matters of literary classification. In this regard (although I do not propose to offer insights about genre theory in general) I have found Anis Bawarshi's comments in his article, "The genre function" useful. Bawarshi (2000: 344), like Bosman, posits an argument that runs counter to schools of thought (e.g. the New Critics) that according to Bawarshi "denigrate genre to a subordinate, a posteriori classificatory status". He goes on to say that proponents of this theoretical position "perceive literary texts as being indeterminate, an expression of unbounded imagination". Therefore they regard genre as an institutional threat to literary texts and authors. In other words, texts do not need genres! With regard to the "functionality" or "usefulness" of genre classification, Bawarshi (338) proposes: "We need a concept that can account not only for how certain "privileged" discourses function, but also how all discourses function, an overarching concept that can explain the social roles we assign to various discourses and those who enact and are enacted by them. Genre *is* such a concept".

What I am calling the small-town sub-genre of the South African novel appears not to fall in the category of "privileged" discourses mentioned above. The South African *plaasroman*, on the other hand, does. It is, to use Bosman's words, "a chain whose links do not grow tarnished with the centuries" as well as an inexhaustible "fund" of inspiration for authors, all of which has contributed to its "survival value as culture" (Bosman. 1944: 26). The *plaasroman* sub-genre of the South African novel in fact is (as I have explained in chapter 1) a case in point with regard to genre as – what

Thomas O. Beebee (cited in Bawarshi 2000: 349) calls – the “use-value” of texts, in other words *cultural value* and, by implication, *survival value*.

With respect to continuity within genres (such as the *plaasroman*), Bawarshi (352) claims that genre classification performs an important function namely *reproduction* or *recurrence*. He cites M. A. K. Halliday as saying, “Genres are symbiotically *maintained* rhetorical ecosystems, if you will, within which communicants enact and *reproduce* specific situations, actions, relations, and identities” (own emphases). In other words, situations and their participants are always in the process of reproducing each other within the genre. The prominent thread of intertextuality that runs through the South African *plaasroman* sub-genre of the novel is an example of such a process of reproduction of meaning within a genre. In an article titled “Die Afrikaanse *plaasroman* in die twintigste eeu” (The Afrikaans farm novel in the 20th century), Hansie Lubbe and Rialette Wiehahn (153-4) give reasons for the longevity (as a literary source of meaning in the South African context) of the *plaasroman* sub-genre: The traditional farm novel, once the embodiment of the beliefs and values of an older generation has, in present-day writing, become the favoured literary vehicle for the questioning and rejection of the selfsame values. [...] a new ideological discourse has originated from this *perennial* genre in Afrikaans literature”. Bawarshi refers to this recursive process as the defining aspect of genre.

I have argued that the critical neglect that the selected Union period small-town novels have suffered is unjustified. I have explained that the grouping together of these texts on the grounds of their sharing insights into the allegoric-referential possibilities for macrocosmic commentary of the small-town microcosm, may not only attract attention to the literary merit of individual texts, but it may also correct historiographical and critical imbalances within the South African liberal-realist tradition of the novel. The fact that small-town novel classifications do not exist in South African letters and criticism precludes to a large extent, what Bawarshi (346) dubs, “a genre-mediated literary universe”. In other words, what I have defined as “small-town novels” has presumably not been conceived according to the conventions of a specific genre classification. The absence of the latter necessarily implies the absence of, what Bawarshi (347) dubs, “assigned genre roles, both to the characters who participate within them and to the writers and readers who interact with them”.

However, the absence of a theoretic-hermeneutical “model” of writing (and reading) renders, in my opinion, a more organic writers’ response to the creative possibilities of the small-town milieu. As I have shown, there are interesting intertextual features in these texts which suggest more than coincidental creative connections.

