POOR WHITES IN NOVEL HISTORY: BRIDGING THE RESEARCH-FICTION DICHOTOMY

Sian E Pretorius-Nel
The University of Pretoria Archive,
University of Pretoria
sianevep@gmail.com

Life resembles a novel more often than novels resemble life (George Sand).

In South Africa, the term "poor white" dominated much of the academic, media and leisure spheres for the better part of the twentieth century. In this article, the use of realist novels as historical sources is examined within the South African context and the poor-white problem. It specifically considers the different types of poor whites identified by the Carnegie Commission and compares them to the characters and their daily lives in a fictional novel, *Bywoners* by Jochem van Bruggen. This comparison augments the existing and rather stereotypical idea of what a poor white is, but also adds flesh and voice to the official definitions and categories, making history come alive. It shows that the realist novel is, in a sense, a reflection of social conditions and context. It resembles the holding up of a mirror to society and reflecting what was happening on the pages. As such, this novel is an example of how fiction can be embraced for a better understanding of the past.

Keywords: Afrikaans literature, *Bywoners*, Carnegie Commission, cultural history, fiction and non-fiction, Jochem van Bruggen, literary text, novels, poor whites, realism

Armblankes in romangeskiedenis: Oorbrugging van navorsing-fiksie-digotomie

In Suid-Afrika het die term "armblanke" vir die grootste deel van die twintigste eeu baie van die akademiese, media- en ontspanningsfere oorheers. In hierdie artikel word die gebruik van realistiese romans as historiese bronne ondersoek binne die konteks van Suid-Afrika en die armblankeprobleem. Dit handel spesifiek oor die verskillende tipes armblankes soos geïdentifiseer deur die Carnegie-kommissie en dit word vergelyk met die karakters en hul daaglikse lewe in 'n fiktiewe roman, *Bywoners*, deur Jochem van Bruggen. Hierdie vergelyking versterk die bestaande en taamlik stereotipiese idee van wat 'n armblanke is, maar voeg ook vlees en stem by die amptelike definisies en kategorieë, wat die geskiedenis lewendig

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maak. Dit toon dat die realistiese roman in ’n sekere sin ’n weerspieëling van sosiale toestande en konteks is. Dit is soos om ’n spieël na die samelewing uit te hou en weerspieël wat gebeur het op die bladsye. As sodanig is hierdie roman ’n voorbeeld van hoe fiksie omhels kan word vir ’n beter begrip van die verlede.

Sleutelwoorde: Afrikaanse letterkunde, armblankes, *Bywoners*, Carnegie-kommissie, fiksie en nie-fiksie, Jochem van Bruggen, kultuurgeskiedenis, realisme, literêre teks, romans

Introduction

The term ”poor white” is not new or uncommon, and poor whites are also not a phenomenon solely related to South Africa.[1] There is evidence that poor whites exist throughout the world and that they have been prevalent for as long as there has been a class structure, an economy and a social setting where people do not or cannot earn or make a living for themselves.[2] The concept of a “poor white” has always been frowned upon, especially in the context of a racially divided South Africa. However, it is an idea that has received much attention from a wide range of disciplines, academics and authors.

Non-fictional and fictional sources written about poor whites, cover a wide range of disciplines, including history, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, medicine and literature. Over the last fifty years, the range of sources utilised by historians has also expanded dramatically. Whereas primary sources were initially confined to official and unofficial documents housed in governmental and private archives, more recently, there has been a widening of the source base along with a shift in methodology and historiography.[3] This is reflected in the increase in inter-disciplinary studies. New sources, such as artworks, are integrated into an effect to help explain the past and generate a deeper understanding thereof.[4] Realist

1 RW Wilcocks, *Rural poverty among whites in South Africa and the South of the United States* (Stellenbosch,1935); NJ Ring, *The problem South: Region, empire and the New Liberal State, 1880–1930* (Athens, 2012); EJ Bottomley, “Governing poor whites: Race, philanthropy and transnational governmentality between the United States and South Africa” (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge), 2016.

2 SE Pretorius, “Non-fiction in fiction: Poor whites in selected South African literary texts, 1900–1950” (MA dissertation, University of Pretoria), 2015, p 1.

3 T Cook, Archival science and postmodernism: New formulations for old concepts, *Archival Science* 1, 2001, p 24; T Cook, Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth: Postmodernism and the practice of archives, *Archivaria* 51, 2001, pp 21–27.

4 W Visser, Trends in South African historiography and the present state of historical research, Unpublished paper, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2004, pp 1–19.

and historical novels have been used in the same way. This article will argue that novels can be used to create insights into specific times in history and provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the term "poor white".

This article analyses a realist novel, *Bywoners*,[5] written in the first half of the twentieth century by an author from the realism genre – Jochem van Bruggen. It considers the poor white within a range of sources and examines how the novel enhances and endorses this understanding. It shows how the novel adds a more human dimension to the categorisation of poor whites according to the Carnegie Commission's report.[6] There exist many more novels to which this method could be applied.

Realist novels as a historical source

The use of novels as a primary source is not new. For over a century, scholars have argued for it and proven its use.[7] Historical sources exist in numerous formats.[8] DB Skårdal explains that history cannot afford to reject any sources, as it aims to understand as much of the past as possible. Its main goal is not only to reconstruct the facts but also to attempt to portray the distinctive character, unique quality and typical consciousness on its foundation. Therefore, history will always be incomplete and imperfect as life itself.[9] Among the different types of data and sources used by historians, novels are the least used, perhaps because many have assumed a sharp line between fact and fiction.[10] Social historians have needed to use a range of sources to examine the lower levels of society to prevent them from being left virtually in the dark.[11] Sources about these groups are scarce, and

5 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen* (Pretoria, 1973).

6 The Carnegie Commission was a study of poverty among white South Africans, which made recommendations. The report encompassed five volumes that dealt with the economic, psychological, educational, health, and sociological facets of the "poor white" phenomenon.

