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Resensies / Reviews

Lance Nawa's poetic manifesto

Nawa, Lebogang Lance. 2005. **Through the eye of a needle.**
Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis. 124 p. Price: R79,95.
ISBN: 1-86919-092-0.

Reviewer: *Deirdre Byrne*
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Lebogang Lance Nawa's début collection of poetry, *Through the eye of a needle*, introduces a new voice in South African poetry. His eclectic, street-wise collection offers evidence of an encouraging turn among new poets in the post-apartheid era. Before 1994 there was very little opportunity to write poetry that was not, in some measure, political protest poetry because every aspect of social life was shaped by repressive racist legislation. Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, our artists are freer to draw upon the lyrical and intertextual aspects of art. At the same time, though, I am aware that there is no apolitical art and that the categories of "political" and "apolitical" writing are artificial impositions on a highly plastic genre. *Through the eye of a needle* is remarkable in its blending of many poetic traditions, including but not limited to South African writing, and, while keeping alive an acute political critique, it significantly extends the range of poetry in our country.

The centrepiece of the collection is undoubtedly the long title poem, "Through the eye of a needle", which covers 32 pages and can be read as Lance Nawa's poetic manifesto. Both lyrical and profoundly political in nature, the poem includes a number of speakers, positions and themes, ranging over African myth, landscape and history as well as the lives of individuals in the troubled land that South Africa has become. The central metaphor of the poem is the

idea of an Odyssean journey and the mutability that it inevitably brings (indeed, travel and change are synonymous). The poem has a quasi-omniscient narrator, who has affinities with Tiresias in T.S. Eliot's famous poem, "The waste land". Like Tiresias, the unnamed perceiver/narrator in "Through the eye of a needle" sees many phenomena as he journeys across Africa, bemoaning the physical and social dereliction that beleaguers our continent. What he observes and records becomes the substance of the poem. He sets the tone with an assertion of African communalism: "The life we travel is not ours alone" (line 1) and then travels widely through time and space, meeting a number of other speakers and recording a number of diverse impressions. Time and history are figured as a cyclical and mythical process of mutation. The speaker first observes that "Life becomes a long funeral procession / marked by interludes" (line 13-14) and then observes a specific burial ritual, returning again to the abstract problems and questions posed by death in the lines (41-74):

So then we ask ourselves a question:
who is dead or alive
at this point
between
the living
and
the dead?

The speaker's use of *we* in these lines, and in the poem as a whole, represents a subtle subversion of the elevated poetic, with all its connotations of centring the individual consciousness, in the Western tradition of poetry. To Nawa's speaker, birth, life and death are all part of one cyclical process, which is informed by a particularly African view of time. Sex is crucial: especially in the era of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, sex is intimately associated with birth and also, sinisterly, with death. But the speaker adopts an ironically distanced tone, which does not really engage with the suffering and drama of sex, life and death. He admonishes an imaginary travelling companion: "Do not overact" in line 123 (which could be a typographical error, or could embrace the meaning of "over-react"). From this point on, most of the poem is addressed to the imaginary traveller, who is probably one of the *juvenile delinquents* mentioned in line 139. The speaker points out the interconnections between natural and human phenomena and advises his interlocutor how to travel safely through a dangerous landscape. Along the way, he muses about what he is doing in a metapoetic vein, advising his companion: "please bring along your raincoat / for clouds of words

are gathering / and are about to fall / very hard over our heads” (p. 48). He questions his own poetic practice, the dangers of working in words, which are the very medium of poetic creation, and implicitly asks the reader to consider whether he can function as the voice of an African continent that is multifarious, ever-changing, inhabited by animals, humans and always by the shift of the seasons. The poem’s final imperative is to travel on, to continue on the road of change, and to remain mindful of the company of other societies, other lives and other changes. It ends with a humorous discussion between the speaker and his imaginary companion about their mode of transport. The speaker dismisses travelling by car, train, aeroplane, bicycle and ship as all prone to hidden dangers, and finally returns to a peculiarly African form of transport: walking, which is a more democratic mode of movement “so that we can accommodate everyone” (p. 50).

As I mentioned earlier, *Through the eye of a needle* epitomises Nawa’s approach to poetry: while remaining firmly rooted in his African context (especially the South African context), he also alludes intertextually to international literary traditions. There are many references, such as his mention of the Titanic on p. 50; even Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the madding crowd* makes an appearance on p. 34. In referring to other literary texts, Nawa finds the eye of the poetic needle; he follows a fine line past Harold Bloom’s “anxiety of influence”, narrowly missing charges of plagiarism and a lack of originality, to achieve a globalisation of his own literary text and, by implication, the African continent itself. Africa is no longer the outcast poor relation of European or American culture, but is an equal partner with those modes of cultural production. The poet can no longer rely on a position of idiosyncratic rebellion against dominant cultures from the fringes of Empire: he must respond to the tradition of writing, and make it his own. It comes as no surprise that many of the poems are dedicated to other African artists, such as Sandile Dikeni, Lesego Rampolokeng, Julian Bahula and Mzwakhe Mbuli. The presence of these voices generates an intertextual community of artists, among whom Nawa is proud to take his place.

Several poems in *Through the eye of a needle* grapple creatively with the condition of post-apartheid South Africa, where political boundaries are less clearly defined, but still exist. A poem such as “Nation at dawn” gives dramatic weight to the reconstruction of South Africa in the ironic scenario at the end of the poem, where the noise that wakes citizens at dawn is

ripping the earth apart, not for building of war trenches,
but for laying of foundations for new houses
pipes for water and electricity, and bridges
for linking the nation with other nations
around the globe (p. 91).

The critique and cynicism of “African leaders” (p. 96), which lampoons the leaders of African nations who have their faces printed on cloths that are tied around women’s waists, contrasts sharply with the optimism of “Nation at dawn”, while a more ironic take on South Africa after apartheid is provided by “South African road” (p. 87-88), where the road becomes metonymic of all kinds of ideological control, finally inducing “people to keep / left”. Nawa voices the concerns of many liberal South Africans of all races, though, when his speaker asks poignantly: “We are left. / What now?” (p. 88).

Intertextual and intercultural references also surface in shorter poems in the collection. One of these is “Swedish tales”, which is another travelogue, this time recording the poet/speaker’s trip to Sweden. There he finds literary resonances and kinship: for example, with August Strindberg, whose statue he visits, but as a member of a literary extended family rather than as a tourist. Rather, he is there “to share with [Strindberg’s] fellow-writers / my experiences of life and their country / as captured in words and deeds” (lines 7-9). The incongruity of a black African in Sweden is absorbed into the poem’s energy, which turns out to be sexual:

I would also hope to find,
next time around when I come back to you,
footprints of the one who wrapped my black heart
in a warm white veil of love,
when we first met, years ago,
back home in South Africa (p. 104).

These lines barely conceal a problematic equation of the land (Sweden) with a woman and love across the racial divide, as *black* and *white* imply. The woman is the reason for the speaker’s visit to Sweden. In other poems, though, the land is more explicitly associated with womanhood: by turns, women are portrayed as having an intimate connection with the soil of Africa, or the earth is seen as feminine. In “Set me free” (p. 55-57) the birth of a child is united with natural processes such as streams flowing to the sea, which implicitly positions the child’s mother as the earth itself. The equation is made more overtly in “The earth I know is a woman” (p. 62). This poem begins with the lines:

Woman, the fertile earth I know
 and run through my fingers
 is your body that gives birth to life
 and sustains it to its full cycle (p. 62).