The novels, *The Dorp* by Stephen Black, *The Mask* by C Louis Leipoldt, *Too Late the Phalarope* by Alan Paton and *Willemisdorp* by Herman Charles Bosman have been selected for the creative manner that the dorp (village or small-town) microcosm is utilised to illuminate an important period in South African history (the Union period, 1910-1948). These novels demonstrate that the iconic cultural-demographic profile of the town milieu makes it particularly suitable for allegoric commentary on the broader society. It is true that recurring patterns of meaning within these novels have been easier to trace after the posthumous publication of C. Louis Leipoldt’s *The Mask* (2003) and H.C. Bosman’s *Willemisdorp* (1998, in uncensored format). However, even after these publications, critics appear still not fully to have appreciated the literary value of these novels’ typical representation of South African society, i.e. how the small-town milieu in these novels has been artistically utilized for meaningful social commentary. For example, after the publication of *The Mask*, some insightful critiques of the novel appeared. One of these is an article by Peter Merrington titled “C. Louis Leipoldt’s ‘Valley Trilogy’ and contested South African nationalisms in the early twentieth century” (*Current Writing* 15(2) 2003). Another is a Master’s dissertation by Prof. Merrington’s student, Riaan Oppelt titled “The Valley trilogy: a reading of C. Louis Leipoldt’s English-language fiction (circa 1925–1935). Although Merrington (32) acknowledges that the characters in Leipoldt’s novels “enact in microcosm the formation of South African civil society, and engage with the unfolding tragedy of racial rivalry”, his appraisal reveals some ignorance about other contemporaneous novels which have, as effectually as Leipoldt, (and I quote from Merrington’s title), “contested South African nationalisms in the early twentieth century”. He claims: “Poverty and black migrant labour were a repeated locus of denial among white writers before the Second World War. Afrikaans literature sought to build a *Volk* consciousness, while the bulk of English-language fiction [...] attempted to capture the essence of the relatively young Union of South Africa by romanticising the land in terms of a neo-Tory model of patrician settlement” (my emphases; 47). Oppelt (87) evokes the creative “usefulness” of the small-town milieu

in saying, “The hearsay factor of the Valley community being deliberately isolated from the metropolitan environment and only being updated of events through postcart is a useful literary device insofar as the emphasis is exclusively on these communities as microcosms of South African society”. While Oppelt links the character Elias Vantloo – “as an icon of tradition’s fall” (63) – to Leipoldt’s idol worship theme in his Afrikaans dramatic work *Afgode* (1932), he does not locate Leipoldt’s English prose writing in the broader context of South African literature.

To return to Merrington’s positive appraisal of Leipoldt’s “Valley Trilogy” on the grounds of the manner in which it has contested Afrikaner nationalism; Merrington’s argument about the literary merit of the novel triptych appears to agree with the main points of Kearney’s actual/ideal model (discussed in chapter1) with regard to the value of historical novels. Merrington praises Leipoldt for critiquing the “actual” (non-ideal) situation i.e. the moral injustice of Afrikaner nationalism in *The Mask* and contrasting it to the “ideal” of an egalitarian, morally sound society in the first and second novels of his Trilogy. The actual situation is played out in the village/small town, the source of ideologically inspired mythmaking and “idol worship”. This particular theme appears in all the small-town novels selected for this study; in fact, it appears to be a recurring pattern in what I have been calling the small-town sub-genre of the South African novel. In Stephen Black’s novel *The Dorp* the epigraph to the chapter describing the aftermath of the Rebellion in the dorp is telling, for it implies a parallel between the inhabitants of the Unionstad district (the “pastoral people” that the newspaperman O’Flinnigan refers to) and the Israelites. This idea is linked to the notion that nationalism based on ethnic exclusivity is a form of idol worship. In *The Dorp* Black deconstructs the Afrikaners’ “elect race” myth on which they construct an exclusive Afrikaner identity.

The “idol worship” theme is one of the main themes of C. Louis Leipoldt’s *The Mask* (chapter 3). Leipoldt suggests that the process of creating an artificial uniqueness of one race at the cost of other ethnical groups is morally indefensible because it requires a certain loss of basic human values and compassion for others. This, he demonstrates, brings out the worst in mankind – a state of egocentric superiority clearly visible in characters (such as Elias Vantloo) that subscribe to transmutations of “idol worship” such as greed. In *Too Late the Phalarope* (chapter 4) the idol worship

idea is evoked in Alan Paton's representation of an unnatural, repressive society. He too implies that the creation of an exclusive national identity is synonymous to idol worship. In his autobiography titled *Journey Continued*, Paton (1988: 37) voices his abhorrence of Afrikaner Nationalism that was gaining similar mythical proportions to the Israelites' golden calf idol. However, he mentions that there were dissident voices such as the Afrikaans writer, Jan Rabie who spoke out against this sort of radicalism. Paton reviews Rabie's novel *Ons, Die Afgod* (We, the Idol) as follows: "He meant that Afrikanerdom was making an idol of itself, to which it would bow down and worship. Afrikanerdom was committing the sin of the Israelites who worshipped the Golden Calf, made for them by their own High Priest". In *Willemstorp* Herman Charles Bosman does not overtly link Afrikaner Nationalism to idol worship. It is, however, strongly suggested in the manner that he sets up the dorp idol, Dap van Zyl, for a spectacular fall from grace.

In the novels of this study it is furthermore suggested that there is a certain irony in the fact that adherents of a religious doctrine based on the pre-ordinance of an elect race would dismiss "alternative" religions as "heathen" and their supporters as "idol worshippers". In this manner racial intolerance and fanaticism actually become a form of "idol worship". The conclusion follows that the most onerous strain of nationalism is that which attempts to justify self-centred ideological aims through selective Biblical interpretation.