7 This is clear by the articles published in *The Sewanee Review*. It is an American literary magazine established in 1892 and the oldest continuously published quarterly in the United States. It publishes original fiction and poetry, essays, reviews, and literary criticism.

8 MT Garcia, *Literature as history: Autobiography, testimonio, and the novel in the Chicano and Latino experience* (Tucson, 2016), p 4.

9 DB Skårdal, "Hard" facts and "Soft" sources: Literature as historical source material, *American Studies in Scandinavia* 16(2), 1984, p 75.

10 DB Skårdal, "Hard" facts and "Soft" sources: ..., *American Studies in Scandinavia* 16(2), 1984, p 75.

11 DB Skårdal, "Hard" facts and "Soft" sources: ..., *American Studies in Scandinavia* 16(2), 1984, p 76; AH Pasco, Literature as historical archive, *New Literary History* 35(3), 2004, p 376.

any available material becomes important.[12] The lack of archival material may lead to unanswered questions, which have led historians to accept the idea that "unusual" sources can be exploited.[13]

Historical novels are usually written by authors from a later period, who have done much research on a topic and have set their fictional storyline within that past context.[14] While fiction is literature describing imaginary people and events, the novels that emerge from the realism genre have a greater degree of truth, history and reality.[15] According to J Conrad, fiction is history and is based on the reality of forms and observations of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents and second-hand impressions. He claims that fiction is nearer to the truth, but that "a historian may also be an artist, and a novelist a historian, preserver, keeper and expounder of human experience."[16] Thus, novelists from the realism genre write what they see and experience, which may be considered as raw and first-hand encounters with the subject, whereas historians grapple to understand second-hand accounts. Realist novels present stories, characters and settings that are like those commonly found in the contemporary everyday world. This requires events to take place in the present or recent past, and events themselves are usually organised in a linear, chronological sequence and located in places familiar to the author and audience, either through direct observation or report. The characters are plausible. The desire to portray contemporary everyday life entails and requires a breadth of social detail. The subject matter is usually whatever is found in everyday life, good or bad. These novels often engage with social issues of the day. The realist novel may offer some moral viewpoint but usually remains neutral and objective and rather strives for accurate representation.[17] The novel remains fictional but owing to its realist nature and the fact that it falls within the realism genre of writing, it too has a historical element.[18]

12 DB Skårdal, "Hard" facts and "Soft" sources: ..., *American Studies in Scandinavia* 16(2), 1984, p 76.

13 AH Pasco, Literature as historical archive, *New Literary History* 35(3), 2004, pp 373–376.

14 A Fleishman, *The English historical novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf* (Baltimore, 1971), pp x–xiii; M Kooria, Between the walls of archives and horizons of imagination: An interview with Amitav Ghosh, *Itinerario* 36(3), 2012, pp 7–17.

15 A Fleishman, *The English historical novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, pp xi–xiii.

16 J Conrad, Henry James, an appreciation, *The North American* Review 203(725), 1916, p 581.

17 S Earnshaw, *Beginning realism* (Manchester, 2010), pp 14–15; A MacDonald Taylor, The historical novel: As a source in history, *The Sewanee Review* 46(4), 1938, pp 464–465.

18 R Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde" (MA tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika), 1937, pp 4, 19; A Fleishman, *The English historical novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, pp xi–xiii.; JC Simmons, *The novelist as historian* (The Hague, 1973), p 21.

Fiction does not attempt to make the same representational claims as traditional scholarship, though fictional accounts may nonetheless be the product of extensive documentation and analysis. There are many examples of novels that represent a historical event or time. A classic example is the work of Charles Dickens. In his novel, *Oliver Twist*,[19] the poor whites in London, as well as orphans, gangs and other labour problems are visibly depicted. Although the storyline itself has no exact historical significance or credibility, several of the characteristics are true to life and contribute to an understanding of the period. Dickens was able to portray a time and events that he experienced and was able to relay them in such a way that people who read his novel would be able to identify with and relate to them thereby embrac a broader readership.[20] E Updale states that a modern historian, looking at the past, may need to wade through several records to find information that a realist novelist, writing at the time, may provide as a passing glance. These unspoken assumptions and unintended insights provide the truest period detail – things that were taken for granted. Fiction may reveal information that the official record never touched upon.[21]

The poor white in a South African context

Both the novel *Bywoners* (1919) and the Carnegie Commission's report (1932) were produced and published during the first half of the twentieth century. However, poor whites existed long before this, as did the growing problem. Whites who were poor arrived with the Dutch East Indian Company (DEIC) in 1652.[22] By 1661, the first poor whites in South Africa became apparent after crop failures accompanied by excessive alcohol abuse. In a letter to the DEIC, Jan van Riebeeck, Governor of the Cape, described the extreme poverty.[23] Therefore, poor whites in South Africa are not a new nor novel concept, and there existed several whites living in poverty for centuries. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the number of poor whites in the Cape and the Boer Republics,[24] began to increase dramatically,

19 C Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Oxford, 1966).

20 J Tosh, *The pursuit of history* (London, 2000), p 64; RJ Allen, "The rise and decline of conscientious realism in English fiction: A contextual study of novels by Charles Dickens and George Gissing" (DPhil thesis, Indiana University), 1978; A Anderson, Dickens, Charlotte Bontë, Gaskell: Politics and its limits, *in* RL Caserio & C Hawes, *The Cambridge history of the English novel* (Cambridge, 2012), pp 341–342.

21 E Updale, The history girls: Fiction as an historical source, http://the-history-girls.blogspot.com/2011/11/fiction-as-historical-source-by-eleanor.html, viewed 2022-03-28.

22 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people* (Cape Town, 2003), p 6.

23 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people*, p 2.