To a certain extent, this poem attempts to deconstruct masculinity when the speaker speculates about what he can do as a *man-poet*. For once, male subjectivity is figured as lack instead of plenitude: the speaker does not have “the tenderness of flower petals”; he does not partake of the mating frenzy between animals; nor does he participate in the ritual of insects fertilising flowers. But he asserts that he does possess the power to love, which he attributes to his having been “born of a mother”. In these closing lines, the poem mythicises and idealises motherhood and femininity, relating it to the archetypal powers of love, birth and fertility. Even despite the subversion of masculinity in the lines explaining the roles the speaker cannot play in fertilisation and biological procreation, the unquestioning, stereotypical representation of women is evidence of a problematic view of gender in the poetry: why does Nawa, with his extensive cultural literacy, draw uncritically on the tired stereotype of the land as mother and lover? Why is there no questioning of his own gendered subjectivity and no problematising of the relationship between a man as fertiliser and procreator with the woman as passive receptacle?

A regrettable flaw in the collection is that it seems to have been poorly proofread or grammar-checked, as demonstrated by a number of typographical errors. For example, *excited* is mis-spelled *exited* (p. 61); *every one* should read *everyone* (p. 66); as in “as bra Chris van Wyk graffiti” (p. 74) would be more grammatical if it were *like*; the three letters *r* in *arrived* (p. 96) should have been corrected; “all and sunder” (p. 97) should surely read “all and sundry”; and so on. Of all forms of literature, poetry depends most upon precision in details, because small variations in single words or lines can change the entire meaning of a poem. It is the responsibility of both the publisher and the author to produce a fault-free collection, and it is a pity that minor errors have been allowed to spoil such fine poetry.

Through the eye of a needle was written in partial fulfilment of the degree of M.A. in Creative Writing at UCT, with Professor Geoffrey Haresnape as Nawa’s supervisor. As I have argued, the strength of the poetry lies in its powerful and original creative synthesis of African and other poetic traditions. One example among many in the

volume is his list of *African commandments* in “Through the eye of a needle”:

thou shalt respect and pray to God through ancestors
thou shalt be a member of the human race and animal kingdom
thou shalt recognise family/clan totem as own mark of identity
thou shalt regard any elder as own parent
thou shalt regard any child as own child
thou shalt not be a sibling’s keeper but own keeper
thou shalt not declare a friend’s enemies as own enemies
thou shalt live for collective good
thou shalt share with the less fortunate
thou shalt pass on this world to guide the living left behind
(p. 40).

(*World* in the last commandment might originally have been written as *word* and could be one of the volume’s typographical errors.) While the diction of the *Commandments* is Mosaic, the images are drawn from a uniquely African worldview, including the ethics of *ubuntu* and respect for the interconnectedness of all life. But there are also moments where the poetry reveals a lack of discipline and control. One such moment occurs in “For the devil and the saint” (dedicated to Lesego Rampolokeng and Vusi Mahlasela), when Nawa describes how the two entertainers

often get anxious when rain begins to fall
outside for you know, as we know, how
dependent death is on birth, that you will be left
alone to find your way back home to the ghettos (p. 81).

The speaker’s mention of the dependency of death on birth, while it is a recurrent concern in the volume as a whole, seems unnecessary in the context of his sympathy with two entertainers who may be left without transport back to their township homes. At times like these, the poetry leaves the impression of having been written by a poet who has not reached full artistic maturity, as demonstrated by his uncritical representation of women and women-figures in poetry. If Lebogang Lance Nawa continues to synthesise African poetics with other forms of discourse, he will give poetic expression to Africa’s citizenship in a global community, not only of economics, but also of cultural and artistic production and thereby make a valuable contribution to South African letters.

Anton Goosen – digter en liedjieskrywer

Goosen, Anton. 2005. *Hitte vannie teerpad: songs van die liedjieboer*. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis. 125 p. Prys: R100,00. ISBN: 1-86919-103-X.

Resensent: *Lucas Malan*
Onverbonde digter en letterkundige

Die publikasie van Anton Goosen se *Liedjieboer: lirieke met ghitaar-akkoorde* (Tafelberg: 1981), ingelei deur Kerneels Breytenbach, sou sekerlik in daardie periode van ons land en die Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis vir menige aspirantsanger en -liedskepper in die genre van die populêre/volkse musiek van groot hulp gewees het en tot inspirasie gelei het.

Ten eerste omdat Goosen hom toe alreeds as 'n unieke, enigszins alternatiewe sanger van romantiese liedjies of ballades in 'n *nuwe* Afrikaanse tradisie onderskei het. Ten tweede omdat daar juis in daardie troebel politieke jare 'n groot behoefte aan sinvolle, maar tegelyk musikaal draaglike luisterliedjies was. Met die klem op *luister*, want die woorde in sy tekste is op so 'n wyse geselekteer en geplaas dat die hoorder instinktief sou *luister* na die teks, al was die melodie ook hoe bekoorlik. Die eerste teks in hierdie bundel, "Jantjie", bly een van die beste voorbeelde van so 'n sonderlinge kombinasie.

'n Mens kan maklik kleitrap met die onderskeid tussen begrippe soos *popliedjie*, *liriek*, *luisterlied*, *liedteks*, *kabarettteks* en die hedendaagse gruweltjie bekend as 'n *song* wat meermale neerkom op 'n amorf klankstroom van enige aard, wat meestal onverstaanbaar is en net deur die verskil in volume en die duur van verdowende herhalings van die volgende een onderskei kan word.

Hoewel die tekste in die subtitel van hierdie beduidende versameling, *Hitte vannie teerpad*, ook *songs* genoem word, slaag dié gemoedelike woord nie daarin om Goosen se werk in die kraal van soveel hedendaagse sangers of "idols" te jaag nie. Gewoon omdat sy tekste kreatief en literêr beskou, naas dié van Amanda Strydom, David Kramer, Laurika Rauch en Coenie de Villiers op 'n hoër plan as dié van 'n golf eietydse sangers staan – hoe gewild die dreunsange van las- en loslappies met eindelose refreine ook al onder gehore skyn te wees.

Dit sal 'n veel langer ondersoek as hierdie kort bespreking verg om aan te toon waarom Anton Goosen se tekste van die begin af so treffend was en so langdurend bo dié van latere genote nog gewild bly. Volgens my bied hierdie versameling tekste 'n gangbare antwoord daarop. Daar kan kortliks na enkele aspekte in Goosen se oeuvre gekyk word:

Anton Goosen het iewers voor hy met liedjies begin boer het, klaarblyklik skoling gehad in die geslypte gebruik van sy moedertaal. Hy het 'n *intuisie* vir groeps- en idiomatiese taal en dit het hy gekry van 'n aantal digters wat – hoe subtiel ook al – telkens in sy tekste meespreek. Met die gebruik van “etnies”-gemerkte woorde soos *ghantang*, *dixieland*, *kaparrangs*, *nonnies*, *boendoe*, *tortelduiwe*, *konka* en *oulap* wys dié liedskrywer dat hy goed geluister het na onder meer Boerneef, Opperman en Jonker. (Hierdie woorde kom, terloops, ook plek-plek in die sangpaar Randall en Koba Wicomb se bekendste tekste voor.)

Ook in Goosen se voorkeur vir die ballade se verhalende aard, kan 'n voorganger soos I.D. du Plessis herken word in tekste soos “die kaap is weer hollands”, “antjie somers” en dan, in die periode ná 1985, “silver de lange” en die tragi-komiese “bettie de wet”, wat die leser op die een of ander wyse aan grepe uit Totius se *Trekkerswee* (1915) laat dink. En dan ook verrassend, in die onlangse liriese ballade “om die wind te soen” van 2002, wat met sy wrang weergawe van 'n eietydse mens op soek na sekerheid, onverwags aansluit by *Trekkerswee*, en paradoksaal, aan Leonard Cohen se tekste met 'n soortgelyke strekking herinner.