I have mentioned how the small-town novels of this study allegorically portray the mentally/morally claustrophobic effect of the small town cosmos on characters who feel at odds with the demands of a repressive society with regard to stereotypical modes of social behaviour. In this regard I have pointed out how these characters (Ned Oakley in *The Dorp*, Mabuis in *The Mask*, Pieter van Vlaanderen in *Too Late the Phalarope* and Charlie Hendricks in *Willemstorp*) feel an urge to escape the ideological imprisonment represented by the claustrophobic town boundaries. In the case of Charlie Hendricks's character in *Willemstorp* Bosman demonstrates the psychological tension between the compulsion to break out of repressive societal moulds and the restraining power that cultural conditioning and political indoctrination exert on the individual.

With regard to Kearney's utopian or "ideal" model versus the "actual" situation as it is represented in microcosm in *The Dorp*, *The Mask*, *Too Late the Phalarope* and *Willemisdorp* (ideological repression, radical nationalism, religious fanaticism, cultural conditioning, political indoctrination, racial injustice etc.), the following newspaper article (*Beeld* (By-supplement 10 May 2008: 11)) by South African writer, Hennie Aucamp is interesting. It is titled, "Groot kanonne aan die woord" (Big guns speak out) and is an evaluation of the book, *Nobel Lectures: 20 Years of the Nobel Prize for Literature Lectures* (2006). In his opening paragraph Aucamp mentions that it is difficult to summarize the richly textured texts that have been presented by Nobel Prize winners as part of their acceptance speeches. However, he notes that each one has echoed a "collective credo" in terms of writers' social conscience and the Swedish Academy's main criterium for "the most outstanding work of an *idealistic tendency* (my emphasis)". As I have mentioned, the novels selected for this study do not only illuminate an important era (the Union period (1910–1948)) in South Africa in a historically revealing and artistically achieved manner, but also, in each case, a vision for a better future is represented. Thus, these are novels that may be seen (in Kearney's words) as "paving the way to the impressive change that occurs in fiction as one moves to the period just before and just after the Nationalist Party victory of 1948" (271).

This fecund allegoric-referential possibility of the claustrophobic small-town locale appears to be a thread weaving through the South African dorp novel sub-genre from Stephen Black to Zakes Mda. If one looks at the small-town novel's prevalence in South African literature, it appears to have declined after 1948. Demographical patterns of movement to the cities are reflected in the proliferation of city novels in South African literature during this era. There is, however, a spate of texts that were published much later that have returned to familiar small-town novel themes in the manner that they embody a "writing back" to the apartheid era. Some of these novels excel in the way that they demonstrate the literary "use-value" (to use Beebee's term) of the small-town milieu as an ongoing vehicle for commentary on key aspects of South African society. They are Wilma Stockenström's *Uitdraai* (1976) Klaas Steytler's *In die Somer van '36* (1991), Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), Michiel Heyns's *The Children's Day* (2002), Troy Blacklaws's *Karoo Boy*, Ingrid Winterbach's *The Elusive Moth* (2005) (translated from the Afrikaans, original

title *Karolina Ferreira*), Jan van Tonder's *Stargazer* (2006) (translated from the Afrikaans *Roepman*) and Stephen Finn's *Soliloquy* (2008).

These novels reflect Ingrid Winterbach's views (expressed during an interview, 18 August 2007³⁵) about the literary prospects of the dorp/small-town milieu. She proposes:

The dorp is a kind of microcosm of South African society. The dorp is usually seen as a little bit more conservative than the city. It is an enclosed space, so it's almost as if as author one can have a bird's eye view of the town. It becomes like a stage, almost, in the sense that it's a microcosm of society, and maybe the more conservative element of society. You have a police force, you have a lawyer, you have two chemists, you have two cafés, you have an AVBOB. You have one of each thing, almost. And the thing about such a small space – a dorp space – is that the insiders and outsiders are more easily identifiable. And in a sense the insiders represent the very precarious order. And you know that it's waiting to be disrupted by the outsiders coming in. So all the main characters in this novel – or not all the main characters, but many of the main characters in *The Elusive Moth* – are actually outsiders [....]

Small-town mental claustrophobia during the apartheid era is powerfully demonstrated by Winterbach's novel, *The Elusive Moth* in which most of the action is set in the bar of the local hotel. Even outsider characters are caught up in and unable to escape the mental imprisonment represented by the small-town boundaries. For example, the main character, Karolina attempts in vain to attend social functions in a neighbouring town.