24 The Boer republics (sometimes also referred to as Boer states) were independent, self-governing republics formed (especially in the last half of the 19th century) by Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the Cape Colony and their descendants.

especially in the rural areas, for many reasons.[25] Some of these include causes to which historian Charles van Onselen refers to as the "Hand of God" and the "Hand of Man".[26] Droughts, pests, continued crop failure, shortage of land, inability to modernise, unwillingness to take risks, economic slumps and recession, as well as depression.[27] These factors led to some subsistence farmers losing the land they owned and being pushed into the category referred to as *bywoners*.[28]

Soon after the founding of the Boer Republics (1852 and 1854), mineral wealth in the form of diamonds was discovered in 1867 in Kimberley, and gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand in 1886. This created a different type of poor white: a landless rural poor, small town, low-skilled, low-paid wage earners, as well as the lumpenproletariat element.[29] The Afrikaner *bywoner* had a special love for the land and tried to remain in the rural area for as long as possible. However, many rural farmers and *bywoners* were unprepared and incapable of adapting to the new modern economic conditions that the mineral revolution brought about.[30] The new urban areas required food, and the need for commercial farming increased, which resulted in many farmers, who had *bywoners* occupying their land, asking them to leave so that they could fully utilise their land. Furthermore, *bywoner* labour was also more expensive than black labour, and machines were also replacing human labour.[31] Many of these rural poor whites moved to the urban

25 C Bundy, Vagabond Hollanders and runaway Englishmen: White poverty in the Cape before poor whiteism, *in* W Berinart, P Delius & S Trapido, *Putting a plough to the ground: Accumulation and dispossession in rural South Africa 1850–1930* (Witwatersrand, 1986), p 106.

26 C van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday life on the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914* (Johannesburg, 2001), p 321.

27 D Oakes (ed), *Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa: The real story* (Cape Town, 1992), pp 328–329; H Giliomee, 'Wretched folk, ready for any mischief': The South African state's battle to incorporate poor whites and militant workers, 1890–1939, *Historia* 47(2), 2002, p 609; C Bundy, Vagabond Hollanders and runaway Englishmen: ... *in* W Berinart, P Delius & S Trapido, *Putting a plough to the ground: ...*, p 106.

28 *Bywoners* literally means by-dweller but can also be a sharecropper or tenant. They denote a landless rural person to whom the resident owner of a farm has given permission, under conditions that vary considerably, to live on his farm.

29 C Bundy, Vagabond Hollanders and runaway Englishmen: ... *in* W Berinart, P Delius & S Trapido, *Putting a plough* ..., p 104.

30 L Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek – 'n Sosiologiese studie" (PhD-tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit), 1985, pp 41, 47.

31 A Grundlingh, Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881–1899, *in* T Cameron & SB Spies (eds), *An illustrated history of South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1986), p 185; L Callinicos, *A people's history of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886–1924* (Johannesburg, 1980), p 86; L Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek – 'n Sosiologiese Studie", pp 45–46; R Morrell (ed), *White but poor: Essays on the history of poor whites in Southern Africa, 1880–1940* (Pretoria, 1992), p 5.

areas to improve their economic conditions. Most were unemployable because they were unskilled or barely skilled.[32]

Soon after the founding of the Boer Republics and the discovery of mineral wealth, the British expansion into South Africa began, and they sought to annex the Boer Republics. The Boers were able to ward off these attempts; however, the British were determined to dominate South Africa, resulting in the Second Anglo-Boer War (South African War) breaking out in 1899. The War ended in 1902, and although poor whites existed before the War, the outcome and aftermath aggravated the growing crisis. Poor white numbers drastically increased, and this increase, and the increasing numbers moving to the urban areas, pushed the poor whites into the spotlight.[33] Many poor whites who sought economic relief in the urban areas were ill-equipped and unskilled. Some were able to use their rural skills, such as brick making and transportation, for a time to create a living; however, South Africa was undergoing rapid industrialisation, and they were soon replaced with machines.[34] The mines relied on skilled immigrant labour, and cheap black labour, and there was no place for the poor whites.[35]

From the middle-nineteenth century, the Dutch Reformed Church recognised the growing poverty among whites and started to respond to it with extended synodical work from the 1880s.[36] By the beginning of the twentieth century, the church alone could not staunch the numbers, and soon, the government had to step up and become involved. Thus, by the 1930s, there were already 300,000 poor whites. Of this number, 250,000 were Afrikaners, which meant that one out of every four Afrikaners was regarded as a poor white. Although other whites were also poor, it was the Afrikaners who made up the majority.[37] Government[38]

32 AN Pelzer, Die 'Arm-Blanke' in die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek tussen die jare 1882 en 1899, *Historiese Studies* 2(4), 1941, p 126; L Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek – 'n Sosiologiese studie", p 50.

33 AB Teppo, "The making of a good white: A historical ethnography of the rehabilitation of poor whites in a suburb of Cape Town" (D Phil dissertation, Helsinki University), 2004, p 27.

34 D Oakes (ed), *Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa: The real story*, p 329.

35 L Pretorius, "Suid–Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek – 'n Sosiologiese studie", pp 41, 46; R Morrell (ed), *White but poor: Essays on the history of poor whites in Southern Africa, 1880–1940*, p 5.

36 R Vosloo, *Reforming memory: Essays on South African church and theological history* (Stellenbosch, 2017), p 92.

37 H Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners van 1910 tot 2010: Die opkoms van 'n moderne gemeenskap* (Pretoria, 2011), p 7.

38 In terms of this study, "government" will refer to the various political parties and their respective coalitions for the first half of the twentieth century: 1910–1924 South African Party government (South African Party), 1924–1933 Pact government (A coalition between the National Party and

would grapple with this problem well into the second half of the twentieth century. Throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century, the poor-white question would dominate much of the politics for several reasons, which had a variety of long-term consequences.