Hierdie liedskrywer het 'n aangebore gevoel vir ritme en beeldende taal. Reeds in sy vroegste tekste soos “ta' mossie se sakkie-sakkieboeredans”, “vergeet om my te vergeet, onthou om my te onthou” en die latere “klein bietjie wyn” het Goosen se tekste 'n ritmiese struktuur gehad wat in die vokale weergawes 'n blywende indruk gelaat het. Tot in die jongste tekste, soos “die seewater is blou” en die Engelse teks “freewheelin”, bly die leser bewus van 'n musikale aanvoeling wat in die ordening van taal meespreek.

In sy nawoord tot Hennie Aucamp se liedtekste *Lyflied* (Tafelberg, 1999) skryf Daniel Hugo onder meer “... ek glo dat Aucamp in die eerste plek 'n digter is; daarna liedjieskrywer”. 'n Mens sou dit ook van Anton Goosen kon sê, behalwe dat hy 'n minder sorgvuldige digter sal wees. Om twee voorbeelde te noem: in die twee weergawes van die teks “kruidjie-roer-my-nie” (p. 25, 26) is die eerste een duidelik die spontane een wat die tweede weergawe met

sy politieke skimpe oorskadu. En in die teks “blommetjie, gedenk aan my” (p. 27) wat oor ’n bekende spookstorie handel, is daar ’n ritmiese hapering in die slotreël wat ’n ware digter nie sou duld nie. Aan die ander kant is ’n teks soos “die skipper / weskusliedjie” (p. 78) weer klinkklare poësie.

Hoe ook al, hierdie keurig versorgde versameling van Anton Goosen se tekste waarvan soveel al bekend is en talle nog getoonset moet word, is meer as welkom op my rak. Dáár, by die digbundels.

Patrick Mynhardt = Oom Schalk Lourens?

Mynhardt, P., comp. 2005. Celebrating Bosman: a centenary selection of Herman Charles Bosman’s stories.

Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 219 p. Price: Unknown.

ISBN: 1-86814-416-X.

Reviewer: *Craig MacKenzie*
Department of English, University of Johannesburg

Celebrating Bosman is the distillation of Patrick Mynhardt’s nearly forty-years love affair with the works of Herman Charles Bosman. And, as with his hugely successful stage adaptations of Bosman’s works, Mynhardt has stuck with a winning formula. For this new volume follows, with very little alteration in content, Mynhardt’s earlier *The Bosman I like* (1981), which has been out of print for some time.

Celebrating Bosman begins with Mynhardt’s own stage adaptation of Bosman’s prison memoir, *Cold stone jug*, and then moves on to Bosman’s essays and stories. The last grouping, which rightly forms the bulk of the volume, is a selection of Oom Schalk tales, third-person-narrated stories, and *Voorkamer sketches* – from which Mynhardt has selected “Birth certificate” and the all-time classic “A Bekkersdal marathon”. Mynhardt has also provided an entertaining preface (q.v. for a hilarious definition of *jerepigo*) in which he relates how he came to stage Bosman and in which he offers a brief but colourful introduction to Bosman’s life and works.

The stories are arranged according to the original volumes from which they are drawn. Thus we have four from Mynhardt’s own

audio collection *Tales of the Boer War*, two from *Bosman at his best*, nine from *Unto dust*, seven from *Mafeking road*, and, finally, the title story from *A Bekkersdal marathon*. This might not be the best way to organise the pieces, as they follow neither the original publication sequence nor any discernible thematic arrangement. Thus, for example, the reader will not be able to see the development of Bosman's writing from early Oom Schalks (*Mafeking road*) to later Oom Schalks (*Unto dust*) and then on to the *Voorkamer* pieces, which he wrote in the last years of his life.

How much this affects readers' enjoyment of the selection depends upon individual sensibilities. Those who approach the volume with expectations of a systematically arranged set of items gradually building into a larger artistic whole, might come away a little perplexed. However, those who perceive the volume as a set of discrete items, each of which can be savoured without reference to contiguous pieces, will not be disappointed. For there is no doubt that Mynhardt has chosen well. His prefatory remark, "I think that with thirty-six years of Bosman involvement and fifty-two years on the stage, my instinct has guided me wisely", is just. This amount of experience in front of audiences has given him a sure sense of what South African readers come to Bosman for.

A more complex issue is the question of textual accuracy and the role of editors. The figure of Lionel Abrahams looms large over this selection, with pieces drawn from four of his six highly influential editions. This comes at a price, however, as Abrahams took it upon himself to translate one of Bosman's stories from the Afrikaans ("My first love"), raising the interesting issue as to whether this piece can, strictly speaking, be considered authentic Bosman. He also made (or inherited from earlier editors) several errors in editing (most notably in "The rooinek"), and often rearranged the sequence of pieces as he saw fit (the *Voorkamer* series is the best example here). Much of this legacy Mynhardt has, in turn, inherited.

But how serious are the consequences of this? In a letter to Roy Campbell written in 1949, Bosman himself was provoked to complain about how his stories were "mutilated" by the incompetence and possibly even intervention of various editors. In the end, however, Bosman conceded that "perhaps the picture is not much affected." And this probably also serves as a description of the effect of the errors Mynhardt inherited from Abrahams: only readers intimately acquainted with the original versions of the stories would notice the errors and omissions contained in *Celebrating Bosman*.

These are small quibbles, and perhaps out of place in relation to this highly entertaining volume. Mynhardt does not claim to have *re-edited* or *restored* Bosman. A better way of seeing this collection is as the lively script of Mynhardt's many successful stagings of Bosman's works. In the South African popular imagination, Mynhardt is so closely associated with Bosman's works – and in particular his inspired creation, Oom Schalk Lourens – that for many South Africans Mynhardt is Oom Schalk incarnated. It is in this spirit that *Celebrating Bosman* should be enjoyed.

The pilgrim's progress

Hofmeyr, Isabel. 2004. **The portable Bunyan.**
Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 314 p. Price: R180,00.
ISBN: 1-86814-403-8.

Reviewer: *Michèle du Plessis-Hay*
Department of English, Potchefstroom campus,
North-West University

Hofmeyr's main argument is that Bunyan's *Pilgrim's progress* should not be marvelled at as a quintessentially *English* book that yet has a *universal* appeal. Rather, she contends, the book was not only portrayed as universal under the pressures of nonconformist evangelism in Africa and elsewhere, but was in fact appropriated by Africans, and other colonial subjects, who did not always share the missionaries' agenda or interpretation. Only after this, she argues, was *The pilgrim's progress* reappropriated and reinscribed as *English* and *white* within the new field of *English Literature studies*.

The body of Hofmeyr's book is divided into three unequal parts, which the introduction and conclusion place firmly in a post-colonial framework – although the introduction in particular is perhaps too self-consciously aware of the alternatives to every choice made. In the first part, four chapters on "Bunyan in the Protestant Atlantic", Hofmeyr explores the use made of Bunyan by nonconformist missionaries on both sides of the Atlantic. In the central section, five chapters on "Bunyan, the public sphere, and Africa", she discusses African appropriations and (re-)interpretations of, and borrowings from, both the text and illustrations of *The pilgrim's progress*. The final part of the book, "Post-Bunyan", comprises one chapter, "How

Bunyan became English”, in which she draws together the threads of her main contention.

The book includes two appendices (“Bunyan translations by language” and “A social profile of Bunyan translators”), twenty figures, substantial notes, a thorough bibliography and an adequate index.

Throughout the book, Hofmeyr supports her arguments by general examples pleasingly justified and exemplified by detailed historical case studies of specific instances and individuals. These histories are of course mediated via the bleak gaze of post-colonialism, in which human socio-political history is reduced to cynical and interested negotiations and manoeuvrings between individuals or groups, all alike devoid of altruism or sincerity.