Michiel Heyns's novel, *The Children's Day* is, in my opinion, an outstanding example of the creative use of the imaginary small-town locale for social critique. Heyns's novel is set in the fictional town, Verkeerdespruit in apartheid South Africa in the 1960's. It is a searing exposé of small-town hypocrisy and moral perversion. Heyns paints a poignant picture of the profound consequences on individual characters that become helpless victims of a cruel society. Such a character is the "ducktail" Steve whose collision with small-town prejudice has tragic effects. In the following passage, Heyns deftly sums up the entire scope of small-town narrow-mindedness:

'What's a ducktail? Louis challenged in a truculent tone intended to neutralise the humiliation of having to admit ignorance. They're people who drive around on motorbikes and comb their hair like Steve's,' I said, conscious

of a certain circularity of definition. This was not lost on Louis. ‘Big deal,’ he said. ‘So what?’

‘They live in Johannesburg,’ I added, ‘and they have Sheilas. The Sheilas are women who smoke.’

Louis wasn’t going to be trapped into another admission of ignorance. ‘Then where’s Steve’s Sheila?’ he demanded, and to myself I had to concede that Louis had seized the initiative. To him I said, ‘In Johannesburg, I suppose. Sheilas live on the streets.’

‘So? There are streets here, aren’t there?’ and Louis gesticulated indignantly towards the dusty waste of Voortrekker Street.

I laughed scornfully. ‘And what do you think a Sheila would do on Voortrekker Street?’

‘Just what she does on the Johannesburg streets, I suppose,’ Louis countered. ‘A street’s a street, isn’t it?’

Looking at Voortrekker Street in the meagre light of an unexuberant spring, its one café and two shops, its petrol pump and its hotel, its ragged eucalyptus trees, I shook my head. ‘No. A street’s not a street,’ I said though without quite understanding what I was trying to say. ‘No Sheila could live on this street’ (29)

Other novels that excel in their portrayal of repressive South African town politics are contemporary South African writer, Zakes Mda’s novels, *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) and *The Whale Caller* (2005). When I asked Mda (via e-mail) to comment on the creative possibilities of the small-town milieu, he responded as follows:

Both the settings of *The Whale Caller* and *The Madonna of Excelsior* were chosen for me by the nature of the story I was telling. Whale watching happens in Hermanus and the sex scandal happened in Excelsior. But the fact that these were small towns facilitated my storytelling and added its own magic – the magic of *domaine perdu*. Here I was able to tap into landscapes that bring out the humanity of my characters at its best (with all its foibles and strengths) (own emphasis).

With regard to the fictional small-town location’s suitability for scrutiny of the human condition, the contemporary novel *Soliloquy* (2008) by Stephen Finn is a fine example. The novel explores the theme of the devastating personal effects of small-town ideological imprisonment during the apartheid era in a refreshingly original manner. When Finn’s protagonist, a physically retarded Jewish boy, is pushed too far by school bullies, he commits a murder. *Sunday Times* reviewer, Aubrey Paton (2008: 19) comments that the novel is “a mirror of small-town life, of the prejudices that were accepted without question at the time, and a reminder of how the more brutish and unacceptable facets of human behaviour tend to survive, despite changes in circumstances and conditions.”

George Weideman's *Die Onderskepper of die Dorp wat op 'n Posseël Pas* (1997) and Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* are exceptional examples that the small-town novel has purchase on the "new South Africa". Mda satirizes the "new romanticism" associated with the dorp locale. In South African seaside towns such as Hermanus, rich people (mostly white yuppies and retired people) escape from the stresses of the city rat race and high crime rates. They try to recapture traditions of yesteryear by partaking in festivals such as the Whale festival and the "kalfiefees". However, Mda points out that all is not well in these communities. The old racial divides, for example, still thrive under the shiny surface of wealth and holidaymaking. With regard to Mda's inventive use of the small-town milieu to deliver ironic commentary on societal imbalances that continue to exist in post-apartheid South African society, Denise Simon (*Black Issues* book review: 59 www.bibookreview.com) comments: Hermanus, the real-life village that figures so largely in Mda's story, is a town trying to find its place in the "new South Africa" – between the wealthy visitors who build expensive homes there and longtime residents who can barely afford the necessities."

The seemingly charming University dorp of Stellenbosch in the Western Cape is the target of two exceptional novels, the acerbically satirical *Raka: die Roman* by Koos Kombuis (pseudonym of the Afrikaans songwriter, poet, columnist and novelist André le Roux du Toit) and the winner of the *Sunday Times* fiction prize in 2006, *Coldsleep Lullaby* by Andrew Brown. In typical Bosmanesque style Kombuis mercilessly lampoons the snobbery and pretence of so-called high culture in the academic circles of the town that he mockingly renames, "Pleasantville". Brown's novel is a dark critique of the underbelly of high society in Stellenbosch. He tackles social issues such as teenage club culture, drug abuse, prostitution, paedophilia, and xenophobia.