Therefore, by the time the Carnegie Commission started its investigation, a few different Commissions and Conferences had taken place to address the poor-white problem. It had become a dire situation, and solutions needed to be found.[39]

The Carnegie Commission vs Van Bruggen's *Bywoners*

By the late 1920s, white poverty had become a national issue for two reasons. The first was a result of the global economic issue, which coincided with a prolonged local drought. The government attempted to stem the flow of impoverished whites leaving the rural areas to the urban areas by making loans available and boosting relief subsidies for temporary employment in public works. The second reason was that white poverty was given more attention in the development of academia.[40] Poor whites in general were regarded as a transnational problem that had global ramifications. White superiority, a legacy of colonial policy, needed to be maintained.[41] The Carnegie Commission was the first national poverty survey that could claim the status of a scientific enterprise.[42] A more scientific approach was taken towards studying social ills. Thus, after the numerous similarities between South Africa and the United States of America were noted, the Carnegie Commission of New York decided to fund an investigation into the problem of white poverty in South Africa.[43] However, the Carnegie Commission did not fund the investigation in its entirety. The Dutch Reformed Church, the South African

Labour Party), 1933–1948 United Party government (A fusion between the South African Party and the National Party and 1948–1994 National Party government.

39 See the Carnegie Commission's report and L Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek – 'n Sosiologiese studie" (PhD-tesis, Universiteit van Stellenbosch), 1985.

40 G Davie, *Poverty knowledge in South Africa: A social history of human science, 1855–2005* (New York, 2015), p 82.

41 NJ Ring, *The problem South: Region, empire and the New Liberal State, 1880–1930*, pp 155, 160. It is no coincidence that in South Africa and the American South the fascination and interest in the poor-white problem coincided with the rise of apartheid and Jim Crow.

42 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people*, pp 345–346.

43 NJ Ring, *The problem South: Region, empire and the New Liberal State, 1880–1930*, p 156; M Bell, American philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and poverty in South Africa, *Journal of South African Studies* 26(3), 2000, p 489.

Government and several non-government organisations also contributed to the funding, enabling some of their members to participate in the inquiry.[44]

Five commissioners[45] and several assessors were appointed from different fields to travel throughout South Africa between 1929 and 1932 and interview a cross-section of poor white communities.[46] The majority of the people they interviewed were poverty-stricken, Afrikaans-speaking descendants of the pioneer Boers and Voortrekkers.[47] The interviews were conducted when the poor-white problem was at its worst.[48]

The result was a five-volume report issued in 1932. The Carnegie Commission's findings were the most interdisciplinary work of its time.[49] It was met with widespread publicity, praise and public discussions in many different types of media by a range of people.[50] A total of 124 joint findings and recommendations were made, which would ultimately influence nationalists, politicians and policymakers.[51] The commissioners felt that although the poor whites needed to be helped, handing them everything on a "silver platter" would not be a solution and would create dependency rather than solve their problem. A better remedy lay in education, training and the acquisition of skills and work opportunities, which was to make them independent and self-sufficient.[52]

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44 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white* II (Stellenbosch, 1932), pp ii–iv; RR Vosloo, The Dutch Reformed Church and the poor white problem in the wake of the first Carnegie Report (1932): Some church-historical and theological observations, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 37(2), 2011, p 73.

45 Prof JFW Grosskopf was a chair in the Department of Agriculture Economics, as well as the Dean of the Faculty of Economic Management Sciences at the University of Stellenbosch. Professor RW Wilcocks was a lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch in the Psychology Department. Dr EG Malherbe was the Director of the National Commission of Education and the Editor-in-Chief of the report on poor whites for the Carnegie Commission. Dr WA Murray was the Senior Assistant Medical Official of the Union Department of Health. Rev. JR Albertyn was the Minister in Kimberley and Secretary of the Education Commission of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Ms ME Rothmann was the only female commissioner. She was the Secretary of the Afrikaans Christian Women's Association of the Cape Province.

46 L Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek – 'n Sosiologiese Studie", p 34.

47 The "Voortrekkers" label is used for the Boers who participated in the organized migrations of systematic colonization – commonly referred to as the Great Trek.

48 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in society & the mother and daughter of the poor family* V (Stellenbosch, 1932), p 154.

49 L Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek – 'n Sosiologiese Studie", p 35.

50 M Golden, Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A difficult past leads to a commitment to change, *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation, 2004.

51 M Golden, Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: ..., *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation, 2004.

52 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a people*, pp 347–349.

The Carnegie Commission's report resulted in a new understanding of the crisis, and people began to realise that poor whites were not solely responsible for their poverty. It was multi-casual with social, economic and natural forces all contributing to circumstances over which they had little control.[53]

The Carnegie Commission report serves as the primary source about poor whites because it was written during the first half of the twentieth century, at a time when the problem was at its worst and is still considered one of the most important research studies on poor whites in South Africa. Although the consensus is that it remains one of the best primary sources to examine the subject, this article argues that novels written during the same period from the realism genre are equally valuable.

Thus, to better understand the novel and its context, it is essential to understand the novelist and his background. Of interest, *Bywoners* was published in 1919, ten years before the start of the Carnegie Commission's investigation. This is important because it proves that realist novelists, such as Van Bruggen, were historically correct in the analysis and understanding of the different types of poor whites before they were investigated by the Carnegie Commission. The findings of the Carnegie Commission's report confirm and substantiate this.

Jochem van Bruggen (1881–1957) lived during the period when the poor-white problem was at the forefront of South African life. His family moved from the Netherlands to the Witwatersrand, where his father hoped to start a new life.[54] He was one of six children and grew up poor as his father did not earn much as a Dutch teacher.[55]

His father was responsible for his early education and inspired him to write essays and novels. Poet, Nico Hofmeyr was one of Van Bruggen's teachers and although Afrikaans was not yet an official language, he encouraged him to write in it.[56] Van Bruggen was very involved and influenced by the Second Afrikaans Language Movement.[57] It was a period when Afrikaner culture and the Afrikaans language were pushed to the forefront of literature to ensure its development and protection.[58]

53 F Pretorius (ed), *A history of South Africa: From the distant past to the present day* (Pretoria, 2014), p 304.
54 PJ Nienaber, *Hier is ons skrywers: Biografiese sketse van Afrikaanse skrywers* (Johannesburg, 1949), p 32; R Olivier, *Jochem van Bruggen* (Pretoria, 1981), pp 3–6.
55 Kleinjan, Jochem van Bruggen, *Die Huisgenoot* 18(610), 1 Desember 1933, pp 43, 89.
56 J Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen* (Pretoria, 1960), pp 1–2.
57 H Giliomee & M Mbenga, *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town, 2007), p 228.
58 R Coetzee, "Die armblanke in Afrikaans letterkunde", p 3.