Occasionally, however, the histories – interesting and well-presented though they are – do not definitely support her argument, and the author is reduced to speculation:

Because evidence on Fuller’s translations is limited, so it does not allow us detailed insight into whether he carried forward any ‘Jamaican’ inflections of the text [of *The pilgrim’s progress*]. ...

As an evangelical Jamaican Baptist, Fuller *would almost* certainly have seen Bunyan as one of the ‘messages’ that he was carrying to Africa ... His Cameroonian translations of Bunyan *may* have aimed for a similar outcome in which his Duala Baptist converts *could* read the text as a story about themselves and their struggles. Such a translation strategy *would*, of course, unmoor traditional conceptions ... (p. 93-94; italics – MdP-H).

Together with the admission in the first sentence quoted, the modal auxiliaries and adverb I have italicised make this substitution of speculation for evidence clear.

Occasionally Hofmeyr reveals a haziness about historical details not central to her discussion, as when she writes: “In keeping with Elizabethan vagrancy laws, Christian, a masterless man, must carry a ‘pass’ to indicate that he has permission to be travelling” (p. 142). Surely Restoration legislation would be more relevant?

The writing is sometimes marred by misused words and abused metaphors. One of the most glaring of the latter is: “*The pilgrim’s progress* came to Africa orbited by its own galaxy of visual confetti” (p. 175). The inappropriate juxtaposition of the astronomical terms

galaxy and *orbit* (to say nothing of the bathetic addition of *confetti*) cannot but jar.

Perhaps it is pedantic to be reminded by “celibate and unmarried” (p. 171) that the original meaning (and still one of the meanings) of *celibate* is *unmarried*. The sentence, “... everyone sang hymns from memory, since to deem to hold a hymnbook was ‘an unpardonable affectation’” (p. 245), suggests that two constructions have been conflated and that proof-reading has been hurried – which happens to all of us.

But it also seems to me that Hofmeyr uses *creole* and its derivatives rather casually and distractingly. Admittedly, *creole* can be a vague word. According to my *New shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, it can mean, “in the West Indies, Central or South America, a person descended from European settlers or a person descended from black slaves”. Nevertheless, the phrase “... a world of African creole spiritual experience” (p. 87) is not clear. What kind of person is an African creole? The dictionary offers no meaning for *creole* (applied to a person) in Africa. If she intends to convey that Jamaicans might have a special insight into the hybridities (of any kind) that might have arisen in colonial Africa, there are better ways to express this. A few pages later Hofmeyr describes a religion emphasising personal revelation as “this creole Christianity” (p. 90). It is not quite clear whether she means Christianity hybridised with other Jamaican religious traditions, or the Christianity of the creole people of Jamaica; perhaps the latter, since her next paragraph begins, “In the records of Jamaican slave Christianity ...” (p. 91). The reason I keep suggesting that *creole* might mean *hybrid* for Hofmeyr, is this sentence: “The episode [in *Pilgrim’s progress*, where Christian must show his certificate at the gates of heaven,] also dramatizes a creolized view of literacy and documents that draws together ‘African’ and ‘European’ understandings” (p. 92). Since she clearly means *hybrid*, surely this would be less open to misunderstanding than a technical sociological and linguistic term?

On the whole, however, Hofmeyr’s book offers a thought-provoking thesis competently argued.

Women writings in Africa

Daymond, M.J. et al., eds. 2003. Women writing Africa: the Southern region. Vol. 1: Women writing Africa project.
Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 554 p. Price: R250,00.
ISBN: 1-86814-394-5.

Reviewer: E.L. Cloete
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For a decade scholars and researchers in six southern African countries collected oral and written texts by women to make up a collection of documents spanning just over two centuries. The texts in *Women writing Africa* range from political petitions, court records, short stories, poems, communal songs, folktales, letters, and extracts from journals written or recorded by women in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Swaziland. (Mozambique does not feature, and will hopefully be included in the east African region edition.) Each of the 120 texts is accompanied by a headnote written either by the editors themselves or younger researchers. These headnotes provide background to the text itself as well as broader historical, social and political contextual settings to the time and place in which the text originated.

This volume is the first in a series of four volumes dealing with women writing Africa, while the remaining volumes will encompass orature and literature from the western, eastern and northern regions of Africa. The project was initiated by the Feminist Press and financial grants received from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and awards from the Bellagio Study and Conference Center. Volume 1 of *Women writing Africa* is a breathtaking venture in its scope and diversity. The publicity note provided by Wits University Press mentions that the collection “reveals a living cultural legacy that will revolutionise the understanding of African women’s literary and cultural production”. This is indeed the case.

The editors were especially mindful that three of the countries covered in this volume are settler colonies and particular care had to be taken that the collection was not swamped by the prolific amount of white women’s writing – especially in so far as South Africa was concerned. In the decade it took to put this collection together, researchers scoured court records, national and missionary archives, libraries and private collections and listened to tape

recordings (private and radio) to gather written and oral testimonies of women. In many instances original translations and transcriptions were made. For instance, of Nongenile Zenani's *intsomi* (p. 316-333), of communal Swazi wedding songs and isiZulu and isiXhosa work songs (p. 461-467). The latter were recorded in the 1990s, and reflect not only hundreds of years of tradition, but also the influence of contemporary political and social concerns such as the conflict between the ANC and Inkatha. In another instance, Antjie Krog provides a new and thoughtful translation of Ingrid Jonker's poem, "I Drift in the Wind" (p. 306-308). Lesser known work from established writers such as Bessie Head and Olive Schreiner are also included. While there is a preponderance of texts from South Africa's indigenous ethnicities there are also examples of texts from Indian, Chinese, coloured and Afrikaans-speaking groups.

The texts are arranged chronologically starting with an anonymous Sesotho contribution, "Song of the afflicted" dating from 1842 and which predates Western influence in Lesotho, and ending with Botswana's Unity Dow's, "Caring for the dying" (2001) which deals with the HIV/AIDS pandemic (p. 520-522) and the South African-born, Australian-exiled, Yvette Christiansë's hitherto unpublished poem, "Generations" written in English and Afrikaans (p. 522-524). The editors point out that the women's texts selected "subvert the accepted sense of linear, imperial chronological history (of wars and laws)" (p. xxv). Thus oral texts, as part of a continuing tradition, "are not frozen in some particular period ... but appear throughout the anthology" (p. xxiv). The chronology highlights the extraordinary resilience of traditional orature while often dealing with contemporary concerns. From a regional perspective, the chronological order of texts foregrounds also the different and uneven pace of colonisations and literacy in the area. For instance, letters on land issues, written between 1860 and 1882 in English, by Emma Sandile, the daughter of a senior Xhosa chief in British Kaffraria, to senior colonial officials, foregrounds the already established effects of missionary education and colonisation in that region (p. 91-96), while northern Namibia was only effectively colonised in the 1940s.

The collected texts in *Women writing Africa*, together with the carefully researched headnotes shadowing each text and the thoughtful and wide-ranging 82 page introduction written by the editors (who often had different points of view), provide an invaluable input into women's places and spaces (and non-places) in the region. The Introduction also identifies areas for further research. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists, scholars and students interested in literature and literacy, as well as the general

reader are only a few of those who would find this anthology invaluable. If there had to be a point of criticism, then the rather insubstantial index could do with expansion which would include references made to texts and events in the valuable Introduction itself. While researchers and academics are understandably reluctant to release documents which they have painstakingly collected, transcribed and translated and on which they might yet need to conduct further research, the editors could well consider whether the texts in the anthology, texts which were not included and the full, rather than edited headnotes, should not be housed in a central repository and thus become available to future researchers.