The South African novels discussed above are only a few examples of texts that demonstrate how the creative imaginations of eminent writers have responded to the opportunities that the small-town milieu offers for ongoing social commentary. These novels touch on critical socio-political, cultural, and environmental aspects of South African town-life that appear to deconstruct idealized notions of the new South Africa. It appears that town culture continues to reveal the ferment under the surface

of rhetorical notions of the nation. The small-town locale offers a rich vein of fictional possibilities to writers who wish to explore the unique socio-political realities of South African society such as neo-conservatism and radicalism in towns in the Northwest Province, political corruption and environmental mismanagement in tourist towns and squalor and poverty as a result of retrenchment in mining towns, to name only a few examples.

It is my wish that this study may inspire renewed interest in the small-town novels, *The Dorp* by Stephen Black. *The Mask* by C.Louis Leipoldt, *Too Late the Phalarope* by Alan Paton and *Willemisdorp* by Herman Charles Bosman. These texts, as I have indicated, have not been accorded the measure of critical acclaim that they deserve. If the clustering together of these works as small-town novels of the Union period, raises important issues and provides valuable insights into a significant period in South African (literary) history, it is hoped that the grounds that have been suggested for the existence of a continuum within the small-town genre of the South African novel, may also serve as inspiration for further investigation into this literary terrain which offers a rich vein of possibilities for on-going commentary on a constantly changing South African society.

Notes

¹ Most of Bosman's short stories are set in the farm milieu of the Groot Marico region of the Western Transvaal

² The Afrikaans term *dorpsroman* (the common nouns *dorp* and *roman* are linked by an “s” to form a compound noun) has virtually no history of usage in literary commentary. I have come across this term only once in a discussion of Etienne van Heerden’s novel *Die Swye van Mario Salviati* by Heilna du Plooy (Litnet). It is mentioned briefly at the beginning of her article. She then goes on to discuss the novel as a fine example of traditional novel writing and does not make any specific reference to Van Heerden’s creative use of the small-town milieu. It appears that Van Heerden’s critique of small-town culture is indeed secondary to the other main themes of the novel.

The term *plaasroman* has a history of usage in the canons of both Afrikaans and English literature in South Africa. It denotes a voluminous sub-genre of the South African novel. One may, therefore, argue that the term *dorpsroman* could be used trans-literally too. However, it does not make grammatical sense. Therefore I prefer to refer to the novels selected for this study as “small-town novels”. In Chapter 6 I shall demonstrate that the broad outlines that I have suggested for this sub-genre classification point to a continuum – similar to the *plaasroman* sub-genre – in South African literature. A key theme in small-town novels appear to be a critical view regarding the ideologically *narrowminded* traditionalism that seem to prevail in the small-town cultural mindset. Hence, I have preferred the term “small-town novel” to “town novel”. The former term is more appropriate for it encapsulates the allegorical-referential aspects of the small-town microcosm discussed in this study.

³ After the fall of Bloemfontein, Kroonstad and Heilbron were successively proclaimed the capital of the Orange Free State. When Heilbron fell to the British forces in 1900, President Steyn, president of the Orange Free State, moved to the town of Frankfort.

⁴ The manner in which Millin deals with the theme of miscegenation demonstrates her abhorrence of “tainted” blood. In a Litnet article titled “A Century of Anglo Boer War Stories”, Chris van der Merwe and Michael Rice (3) claim that Millin’s famous work, *God’s Stepchildren*, is representative of the ideological preoccupation of many English-speaking authors of the time. They were committed to the notion of the Union of South Africa: a Union which most of them saw exclusively in terms of the white population. Van der Merwe and Rice name two notable exceptions to this point of view: William Plomer in *Turbot Wolfe* (1926) and Laurens van der Post in *In a Province* (1934). They neglect to mention Stephen Black’s *The Dorp* (1920), a novel which in my opinion also falls into the latter category.

⁵ The notebooks that Black used during court proceedings are in the Strange Collection of the Johannesburg Public library.

⁶ The title, *The Dorp*, may have been chosen by Black when he typed the final draft of the novel. Alternatively, it may have been the title chosen by the publishers.

⁷ This information is provided by an internet source:
http://nq.oxforjournals.org/cgi.issue_pdf/frontmatters_pdf/189/4.pdf.

⁸ In this regard Hermann Giliomee (2003: 379) states: By the beginning of 1914 the high economic expectations of unification had been dashed. Three to four years of drought had devastated farms [...] and by 1912, as many as three-quarters of the farms in some districts were bonded. [...] Bills were falling due, cattle were dying and food prices were rising”.