At the age of 18, the Anglo-Boer War broke out, putting an end to his studies. Van Bruggen voluntarily joined a Boer commando and witnessed the devastating effects the War had on the Afrikaners.[59] Like so many of his characters, he longed for the rural areas, (wide open spaces) away from the city and the British. After the War, he left Johannesburg and moved to a farm in the Magaliesburg, where poverty was rife. Regardless, he remained on his farm until he died in 1957.[60]

Van Bruggen became a teacher for a while and was paid in tobacco by the parents of the children he taught, who were poor tobacco farmers. He soon left teaching and opted to sell the tobacco he accumulated, but was bankrupt within 18 months.[61] It was at this time that he also decided to give up farming.[62] He had to supplement his income with poetry, but when a publisher told him that he would have to pay for publishing, he decided to abandon poetry and focus solely on literature.[63] Van Bruggen received numerous awards for his contribution to South African literature during his career.[64]

Van Bruggen's work was heavily influenced by the Anglo-Boer War, Afrikaner culture and the language struggle, as well as the poor-white problem.[65] He was an important figure in the development of Afrikaans literature and was classified as a realist novelist who had found his spiritual truth.[66] His novels have a historical element as he strove to capture the reality that surrounded him. Van Bruggen's work in the realism genre became the most well-known and stands out as the "best example".[67] He is regarded as one of the best writers on the poor white question, thus providing the reader with insight into the daily lives, personalities and perceptions of the poor whites.[68]

59 PC Schoonees, *Die prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging* (Kaapstad, 1939), p 202; J Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, pp 2–3.; By this time Van Bruggen regarded the Afrikaners as his own people.

60 E Botha, Jochem van Bruggen: 1881–1957, *in* HP Van Coller (red), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis* II (Pretoria, 1999), p 645; AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen* (Pretoria, 1973), p 17.

61 JC Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur* I (Pretoria, 1978), p 184.

62 E Botha, Jochem van Bruggen: 1881–1957, *in* HP Van Coller (red), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis* II, p 645.

63 J Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen* (Pretoria, 1960), p 4.

64 AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp 17–18.

65 CJM Nienaber, Jochem van Bruggen 1881–1957, *in* PJ Nienaber (red), *Perspektief en Profiel* (Johannesburg, 1951), p 285.

66 G Dekker, *Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis* (Kaapstad, 1935), p 140.

67 JC Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur* I, p 184.

68 R Coetzee, "Die armblanke in Afrikaanse letterkunde", p 46.

Furthermore, Van Bruggen had first-hand experience of the hardships and difficulties of farm life, such as droughts and diseases and was therefore able to accurately depict the circumstances, thoughts and emotions.[69] Moreover, several *bywoners* lived and worked on his farm. He witnessed their poverty, struggles and destitution first-hand.[70] These experiences created the backdrop to his novels and rendered his work potent and realistic, allowing his readers to relate to it.

His novel, entitled *Bywoners*, is set on the farm owned by Andries Vry. Vry had allowed many *bywoners* to live on his land in exchange for a small piece of land they could work themselves and on condition that they work for him on his farmlands as well.[71] These *bywoners* are all very different and one of them, Jaap Gouws, decides to leave Vry's farm and employment to seek better opportunities in the urban areas.[72] A new arrival, Alwyn de Klerk, arrives on Vry's farm. He is not a *bywoner* but has money to rent a piece of Vry's land on the mountain.[73] Soon after his arrival one of Vry's *bywoners*, Cornelis Sitman decides to leave Vry's employment to work for De Klerk and live on his rented land. Much of the novel focuses on Sitman and his family and their spiral into abject poverty, so much so that De Klerk finally decides to leave Vry's farm to "escape" the Sitman family, who was starting to drag the De Klerk family down with them.[74] Gouws returns to Vry's farm to visit his friends and "recruit" them into joining the First World War, which has just broken out. He tells them of the perks and most leave Vry's farm. This is mostly due to the increase of the cost of living, as a result of the War, and many being unable to survive on Vry's farm as *bywoners*.[75] However, after the De Klerk family departs, the Sitman family remains on the mountain for a time before returning to work for Vry again.[76] The novel ends with all, but two of the *bywoner* families having left the farm. Vry is forced to finally embrace the Industrial Age and the change to farming. He looks out at his land and longs for the past when he was "king" of his land, and the fields were worked by *bywoner* hands.[77]

Many of Van Bruggen's own experiences and what he witnessed and encountered are embedded within this novel, which, in essence, reveals a true and accurate depiction of or insight into the time and daily lives of poor-white *bywoners*.

69 J Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, p 17.
70 J Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, p 6.
71 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, pp 23–25.
72 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, pp 30–36.
73 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, pp 25–27.
74 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, pp 37–71, 74.
75 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, pp 72–74.
76 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, p 74.
77 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, pp 74–75.

Defining the poor white in the Carnegie Commission report and *Bywoners*

Poor whites have been classified and defined as a separate group and class. However, within this categorisation, there are different types, and this is explained in the Carnegie Commission report and Van Bruggen's novel *Bywoners*.