Van eensame mense

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| <p>Serfontein, Dot. 2005. So min blomme; Onder skewe sterre; Sonder klein trou. Pretoria: LAPA Uitgewers. 512 p. Prys: R180,00. ISBN: 0 7993 3439 1.</p> |
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Resensent: E.A. van der Elst
Vroeër: Departement Afrikaans & Nederlands,
PU vir CHO

Dot Serfontein het in 2005 haar tagtigste verjaardag herdenk. Ter viering daarvan het Lapa Uitgewers die romans *So min blomme*, *Onder skewe sterre* en *Sonder klein trou* in een bundel uitgegee. Dié werke het oorspronklik in onderskeidelik 1966, 1967 en 1974 in die *Sarie Marais* as vervolgvhale verskyn. Die versamelbundel skop af met 'n interessante voorwoord deur Antjie Krog waarin daar “'n wonderlike wisselwerking tussen ma en dogter” is (Elize Botha in *Boeke-Beeld*, 19 September 2005). In die drie romans is 'n baasverteller aan die woord oor die wel en wee van die mense van die spoorwegdorpie, Laval.

Die trilogie is 'n sosiale dokument in dié sin dat dit “'n boeiende geskiedskrywing van ons ‘spoorwegfase’ [is]” (Antjie Krog). In veral *So min blomme* is die treinomgewing die agtergrond waarteen die gebeure afspeel. Mooi word die loodsgeluide in die nag beskryf: “'n Stoomketel word met die egalige gedreun van 'n waterval leër geblaas; dáár sny die sissgeluid van 'n stoomklep; dáár kap-kap 'n lokomotief stadig vorentoe, skud sy stoom rond soos 'n reus wat sy kieste skoon spoel ... Trokke word kletterend gehaak (p. 82).

In *So min blomme* speel Dawid McClaglan en sy liefde vir Mia Neethling 'n belangrike rol. Daar is talle kinkels in die kabel van hulle verhouding. Dawid is 'n masjiniis woonagtig aan die "verkeerde" kant van die treinspoor en Mia is 'n rykmansdogter uit 'n snobistiese gesin. Klasseverskil wat in al drie die werke aanwesig is, is hier die groot probleem.

Daar is ook die verhaal van Tokkie Coetzee en haar seuntjie, Jan-Koos. Hulle het nie 'n maklike lewe saam met Koos wat te lief vir die bottel is nie. Jan-Koos is 'n interessante, vroegwyse kind. Hy figureer ook as jong volwassene in die ander twee dele van die trilogie.

Van die ander karakters wat die wêreld van *So min blomme* bevolk, is die patetiese onderwysersfiguur, Hoffie Eksteen, en die eenvoudige maar goeie Johanna wat in die ryk Archimedes se kafee werk. Sy koester groot bewondering vir Hoffie en dit loop later op 'n huwelik uit.

In die tweede deel van die trilogie, *Onder skewe sterre*, gaan die lewens van die meeste karakters uit die vorige boek voort. Die kollig val egter op Jan-Koos wat intussen in 'n sensitiewe jongman ontwikkel het, en sy hartseergetinte liefde vir Jettie. Van laasgenoemde word gesê dat skewe sterre oor haar geskyn het, maar eintlik is dit van toepassing op byna al die eensame karakters in die drie boeke.

Baie aandag word in dié deel bestee aan die oorlewingstryd van Tokkie Coetzee met haar haarkappersalon. Die groot speek in die wiel is die skatryk en snobistiese Ciska Engelbrech. Klasseverskil is weer die agtergrond. In hierdie deel word ook kennis gemaak met die twee onnutsige, maar kostelike seuntjies van Hoffie Eksteen en Johanna.

In die derde deel, *Sonder klein trou*, tree Dawid McClaglan en Mia weer op die voorgrond. Jan-Koos, wat sy verlede nie kan afskud nie, en sy (on)vermoëns as skrywer figureer weer. Ook is daar die Nederlander, Goof Duimke, wat eintlik 'n skurk is. Tog word hy, as een van die eensames, nie sonder deernis geteken nie.

Die liefde, veral die onbeantwoorde liefde, kom ook voor, soos in die ander twee dele. Daar is onder andere Jan-Koos se liefde vir Mia, en Magriet (dogter van die onderwyser) se liefde vir Jan-Koos. Hoewel daar soveel verdriet en ellende in die verhaaldebeure is, eindig al drie die dele tog op 'n hoopvolle noot.

Karakters van vlees en bloed word geskep deur 'n verteller met mensekennis. Later voel die figure soos ou bekendes. Hoewel daar nie doekies om die swakhede en tekortkominge van die mense van Laval gedraai word nie, word almal tog met deernis geteken. Dit geld selfs vir die skurkagtige Duimke wanneer hy aan Dawid McClaglan, sy held, die verwyt rig: "Waarom het jy my nooit geag nie?" (*Sonder klein trou*, p. 479). Die eensaamheid van die karakters is opvallend. 'n Oorkoepelende titel vir al drie die werke sou kon wees "Van eensame mense".

In die drie verhale sorg 'n meesterverteller dat die verhaalgang vlot verloop. 'n Uitstaande kenmerk is die hantering van die taal. Raak, kostelike uitdrukkings en beskrywings maak die leeservaring besonder aangenaam. So word daar in *Onder skewe sterre* van die ongewilde rykmansvrou, Ciska Engelbrecht, gesê dat sy met haar hare nie na 'n haarkapper moet gaan nie, maar liever na 'n smidswinkel waar sy met tange en blaasbalke hanteer behoort te word (p. 204). In *So min blomme* is die onderwyser, Hoffie Eksteen, veronderstel om 'n perdekommando te lei, maar die perd met die "onsimpatieke oog" en groen kwyl wat by haar tande afdrup, jaag hom aanvanklik die skrik op die lyf. Maar vind hy uit, dit is bitter moeilik om die ou perd "in die algemene gees van vooruitgang te kry" (p. 127). Onverwags sit die dier egter op loop en op kostelike wyse word beskryf hoe Hoffie spartel om die perd te beheer. Toe hy uiteindelik weer op vaste grond is, twyfel hy sterk daaraan "of normale funksie ooit weer tot sekere van sy teerwarm liggaamsdele sou terugkeer" (p. 128).

Die onderwerpe wat in die drie romans ter sprake kom, steek nie vas by die mense van Laval nie, maar wen aan boeikrag, omdat dit algemeen menslik is. So is daar byvoorbeeld die liefde; en klasseverskille wat baie onaangenaamheid en verdriet soos kleinlikheid, snobisme en valsheid meebring; en die verlede wat nooit afgeskud kan word nie.

Die bundel word aanbeveel as uitstekende leesstof in die genre van goeie gewilde prosa.

Oom Willem vertel: maar hier onthou 'n mens eerder die manier van vertel as dít wat vertel word

Bekker, Pirow. 2005. **Toorop-stories.** Pretoria: LAPA Uitgewers.
128 p. Prys: R79,95. ISBN: 0 7993 3442 1.