⁹ A different picture is reflected in the Afrikaans literature of the time, for example the iconic novel *Bart Nel* (1942) by Jan van Melle, which deals with the personal tragedy of an Afrikaner farmer and his family as a result of the 1914 Rebellion. It demonstrates how Bart Nel, the main character, is torn between his loyalty to the Boer cause and his responsibility towards his family and his farm. In his introduction to the 1988 edition of the novel, the editor, W.F. Jonckheere (ix) praises Van Melle for his compassionate, yet sober and objective portrayal of Bart’s dilemma.

¹⁰ This appears to reveal some prejudice on the part of the authors of these texts, in other words, if the characters are “educated” and “informed” they embrace the pro-empire politics of the Smuts government, whereas if they are uniformed and ignorant they remain embittered and unappeased. It would appear to discount genuine suffering endured in the Boer War and the loss of self-determination precipitated by its conclusion as legitimate political impulses. It seems to me to reflect the jingoist attitude that anybody in his right mind would like to be an Englishman. Kearney, however, is careful not to openly endorse this judgement. He emphasizes that his task is to show how the writers, Francis Bancroft (*An Armed Protest* (1918)), Leigh Thompson (*The Lion and the Adder* (1918)), F Mills Young (*The Shadow of the Past* (1919)), Stephen Black (*The Dorp* (1920)) and Norman Giles (*Rebels in the Sun* (1935)), construct and interpret the Boer Rebellion (28; my emphasis). He goes on to say that Bancroft’s representation of the Rebellion is somewhat different from the other authors’ in that – despite suggestions of Boer rebel’s ignorance – she grants them more agency and legitimacy” (43). Although Black condemns the 1914 Rebellion for the manner in which it fuelled feelings of bitterness between Englishmen and Afrikaners, Kearney praises the equanimity of his satirical treatment of both factions, the “Sappers” and the “Nats” in the community.

¹¹ David Bosch (1988: 99) quotes Willem Nicol, a *Beeld* columnist (27 August 1985) as saying: “[W]e believed that enforced racial segregation was consistent with the Christian gospel; we sometimes even went so far as to think that our faith demanded racial separation”.

¹² Herman Charles Bosman’s short story “Dopper and Papist” is an example of his critique of religious bigotry in a rural society.

¹³ Afrikaans was then commonly referred to as a *kombuistaal* (kitchen language), a patois presumably used by the “uneducated” on the lower rungs of the communal

ladder. Evidently, the point had, at this stage, not been reached where Afrikaans was closely associated with the nationalistic project, a symbol of Afrikaner identity. In *The Mask* Leipoldt, one of the foremost Afrikaans writers and poets of the time, understandably, gives more attention to this aspect than the English-speaking South African, Stephen Black. Afrikaans was recognized as an official language of South Africa, effectively replacing Dutch, in 1925.

¹⁴ The small-town locale is a fine example – more revealing, in my opinion, than the farm – of what Michael Chapman (188) calls, “the small oppressive localities of Afrikaner Calvinism”.

¹⁵ Gustav Preller was the editor of the Pretoria-based *De Volkstem*, a newspaper started by the Boer generals. Preller wrote a series of articles in his newspaper on the Voortrekker leader Piet Retief which turned into a book. Leipoldt worked with Preller on the staff of *De Volkstem*, but they often clashed as a result of differing political views. Leipoldt’s *Valley* trilogy was written as a critique of segregationist Afrikaner sentiments. He argued against the *Volk*-iconography of the Voortrekker propagated by Preller (Oppelt, R. 2007: i).

¹⁶ There are two manuscripts in the Jagger library of the University of Cape Town. One is slightly longer than the other. Both manuscripts are undated and untitled.

¹⁷ According to Pelzer (1979: 10), the Afrikaner Broederbond’s aims were: “the promotion of a healthy and progressive spirit of unity among all Afrikaners aimed at the welfare of the Afrikaner nation; the cultivation of national self-consciousness in the Afrikaner and love for his language, religion, traditions, land and people, and the advancement of all the interests of the Afrikaner people.” The Broederbond which was a secret organization, restricted membership to Afrikaans-speaking Protestant white males who were financially independent.

¹⁸ These “try-for-whites” as they were called, have, incidentally, since served as the impetus for many fictional projects in South African literature. Well-known examples are Pamela Jooste’s novel, *Dance with a Poor Man’s Daughter* (1998) and Pat Stametélos’s *Kroes* (2005).