Although much has been written about poor whites in the South African context, there exists a rather unnuanced definition of what a poor white is. According to the Commission, the term could only originate in a country where whites and blacks lived together in relatively proximity.[78] The commissioners decided to define the term before they started their investigations; however, they found it difficult to find a definition that was suitable for their specific social and economic purposes. Thus, they examined several definitions and proposed the following:

> A "poor white" is a person who has become dependent to such an extent whether from mental, moral, economic or physical causes that he is unfit, without help from others, to find proper [sic] means of livelihood for himself or to procure it directly or indirectly for his children.[79]

The commissioners emphasised that although their definition would suffice in explaining what a "typical" poor white was for the investigation, it was not intended as a description of all the finer distinctions that were made. Poverty was another difficult term to define, as were the different levels of poverty.[80] Therefore, the commissioners decided to further define the poor whites by classifying them into one of five categories[81] according to their situation.[82]

The natural group included all poor whites who evolved through social inheritance. These people may have been of normal intelligence, but for generations, they had belonged to the inferior classes of society until they came to be identified with a definite social pattern of inefficiency. The commissioners reflected that in some cases, with proper treatment and guidance, they may have been educated to become respectable, and useful members of society. Those who were mentally deficient and incapacitated, including the chronically sick, blind, deaf, dumb and all others

78 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: Rural impoverishment and rural exodus* I (Stellenbosch, 1932), p 17.
79 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: ...*, p 18.
80 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white* II, pp 2–4.
81 The natural group, the rural groups, the industrial group, the pathological group and the accidental group.
82 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in society & The mother and daughter of the poor family* V, pp 4–18.

who, through some mental or physical defect, were unable to support or care for themselves were also included in the natural group.[83]

The rural group was the largest of the groups, and most poor whites fell into this group. It incorporated those who lived in the rural areas and had a rural existence, such as the nomadic trekboer (travelling farmers), the bywoners (sharecroppers or tenant farmers), the woodcutters, and the Transvaal bushveld type (nomadic hunters living from the environment) and those living in isolation (isolated by history or geography).[84]

The industrial group comprised the poor whites who lived in the urban areas. These were the village (small town or 'dorp') type, who had usually been farm labourers or bywoners who had been forced off the land by modern changes and technologies. Many were unskilled in any trade or semi-skilled and used their rural skills where possible in the urban areas to make a living. These poor whites migrated to the urban areas seeking any type of relief and aid, but many were unable to adapt to city life and sank further into poverty, becoming completely destitute. The industrial or "digger type" also included poor fortune hunters who had no knowledge or experience of digging.[85]

The pathological group encompassed the poor whites who, through some aberration such as indolence, improvidence, drinking, dependency or crime, had sunk to a low social and economic standard. The abuse of strong alcohol was one of the leading causes of the poor-white problem and the reason why many "other" whites did not sympathise with them.[86] It is this group that has become the stereotype with which most people associate the term "poor whites".

Lastly, the accidental group covered the poor whites who had been respectable, self-supporting members of society, but had been the victims of some calamity. This mostly included natural disasters and causes that were out of their control. However, if aided, these poor whites were often able to rise out of their poverty and become self-supporting once again.[87]

The commissioners felt that it was important to add a group who had not yet fallen into poverty but would become poor whites if their circumstances did not

83 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 4–6.
84 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 7–15.
85 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 7–15.
86 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 15–17.
87 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 4–18.

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change. Throughout their investigation, a few attributes were identified that would ultimately lead to their eventual poverty. These included a lack of proper and secondary education, having smaller families, finding employment and working hard. In many of these cases, the whites were not yet "poor" or had managed to save themselves from poverty. It was these poor whites who proved that the stereotype – of all poor whites being lazy and unwilling was not true and that some were victims of circumstances and that there were those willing to "return" to the *volk* (nation).[88]

These definitions present an idea of the perceptions of poor whites, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, these somewhat monolithic or unnuanced explanations do not completely encapsulate a human element or what a poor white is defined as being in popular consciousness. Although the novels may portray many poor whites who are classified according to these various definitions as lazy, drunks and good-for-nothings, they also portray other poor whites who are "redeemable" and presented as victims of circumstance. During the first half of the twentieth century, the poor-white question received much attention. The whole stigma obsessed many Afrikaans authors from the realism genre who wrote about what they saw and experienced.[89] Van Bruggen was one such novelist, although there are some other novelists and novels that may be considered. Van Burggen's novels not only became prescribed school literature, but many also enjoyed a wide readership by appearing as serials in magazines such as *Die Huisgenoot* over several weeks.[90] Therefore, it may be argued that these novels influenced the public, infiltrated popular consciousness and may have influenced support for the government's decision to help eradicate the problem. These novels may also have contributed to creating certain perceptions. Novels are an important and popular medium for spreading ideas; thus, the government and novelists in turn may have advertently or inadvertently influenced and supported one another.

In his novel *Bywoners*, Van Bruggen specifically focuses on the different types of poor whites and goes as far as to categorise them according to their names.[91] Not much is revealed as to how they became *bywoners* or poor, but the focus of the novel is rather on their personal lives and the types of poor whites they are. The

88 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 158–166.

89 PC Schoonees, *Die prosa van die Tweede Afrikaans Beweging*, pp 33–34.

90 JA Pretorius, "Die ontwikkeling van die kortverhaal in Afrikaans soos weerspieël in 'Die Huisgenoot' van 1916–1966" (DPhil-verhandeling, Universiteit van Pretoria), 1973, p 18.

91 *Vyr* (Free) is the owner of the farm on which the *bywoners* work. *Niklaas* (No class or not belonging to the class of *bywoners*) went to the First World War to earn a wage. *Willemse – Wil* (Willing) Willing to work and is the most hardworking of the *bywoners*. *Gouws – Gou* (Quick) His wife

novel does not focus on the life or perspective of one character, but rather each is examined, and the reader can gain insight into the lives of that bywoner's outlook. By considering their respectable positions, all the *bywoners* fall into what the Carnegie Commission defines as the rural group[92] because the novel takes place in a rural farming area. Except for De Klerk and Willemse, the other *bywoners* form part of the natural group.[93]

There were several different *bywoners* living on Andries Vry's farm:

> Daar is kruismakers, windmakers en staatmakers.[94]
> [There are troublemakers, those who are lazy and the stalwarts.]