Resensent: *Thys Human*
Departement Afrikaans,
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Oom Schalk Lourens van die Molopo! Só sal talle lesers waarskynlik oordeel nadat hulle kennis gemaak het met die verteller, Willem Toorop, in Pirow Bekker se kontreiverhaalbundel *Toorop-stories* (2005). En met reg, want daar is inderdaad opvallende ooreenkomste aan te toon tussen die verteller in Herman Charles Bosman se Groot Marico-stories en die verteller wat Bekker hier gebruik. Willem Toorop (en plaas dié naam 'n mens nie al op jou hoede nie?) is die kenner en bewaarder van die Molopo-streek se stories en baasverteller in eie reg. Hy vertel graag en meestal op voorwaarde dat daar 'n koue Dawidbier, of Langdawid soos die Molopoërs 'n *Longtom* noem, beskikbaar is: "... enige belofte van 'n storie versand al te maklik tensy daar 'n aanklamdingetjie in sig is" (p. 7). En wanneer Toorop eers aan daardie bier begin teug "soos aan 'n sigaret" (p. 32), dan gaan haal hy die stories ver en wyd. Aanjaag laat hy hom nie sommer nie: "Een ding van Willem Toorop: of hy nou 'n storie optower of nie, hy doen dit op sy eie manier en sy eie tyd. Miskien het dit ook met die weersgesteldheid te doen. Is die weer daarna, rek hy die vertel tot by 'n tweede blik sodat die storie nie stompstert eindig nie" (p. 9). Begin die bier egter opraak, is dit 'n ander storie: "Willem laat die bierblik tussen duim en middelvinger swaai soos aan 'n hingsel. Miskien taks hy die stand van die bier – twee, drie slukke oor. Die storie is in die weegskaal" (p. 10).

Die "optekenaar" van die verhale in die bundel is nie Willem Toorop self nie, maar 'n ongeïdentifiseerde *ek*-karakter wat as klankbord en katalisator optree. Die leser kom egter só min oor hierdie karakter te wete, dat hy as't ware onsigbaar word en dit vir die leser voel asof Willem Toorop met hom-/haarself praat. Willem Toorop weet ook net hoe om sy luisteraar(s) se aandag te behou. Wanneer die spanning begin oplaai en die leser in afwagting verkeer, neem Willem gewoonlik 'n lang sluk bier voordat hy sy verhaal hervat: "Willem drink lank en innig, (...) sluk (...) bietjies bier asof hy dotjies wil

aanbring” (p. 56). Verder terg hy die leser se verwagting deur sy storie vooruit te loop, maar net genoeg te verklap om jou behoorlik nuuskierig te maak.

Oor die geloofwaardigheid van “kroeg-” en kuierstories bestaan daar altyd ’n mate van onsekerheid. Dit is nie toevallig dat Willem se van Toorop is nie; hy toor inderdaad dikwels stories, of dele daarvan, uit sy verbeelding op of gaan redelik vry met die waarheid om. Hiervan maak hy egter geen geheim nie en gee duidelik te kenne dat hy (maar ook die ander karakters wat dele van die stories aan hom oorvertel) nie altyd op die woord gevat moet word nie: “Dis seker net die helfte van die waarheid wat op die oppervlakte uitslaan (...) maar goed. Elkeen kon nou maar afskep wat hy dink die storie is” (p. 45), en “Hoe Gaffie Niemoller die bekendste trofeejagter in die Molopo geword het, is ’n skietstorie wat miskien nie op bene staan nie, maar wat waar is. Meningwaar” (p. 73).

Die meeste verhale in die bundel begin met die stelling van ’n lewenswaarheid wat in die loop daarvan bevestig, ondermyn of gewysig word, óf gee ’n verduideliking van die wyse waarop die hoofkarakter(s) – waaronder Outie Doudruppeltjie, Tewie Mar-’n-bietjie, Klaas Basies, Makka Retief, Nieklaas Koppie, Sprinkaan O’erholster, Trydie Middeltoon, Duiker Engelbrecht en Okso de Lange – aan hul byname gekom het.

Dit is duidelik dat Pirow Bekker met dié bundel ’n korrekatief wou bied op die ernstige en swaarwigtige kortprosa wat tans in Afrikaans gepubliseer word. In hierdie opsig is Willem Toorop se opmerking teenoor sy aanhoorder veelseggend: “As dit is soos hulle beweer (...) dat storievertel ’n hoereerdery is, dan stry ek nie. Maar die hoertjie kon darem een ding sê van die mans met wie sy te doene gehad het: Hulle was almal baie ernstig” (p. 7). Wat ’n mens veral oor die bundel opval, is die humoristiese segswyses en poëtiese spel met woorde. Bekker beïndruk met die moeiteloosheid van sy vertellings en die uiters geloofwaardige dialoog van sy karakters, wat ’n byna afgeluisterde kwaliteit verkry. Die taalgebruik is idiomaties en metafories – soveel só, dat die manier waarop dinge vertel word, soms dreig om dit waaroor daar vertel word, te verdring. Hoewel daar in Willem Toorop se vertellings, net soos in P.G. du Plessis se *Koöperasie-stories* (1980) en *Nog koöperasie-stories* (1985), op goeie wyse met mense se gebreke gehekkel word, dra die oorwegend humoristiese toon in Bekker se bundel ongelukkig daartoe by dat die Molopoërs soms effens oppervlakkig uitgebeeld word. Talle verhale is weinig meer as komiese anekdotes wat op onderhoudende wyse vertel word. In dié verhale waarin ook die

ironie en tragiek van die karakters se situasies belig word – soos “Wat’s in ’n naam?”, “Cronjéttjie en die kameelrol”, “Kom die taksman” en “Die rose” – groei die vermaaklike verhaalgegewe egter weldra uit tot ’n uiters oortuigende besinning oor die aard van verhoudings tussen mense: man en vrou; vriend en vyand; familieledede onderling.

By geleentheid maak Willem Toorop die volgende uitlating: “Soos alle stories wat herhaal word, het dit later seker ook maar vervelig begin raak” (p. 60). Sonder dat hy dit só bedoel, is hierdie woorde ongelukkig profeties ten opsigte van Pirow Bekker se bundel. Aangesien die verhale sterk formulegedrewe is, ’n gemeenskaplike vertelstruktuur het en van soortgelyke retoriese strategieë gebruik maak, raak hulle op die duur redelik eenselwig en voorspelbaar.

Desnieteenstaande is *Toorop-stories* vermaaklike kontreivertellings waarin die giere en geardhede van mense en ’n streek op humoristiese wyse onthul word. ’n Mens mis egter die ironie, satire en weemoedige ondertoon wat Herman Charles Bosman se Groot Marico-stories en P.G. du Plessis se *Koöperasie-stories* so onvergeetlik gemaak het.

Nie net pá se stem nie

Burger, Willie. 2005. *Pa se stem*. Pretoria: LAPA Uitgewers.
122 p. Prys: R89,95. ISBN: 0 7993 3527 4.

Resensent: *Thys Human*
Departement Afrikaans,
Universteit van Johannesburg

Willie Burger is veral bekend as skrywer van die rubriek “Kopstukke” wat tweeweekliks in *Beeld* verskyn. Lesers van die ouerskapydskrif *Baba & Kleuter* ken hom egter as “skrywende pa” wat verantwoordelik is vir die uiters gewilde rubriek “Pa se stem”. ’n Tweede keur uit dié rubrieke het in 2005 in ’n besonder aantreklike formaat onder die titel *Pa se stem* by LAPA Uitgewers verskyn. Dit is dus nou vir lesers wat buite die nismark van *Baba & Kleuter* val, ook moontlik om met Burger se skryfwerk kennis te maak.

Pa se stem is, soos die vertellings in die eerste versameling – *Pa se stem* (2002) – goedgeskrewe essays wat sentreer rondom 'n vader se verhouding tot sy twee seuns. Pa is akademikus, skrywer en kranige roeier. Kleinman en Boetie is uit die doeke en van die bottels af; hulle wêreld is lank nie meer beperk tot die huis en dagskool nie. Kannemeyer (2005:569) het gelyk wanneer hy opmerk dat Burger waarneem met “'n humoristiese oog en 'n menslikheid wat die daaglikse dosis krisis draagliker maak”.