¹⁹ Although Paton does not explicitly state the novel’s exact time setting, it is fair to assume that it is set in the period between 1946 and 1948. Pieter Van Vlaanderen has returned from World War II and there is evidence that General Smuts is still in office (127).

²⁰ An interesting rendition of the town as a stage is in the film *Dogville* by director Lars von Trier. Here the dark, psychological depths of town culture are plumbed in a severe exposé of man’s propensity for evil and corruption. The film’s cinematography echoes the mood of mental claustrophobia. The town, Dogville, is presented as chalk-marked sections on a gloomily lit stage. A cliff-edged boundary serves to amplify this effect. The town as a closed-off entity from which there is virtually no escape – i.e. the middle-of-nowhere physical aspect of the typical country

town, often linked to the outside world by rail only – evokes symbolic parallels of mental claustrophobia which is often explored in fiction.

The ideological imprisonment of the town's social and mental boundaries forms the central theme of the American film *Pleasantville* in which the town's youths find a map, which shows that all the roads stop at the town boundary and that there is nothing outside. This theme scintillatingly recurs in, contemporary South African town novels such as Michiel Heyns's *The Children's Day* and Zakes Mda's *Madonna of Excelsior* and *The Whale Caller* as well as in Afrikaans novels such as Jan van Tonder's *Roepman*.

²¹ The original text reads: "Hy het gesê die Indiese volke leer hulle mense dit al van eeu af dat dit gesond en *natuurlik* is vir elke volk om sy *suwerheid* te wil bewaar, net soos elke mens se eie individualiteit gedurig uiting soek, [...] En dat die rede dáár dieselfde was soos dit by ons is, en soos dit by alle *gevorderde volke* was by die saamwoon met barbare; hulle moet die dinge beskerm wat hulle deur soveel geslagte van strewe gewen het [...] die besef van kosbaarheid van wat gewen was bly en groei aan soms as 'n soort godsdiens (in Streicher 1989: (my emphases); 83–84)"

²² The original text reads: "Hierdie analogie met Israel, wat veral deur die Gereformeerde Kerk voortdurend in die volkslewe ingedra word, is dat soos Israel uitverkies is vir 'n bepaalde historiese taak in die geskiedenis van die Godsopenbaring, nie om enige verdienste nie maar op grond van die Goddelike verbond, en daarom sy nasionale identiteit moes bewaar te midde van omringende volke, so is die Afrikanerdom ook verbondmatig uitverkies vir 'n bepaalde historiese kultuurtaak, nl. die kerstening en Westerse beskawing van Suidelike Afrika, en daarom sy identiteit moet bewaar teen die omringende volke, blank sowel as nie-blank" (259–260).

²³ The above text continues: "[...] dit beteken wel dat die Afrikanerdom 'n eie roeping het, wat hy in geloof moet vervul, en dat hy met die oog daarop by alle verkeer met ander volke sy eie identiteit moet bewaar. Hierdie identiteit sluit [...] uit opgaan in 'n ander Europese nasionaliteit of opswelging in 'n nie-blanke volkeremengsel. Verder hou dit in dat die tradisionele vorme en instellinge van die Afrikanerdom by alle ontwikkeling en aanpassing aan veranderende omstandighede in wese behoue bly, bv. sy geloof in 'n goddelike roeping gebaseer op Skrif en historie, sy taal en kultuur, sy republikeinse staatsvorm en Christelik-nasionale openbare beleid en met die oog daarop sy *rassieapartheid*" (260; my emphasis).

²⁴ I wish to demonstrate that Margaret Lenta's questioning of Paton's moral position is unfounded. She proposes: "It is not that Paton's different formal choices force him into complicity with the Apartheid regime under which he lived as he wrote *Too Late the Phalarope*. The truth is that he made those choices because the assumptions of Apartheid and of the regimes which had preceded it, concerning race, gender, the right to speech and the obligation to be silent, had to an extent naturalised themselves within his consciousness" (1996:103).

²⁵ The original text reads: "Dit gebeur normaalweg in 'n tyd van stryd, wanneer een groep dit nie kan bekostig om te simpatiek teenoor 'n ander groep te wees nie. 'n Ander moontlikheid sou kon wees dat 'n bevolkingsgroep so vervlak en verstar, dat

die individuele menslikheid sodanig verdwyn, dat daar vir die skrywer niks meer waar te neem is as die stereotipe patroon nie”.

²⁶ The original text reads: “Daar was slegs een vergryp van die ou Nasionale Party wat net so erg was soos die misdaad van apartheid teenoor swart mense, en dit was die onderdrukking van seksualiteit, lewensblyheid en kreatiwiteit onder hul eie kinders, onder jong Afrikaanse mense. My geslag het daaronder gely, en vandag se Afrikaanse jong mense het steeds nie daaraan ontkom nie.”