Firstly, the most well-known type of poor white, a dependent person as defined by the Commission, will be examined. Cornelis Sitman is one of the main characters and represents the stereotype of a poor white in popular consciousness.

> 'n Eie boerdery het hy nie meer nie. Daarvoor is hy te sleg...[95]
> [He does not have his own farm anymore. For that he is too useless.]
> Die bywoners het goeie harte oor die algemeen, maar ook 'n stille geestigheid, wat Cornelis Sitman heimlik "meeldiaken"[96] noem.[97]
> [In general, all the *bywoners* have good hearts, but also a meek humour/quiet spirituality, in which Cornelis Sitman is secretly called "Flour Deacon."][98]

He is described as lazy and tries to get out of work by using weak and poor excuses; people usually know that he is lying. As a result, the other *bywoners* look down on him. However, he will work when he knows that there is something for him to gain immanently.

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runs up a big account and he realises he will not have any money left from the harvest and decides to leave to go to the mine after paying his account. He decides quickly and leaves quickly. *Sitman* (Sit man) The laziest of the *bywoners* who prefers to sit around rather than working. It is also important to mention that the author does not reveal the first names of Niklaas and Willemse in the novel.

92 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 7–15.

93 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 4–6.

94 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, p 29.

95 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, p 29.

96 Flour Deacon – because he carries a rolled-up pillowcase with him wherever he goes – ready in case he may be given something, in the same way a Deacon would carry his Bible.

97 J van Bruggen, *Bywoners*, in AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, p 29.

98 The name "Flour Deacon" is used because he always carries an old pillowcase with him, which he uses when begging some flour or sugar from the other *bywoners*.

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> ... willoos, vol ingebeelde kwale en 'n vyand van alle vaste werk.[99]
> [... without a will of his own, full of imaginary ailments and an opponent to all regular employment.]
> "Luisiekte!... vervlakste luisiekte! Hy is oorlede dood so uitgedruk!"[100]
> ["Lazy sickness!... damn lazy sickness! He is already past dead so to speak."]

Sitman goes to work for Alwyn de Klerk, who came from the urban area after being boarded by the mine. He has quite a bit of money and decides to rent a large section of Andreies Vry's farm on the mountain.[101] De Klerk does not know much about farming and is very happy at first when Sitman informs him that he has decided to work for him – *handjie by sit* (lend a hand). Vry warns De Klerk about Sitman's nature.

> "... Hy is 'n man, wat sit waar hy sit en ek wil vandag nie die man wees wat hom eendag uit daardie hartebeeshuisie moet verhaal nie. Hy is die elfde plaag!"[102]
> ["… He is a man who sits where he sits, and I do not wish to be the man who must chase him out of that wattle-and-daub house. He is the eleventh plague!"]

However, De Klerk employs Sitman, but soon learns his true nature as Sitman begins to lie and his laziness is revealed.

> "Jy weet, ek word so stadigaan moeg vir jou gelêery die heeldag by jou huis!"… "Ek kan tog nie werk as ek siek is nie!" het Neels temerig geantwoord. "Ek glo niks aan al daardie kwale, waarmee jy die mense se oë wil verblind nie. Dis pure slegtigheid en luiheid en niks anders nie."[103]
> ["I am slowly getting fed up with you lying about your house the whole day, you know!"… "Surely I cannot work while I'm ill!" Neels drawled. "I do not believe in all your ailments that you try to blind people with. It is pure uselessness and laziness and nothing else."]

As was common with many poor whites during the first half of the twentieth century, Sitman has several children and is incapable of supporting or providing

99 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, p 29.
100 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, p 31.
101 De Klerk represents the more upper class of *bywoner*. He can rent his piece of land and keeps what he is able to make from it. Furthermore, he does not need to work for Andries Vry to pay for his piece of land. Thus, he is not a sharecropper, but rather a tenant farmer.
102 J van Bruggen, Bywoners, *in* AP Grové & S Strydom, *Drie prosastukke van...*, p 42.
103 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 46.

for his family. He also made very little effort. Poverty is rife in the Sitman home, and the conditions in which they live are portrayed as miserable. The reader witnesses the slow deterioration of the Sitman family as matters seem to worsen due to Cornelis' laziness.

> Die ander kinders drein om haar heen. Dis nie meer 'n huil oor kos soos vroeër nie, dis nou 'n aaklige grensgehuil, vol langgerekte klaagtone, wat hulle taaie gemoedstemming uit, as hulle magies skreeu van die honger.[104]
> [The other children whine around her. It is no longer a cry for food like before, but now it is a terrible mewling, full of drawn-out groans emanating from their hopeless situation when their stomachs growl because of the hunger pains.]

Sitman is not only a liar, but also a thief, and he transfers these vices to his children. Sitman is caught stealing eggs from De Klerk's chickens, and he avoids De Klerk after this encounter; however, De Klerk's wife catches Sitman's child stealing eggs a week later.[105]

> Sitman het begin om rond te snuffel en die oop hoenderneste op die arglose boere werwe was vir hom baie verleidelik. Wie sou dit agterkom?[106]
> [Sitman began sniffing around and the unguarded chicken coops on the unsuspecting, surrounding farms were tempting. Who would notice it?]