Ofskoon die vertellings almal oor dieselfde oorkoepelende tema handel en vir dieselfde teikenmark geskryf is, is hulle geensins patroonmatig of formule-agtig/herhalend nie. 'n Opvallende eienskap van die bundel is immers die groot verskeidenheid literêre vorms en style wat Burger afwissel: van briewe, gesprekke en innerlike monoloë tot by anekdotes, sketse en verhale. Soms is die vertelstyl sober en ernstig, ander kere tong-in-die-kies of wars humoristies. Soms oorheers die patos, soms word daar selfironiserend met eie tekortkominge gespot. Burger vertel so vlot en onderhoudend, dat 'n mens soms miskyk hoe behendig die vertellings aanmekaargesit is. In verhale soos “Die wolf by die deur” en “Grootmenspartytjies” vertoon die skrywer byvoorbeeld 'n besondere vertel tegniese bedrewenheid.

Op die agterblad word genoem dat alle ma's en pa's van kleuters by hierdie heerlik humoristiese verhale aanklank sal vind. Hoewel Burger die leser feitlik in elke verhaal laat glimlag (en in “Wat as 'n trol ...?”, “Klasie ons troeteldier”, “Lees om te kook” en “Winde van verandering in die wiskundeklas” behoorlik laat skater), is ál die vertellings nie slegs daarop gemik om die leser te laat lag nie. In vertellings soos “Die videokamera”, “Die dogtertjie”, “www.tandemuis.com”, “Aanmoediging”, “Kerslig” en “'n Brief aan my oudste op sy eerste skooldag”, is dit juis 'n stuk lewenswysheid en mensekennis, 'n besef van die vervlietende aard van alle ervarings, wat 'n blywende indruk laat.

Waarskynlik een van die grootste verdienstes van *Pa se stem* is die balans wat Burger tussen die ouer- en kindperspektief bewerkstellig en die *stem* wat hy aan die kinder karakters gee. Kleinman en Boetie word nie bloot as katalisators gebruik om allerlei spitsvondige, humoristiese en lagwekkende situasies ten tonele te bring nie. Hulle ontwikkel tot volbloedkarakters wat die leser dwing om ook van hulle perspektief kennis te neem en dus op 'n ander manier na die wêreld te kyk. By meer as een geleentheid is Pa heimlik beïndruk met sy “slag” as vader, sy vernuf om moeilike situasies te ontlont en kreatiewe voorstelle aan die hand te doen. Tog moet hy keer op

keer erken dat dit juis sy seuns is wat hóm iets leer; wat hóm dwing om anders na homself en sy lewe te kyk.

Burger slaag op indrukwekkende wyse daarin om aan die hand van die intiem-persoonlike ervarings en indrukke wat hy hier neerpen, sekere universele waarhede oor ouerskap en kindgrootmaak te verwoord. Die leser staan telkens verbaas oor die akkuraatheid waarmee hy die dinamika binne 'n moderne stadsgesin beskryf. By die lees van die verhale kan die leser nie anders nie as om te voel: "Só is dit ook in ons huis"; "So – presies net só – voel ek as ouer"; "Dit is my kind van wie Burger hier skryf." Dit is dus nie net die verhaalinhoud van *Pa se stem* wat 'n mens bybly nie. Burger se vertellings verkry juis 'n besondere oortuigingskrag vanweë sy fyn aanvoeling vir die taal, sy afwisseling van strukturelemente en sy vermoë om afwagting te skep. Met *Pa se stem* bewys Burger dat om onderhoudend oor grootword te skryf alles behalwe kinderspeletjies is.

Tshepang: universal effect and resonance

**Newton, Lara Foot. 2005. *Tshepang: the third testament*.
Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 45 p. Price: R80,00.
ISBN: 1-86814-415-1.**

Reviewer: *M. Keuris*
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Unisa

Lara Newton is an established and well-known theatre director who has directed more than 30 productions, won the prestigious international Rolex director's award and is now the Resident Director and playwright for the Baxter Theatre Centre in Cape Town. She is also a playwright of note and received in 1996 the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Drama.

Tshepang, which premiered in 2003 in Amsterdam, has toured internationally and in South Africa to critical acclaim. The play is based on the well-publicised rape of baby Tshepang in 2001 in the small town of Louisvaleweg. Tshepang, who was nine months at that time was first presumed to have been gang-raped by six men, but it was later discovered that the mother's boyfriend was the

perpetrator of this brutal deed. The play itself is a fictional account of this incident and also, according to Newton, inspired by “thousands like her” (p. vii).

While the rape incident is the main dramatic focus of the play, this incident is expressly placed within a bigger context: the socio-economic circumstances of a particular (South African) society, where poverty, alcoholism and a general disillusionment with life prevail. The rapist himself was a victim of vicious childhood assaults.

The text is preceded by a “Designer’s note” by Gerhard Marx, a “Foreword” by Adrienne Sichel and an “Introduction” by Tony Hamburger, titled: “*Tshepang – a morality play?*” All three discussions make various insightful comments about the play (especially Hamburger’s Introduction of 17 pages). All the main issues addressed by the play is discussed in these pieces (eg. the legacy of apartheid regarding poverty-stricken communities in the platteland; post-apartheid South Africa and the AIDS epidemic; the religious imagery found in the text, e.g. the title; as well as the surprising positive and hopeful ending of the play). One can also concur with the commentators’ remark that this play is part of the tradition started by Athol Fugard and others, of the so-called “protest theatre” or “political theatre” in this country. Newton’s intention is clearly to raise our consciousness level regarding the above issues and to address the inhumane living conditions of the poor in the new South Africa.

The play itself is short (26 pages) with no divisions into scenes or acts and consists of only three characters, namely Simon (the narrator), Ruth (mother of Tshepang, silent throughout the play until the end) and Alfred (boyfriend of Ruth and rapist of baby Tshepang). The use of a narrator, who tells and shows (e.g. by using visual props or reenacting certain incidents) links this play to the African oral tradition (also pointed out by Hamburger). By making use of this technique, a certain aesthetic distance is introduced into the play so that the simulated rape scene (a broomstick stuck into a loaf of bread) is more than dramatically effective to conjure up the full horror of this deed. Although the play deals with a very violent incident which could have become the sole focus of this play, the use of a narrator lessens this danger and brings a perspective to the rape scene which, in fact, succeeds in conveying the full complexity of the issues surrounding this deed.

Although life in this community is dangerous and cruel, it is not completely bleak. A note of hope is introduced in the play: Tshepang

(meaning: *hope*) is seen as a saviour of this community (also indicated by the subtitle of the play: “The Third Testament”), while the theme of love – perhaps unconventionally – also constantly surfaces in the characters’ dialogue (Simon’s declaration of love for Ruth) and actions (Ruth’s desperate carrying of her baby’s bed on her back through-out the play).

Tshepang, is a play rich with meanings and subtexts, and although an infamous incident in South African society is highlighted in this play, it is done in such a manner that it does have universal effect and resonance. This play should be seen and read by everyone interested in drama and theatre.

Giving a voice to women’s lives

Coullie, Judith Lütge, ed. 2004. *The closest of strangers: South African women’s life writing*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. 386 p. Price: R190,00. ISBN: 1-86814-388-0.

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Well-established in the field of life writing, Judith Coullie here presents a truly wide-ranging collection of extracts from existing self-representational texts by South African women, set within the parameters of 20th century South African history. The book contains three useful, though rather blurry, maps (South Africa in the 1890’s, mid-1990’s, and the Bantustans), a general introduction, followed by nine chronologically arranged and themed sections containing a cull of narratives (52 in total, some written autobiographies, some oral transcriptions) of women from diverse walks of life. There is, unfortunately, no concluding chapter, leaving it entirely up to the reader to draw conclusions retrospectively.

The introduction constructs a historical (and, indeed, ideological) backdrop, clarifies the concept “life writing”, and seeks to explain the seemingly naive title of the book, claiming that, despite the almost unbridgeable divides of apartheid, South African women have shared a paradoxical intimacy of experience: black women as prisoners of discrimination, white women as prisoners of privilege.