²⁷ There are many similarities between Bosman’s own persona and that of his main protagonist, Charlie Hendricks, for example their journalistic careers in the English press. Bosman’s family background (the Bosmans were Afrikaners with imperial sympathies) harboured in him a certain cultural ambivalence. Only after his third wife, Helena Stegmann, an Afrikaans schoolteacher had encouraged him rediscover his Afrikaner roots and embrace his mother tongue, did he start publishing his Afrikaans pieces (Rosenberg 1976: 153).

²⁸ Wisely, Bosman replaced the original Version B draft (below) with a more lyrical, suggestive description of the town. It does not matter, he appears to say, who the town was named after or what the particulars of the settlers’ activities comprised. Willemsdorp is, after all, meant to be a microcosmic, universal space. The Version B passage reads:

Charlie Hendricks felt that that little street had changed hardly at all since the time when the wagons of Willem Steyn’s party had come to a stop by a stream amid thorn-trees, and their leader had announced that he would here found his village, his dorp that was to serve as the religious and administrative and social and commercial – in that order of importance – centre for the members of his trek, and of the treks that were coming after them, who would take up vast tracts of farming land, and till the soil, and breed cattle, and dispossess the kaffirs, and exterminate Africa’s Midas-wealth of fauna, and become poor whites (Introduction:10).

²⁹ In Willemsdorp the Immorality Act is referred to as the Tielman Roos Act. Tielman Roos was the Minister of Justice in the Union parliament at the time. He had a considerable influence on the process of piloting the Immorality Act through parliament. In this regard Roux (1964: 203) remarks: “[Tielman Roos] had gone into opposition in 1914 because he disapproved of Smuts’s pro-war policy. His liberal ideas did not, however, extend beyond the colour bar, as witness the following extract from a speech he made in Johannesburg in 1928: ‘There is a Native menace in South Africa, and the whites will be driven into a big united white party to create a bigger and more potent weapon to fight for what we believe in ... we will rule the Natives ... Every white man in South Africa is an aristocrat and people who are rulers and governors cannot be proletarians’”.

³⁰ Anthropologist Charles Darwin supported notions of racial superiority. His publication, *The Origin of Species* (1859) was the handbook for Social Darwinism. Darwin’s thesis that biological destiny of a species depends on the survival of the fittest was popular with the founders of National Socialism in Germany before World

War II. Many Afrikaners in South Africa supported Hitler's so-called *Herrenvolk*-idea that "higher" (white) races have the right to dominate "lower" (black) ones in order to maintain pure, strong bloodlines. In this respect J.M. Coetzee (137) proposes: "[I]n South Africa, [...] a party with Nazi sympathisers in high positions was elected to office in 1948 and set about a program of racial legislation whose precursor if not model was the legislation of Nazi Germany [...]".

³¹ It is also reminiscent of a piece titled "Simian Civilisation" that Bosman wrote for *The South African Opinion* in 1947. It is a tongue-in-cheek commentary on the results of scientific studies carried out on baboon behaviour (in Bosman. 2002. *A Cask of Jerepigo*: 151–154).

³² The British satirist Tom Sharpe recaptures this humour based on misunderstandings between an English-speaking public and an Afrikaans speaking policeman in his South African satires *Riotous Assembly* (1971) and *Indecent Exposure* (1973). It is possible that Bosman may have inspired him.

³³ In this regard Bosman's examination of the "unnatural" character of the physical and ideological structures that society imposes on nature – symbolized by the South African dorp – takes Alan Paton's evocation thereof in *Too Late the Phalarope* a step further. Bosman eschews Paton's rather simplistic view, which juxtaposes the Edenic allegorical meaning of nature to the human imprint (symbolized by dorp settlement) on it. Bosman's view of the white coloniser's relationship to the landscape is more complicated. It is mainly through the main character, Charlie Hendricks that Bosman dramatizes the complexities inherent in this uneasy relationship.

³⁴ The most severe contemporaneous deconstruction of romanticism in Afrikaans *kontreikuns* (regional literature) is a semi-biographical novel titled *Kontrei* (2003) by a writer with the pseudonym, Kleinboer (small farmer). The title is a lewd reference to the nether "regions" of the female anatomy. The novel document's the writer's visits to bordellos in the Johannesburg suburb of Yeoville – a previously white area that has recently deteriorated into near slum conditions.

³⁵ Transcript of selected parts of an interview with Ingrid Winterbach, conducted by Alida Potgieter, Publisher: Human and Rousseau, and Craig Mackenzie, Professor of English at the University of Johannesburg, Die Boekehuis, Auckland Park, Johannesburg, 18 August 2007.

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