Sitman is considered the worst type of poor white, and according to the Carnegie Commission, he would fall into the natural group only because his poverty is most likely hereditary, and he knows no better. However, he may be more likely to fall into the pathological group because of his indolence, improvidence and dependency, as well as his crime.[107]

De Klerk was headed for ending in what the Commission defined as a group of whites who were not yet poor but would become so if their circumstances did not change.[108] De Klerk and his family were initially from the urban area and had no farming experience other than what he read in books. They lost nearly all the money he received from the mine but decided to return to the urban area before it

104 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 64.
105 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 66.
106 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 66.
107 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 4–18.
108 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 158–166.

was too late.[109] Furthermore, in contrast to the Sitman family, the De Klerk family only had two children who both received an education.[110]

Among the other types of *bywoners* living on Vry's farm, Willemse is portrayed as the best out of the group of *bywoners* and is very different from Sitman. Sitman lives in a temporary dwelling and has no crops or livestock of his own. Willemse has built a solid, permanent structure (a red-brick house) and produces a small harvest for himself and his family.

> Op sy werf wys kraal en waenhuis, dat Willemse 'n koning bywoner is.[111]
> [On his site is a kraal and barn, which shows Willemse is a top-class bywoner.)

One of the reasons he remains a *bywoner* is because he knows he is a big help to Vry and that Vry would struggle without him.[112] Willemse gets along with the other *bywoners* who look up to him and work well under his leadership. Willemse is the most dedicated and hardest worker of all the *bywoners,* and they all know it.[113] Vry has a lot of respect for Willemse and regards him as an equal by allowing Willemse's son to court his daughter.

> …Andries Vry is baie gek na hom.[114]
> [Andries Vry likes him.]
> "Pa as Pa nie omgee nie, sal ek nog so 'n ruk versuim," sê Albert en 'n heerlike rooi oortrek sy skaam gesig. Oom Andries voel die nuwe lewe in sy ou hart stroom.[115]
> ["Dad if you do not mind, I would stay a while longer" says Albert, and a lovely red blush covers his shy face. Uncle Andries feels new life flow from his old heart.]

Therefore, through the novel, it appears that Willemse falls into the accidental group. The impression is that he may have become a *bywoner* due to circumstances outside of his control. He appears to be what is deemed a higher class poor white. Although he is a *bywoner* and has no land of his own, he can provide a good type of life for his family, and it seems as though he could leave Andries Vry's farm if he wanted to.[116] Furthermore, he does not fall into what is perceived to be a typical "*bywoner*".

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109 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., pp 26, 37–38, 74.
110 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., pp 37, 66.
111 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 29.
112 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 29.
113 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., pp 29–34.
114 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 29.
115 J Van Bruggen, p 75.
116 J Van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 29.

The other *bywoners*, Jaap Gouws and Niklaas, also try to provide for themselves and their families by working on Andries Vry's farm. However, due to the high cost of living, Gouws receives an account from the Jewish shop owner and realises that he will not be able to pay it and that the income from his entire harvest would have to go to cover it.[117] He thus decides that he can no longer make a living in the rural area and decides to go to the urban area and work in the mines for a fixed salary.[118]

> "Wat help dit vir my om hier te bly werk. Ek vrek tog van ellend! En as ek stil sit is dit net dieselfde."[119]
> ["How does it help me to stay working here? I am dying of misery. And if I sit still, it is just the same."]

This reveals that Gouws is not lazy and wants to be able to work to support his family and therefore undertakes the difficult task of moving his family to an urban area to find some form of employment or aid rather than staying in the rural area and continue to suffer. Therefore, Gouws now falls into the industrial group.[120]

Many months later, Gouws returns to visit his friends on the farm. In the interim, he joined the army to fight in the First World War (1914–1918) and came to tell his friends, including Niklaas, about the perks of joining the War, such as grants for each of their children and a fixed monthly salary. To an extent, he has also come to recruit them. At first, many are apprehensive, but later, they all leave the farm in search of something more permanent because goods were twice as expensive as before the War, and many were unable to survive on their harvests.[121]

At the end of the novel, all the *bywoners* have left Vry's farm, except for Sitman and Willemse.

In terms of the Carnegie Commission's classifications, these *bywoners* fall first into the rural group as they try and make a living in the rural area, but they also fall into the accidental and recovering group. The novel reveals how each one tries to work and create a better life for themselves and their family and, in some cases going as far as to seek new and better opportunities.[122] These were not typical of the poor whites portrayed in academic literature or those in popular consciousness,

117 J Van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 31.
118 J Van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 31.
119 J Van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 35.
120 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The poor white in...*, pp 4–18.
121 J van Bruggen, Bywoners ..., p 73.
122 Carnegie Commission, *The poor white problem in South Africa: The Poor White in...*, pp 4–18.

but rather people (except Sitman) who were trying to get by and provide for their families without assistance.

Conclusion

As is evident in the Carnegie Commission report, there are different categories and even sub-categories for the class termed "poor white". When invoked, popular consciousness seems to have a prescribed stereotypical idea. Through the comparison of the well-known and reputable official primary source, the Carnegie Commission report on the poor-white question and a novel written about poor whites by one of the best-known Afrikaans realist authors, a clearer understanding is gained. It also becomes obvious that a standard and fixed definition does not suffice.

Realist fiction and the realism genre are emerging as a source that augments and enhances history. The literature becomes a reflection of the social and cultural conditions and evolutions of the mind; simply, it is like holding a mirror up to society and reflecting on what was happening on the pages of the novel.[123] It creates better insights into the time and a new and refreshing look at the past. A "real" look into what it was like back then is made possible. The audience is entertained and educated at the same time, and the message reaches a broader audience. This fictional account of poor whites by Jochem van Bruggen is the product of another form of historical document and research – oral evidence and experience.

Through the novel *Bywoners*, a new idea was created among a readership, which caused many whites, especially Afrikaners, to want to help these people. Through the novels, the reader is taken into daily life and struggles of what it means to be a poor white. Therefore, the novel can augment the non-fiction official Carnegie Commission's report by creating another dimension to the human side of the different types of poor whites by giving them a voice and making them walk off the pages, becoming tangible and "real".

123 SE Pretorius, "Non-fiction in fiction: Poor whites in selected South African literary texts from 1900–1950", p 13.