Arguing the need for a focus on women's life writing, Coullie does not step in the trap of "a feminine essence". Against the background of urgent current issues affecting women, most notably HIV/AIDS and rape, she points out that South African women still suffer the consequences of patriarchal gender systems, both Christian and traditionally African, that retain as a central tenet the oppression of women. Coullie attempts to address the neglect and distortions of the past by giving a voice to women's lives.

Most of the extracts are not overtly or consciously feministic, but seem more concerned with racial injustice and everyday life under a racist minority, leaving the reader with a lasting impression of the individuality of the victims, both black and white, of a system that sought to liquidate the individual.

Coullie is right in drawing attention to the importance of considering not only *what* these narratives, mostly concerned with telling the "truth", have to say, but also *how* they say it. Indeed, reading these extracts, one is reminded of the counter-conventional focus of psychoanalytic criticism on the *letter* rather than the *spirit* of the text: Lacan maintained that, not only dreams and slips of tongue (Freud), but every word ought to be seen as revealing. This reading strategy is, in fact, essential when dealing with a collection, such as this, which contains extracts from longer texts, many based on oral accounts, and hence often lacking the pace and density of professional writing. The cover design (by Bon-Bon) shows the face of one of the featured women "drawn" with, and hidden behind/emerging from, the letters that spell the names of those included, thereby highlighting both *individuality* and *language*.

This compilation should offer a thoroughly engrossing read for both the specialist and the general reader. It is, however, more than just a one-off read, but a work of reference to which one can, and should, return time and again. In my opinion it should prove a truly useful publication which could provide basic or supplementary material in the history, sociology, psychology and literature class, among others.

Coullie ought to be commended for having decided to include *izibongo* (praise poetry) and for the way this genre is gradually explained in the introductory parts of the successive sections, showing how it has evolved with time, but the examples sited are often rather disappointingly short and insubstantial.

Each section is provided with a brief introduction with regards to the history of the period in question, and this should be adequately enlightening for the layman/laywomen, but these overviews are maybe somewhat too general (here and there even superficial/one-sided), lacking a sustained focus on women. Each individual extract is preceded by a few, very helpful, introductory comments, but there is a conspicuous absence of integrative and evaluative observations about the respective groups of selected extracts, about the criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

Generally speaking, the book contains a well-balanced selection, ranging from the known/expected to the less familiar and downright astonishing. There are far too many to single out a representative few. However, the deeper complexities, humanity, and paradoxes underlying the various extracts are reflected and condensed in some narratives more than in others, for example:

The “life story” as genre and the telling of the own history, are particularly beautifully realised in the extract from the narrative of cleaning lady Mpho Nthunya’s, reported to her close friend, Limakatso Kendall, a visiting woman American academic.

Particularly memorable is Gillian Slovo’s account of her experience, as the child of activist parents, of the Republican Day celebrations in 1961, when each white school child was to be presented with a gold commemoration coin and pocket-sized model of the new flag. The latter she did not want and, like her parents, despised, but the “Judas coin” she secretly coveted (having been only 9 years old at the time).

Antjie Krog gains prominence in this book through Coullie, almost concluding her introductory chapter with approving echoes of Krog’s sentiments as expressed toward the end of *Country of my skull*, a dubious choice, since Krog’s book could be considered an example of somewhat confused/naive new South African posturing. In the last section, Coullie also included a long extract from the same book. The choice of this text as touchstone with regards to *truth* and *reconciliation* could be (deliberately) symptomatic.

Furthermore, there is a glaring discrepancy in the selection as far as Afrikaner women are concerned: the focus on the role of Afrikaners, sustained both in the introductory parts and many of the extracts, is not borne out by the text selection in terms of “authorship”. In other words, apart from Krog and Marike de Klerk, Afrikaner women do not speak for themselves, even with regards to historical periods

most affecting them, notably the aftermath of the South African War: with the exception of the narrative of “cowgirl” Sarah Raal, the accounts of sympathetic English women like Emily Hobhouse and Pauline Smith have to suffice.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, *The closest of strangers* is an impressive compilation which should bring the reader much closer to those thought to be strangers, and reveal the strangeness in those considered close.

Uitnodiging tot verdere gesprekke

Tydskrif vir Letterkunde. 2005. Temanommer: **André P. Brink @ 70**. Pretoria: Letterkunde-Vereniging. 213 p. Prys: R60,00. ISBN: 0041-476 X. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, 42(1).

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Dit is prysenswaardig dat die redaksie van *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* dit goedgevind het om ’n spesiale uitgawe te wy aan die veteraan Sestiger wie se vertalings in ’n groot mate verantwoordelik was daarvoor dat Afrikaanse letterkunde onder die aandag gekom het van die wêreldletterkunde en wie se werk benoem is vir talle internasionale pryse, aan wie erkenning gegee is deur buitelandse regerings, en wat (uiteindelik) die Herzogprys verower het vir prosa en drama. Hierdie skrywer was vir jare in die spervuur vanweë sy teenkating teen die Nasionale Partyregering se beleid jeens landgenote en hy is die eerste Afrikaanse romanskrywer wie se werk verbied is.

Op die terrein van literêre teorie het Brink ’n belangrike bydrae gelewer tot die studie van inheemse en by uitstek Afrikaanse letterkunde, wat hy, veral in politieke konteks, in verband gebring het met wêreldtendense: sy publikasies in hierdie verband het internasionale aandag getrek. Sy bydrae tot die Afrikaanse dramaskat is ook bo verdenking. Brink se vertalings van werke uit die wêreldletterkunde, sy humoristiese bydraes tot Afrikaanse tekste, mentorskap van “jong” skrywers en insette in manuskripte is alom bekend. Hy staan in ’n groot mate “vader” vir die algemene

Afrikaanse letterkunde. Die temanommer bied egter net beskouings oor sy romans en teoretiese/politieke uitsprake.

Die buiteblad, waarop die telekommunikatiewe *André P. Brink @ 70* teenswoordige tendense in kommunikasie weerspieël, het ook 'n kleurvolle afdruk van Cyril Coetzee se skildery van "T'kama-Adamastor", geïnspireer deur Brink se *Die eerste lewe van Adamastor* van 1988. Dit is goed om te weet dat Brink (of sy uitsette) ook in die skilderkuns verewig word, maar die surrealistiese burleske landskap verteenwoordig net enkele of 'n enkele aspek van André Brink se toevoeging tot die Suid-Afrikaanse literêre toneel.

Tydskrif vir Letterkunde se huldigingsnommer bevat agt artikels gewy aan Brink-romans, 'n Marxisties-literêre toepassing, 'n vergelykend studie, 'n transkripsie van 'n onderhoud wat Louise Viljoen met die skrywer gevoer het, en 'n gedig oor Brink. In die afdeling vir resensies kom toevallig ook 'n kort bespreking voor van *Kennis van die aand* wat in 2004 deur NB Uitgewers gepubliseer is in hulle "Klassieke Reeks".

Die aanslag, kwaliteit en diepte – en ook die taal – van die artikels verskil uiteraard. Die artikels oor Brink se werk tree nogtans op interessante wyse met mekaar in gesprek. Dit sal goed wees as ander letterkundiges tot die gesprek sou toetree en kommentaar, repliek of kritiek lewer op bydraes in hierdie spesiale nommer van *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*.

Isidore Diala's article ("André Brink: An aesthetics of response", p. 5-30) focuses on the embedding of his political convictions in his novels, starting from *Kennis van die aand/Looking on darkness* (1973/1984), and then continues to enquire whether Brink's novels are in fact imbued with the literary qualities, theoretical and political facts he purports to adhere to. The point is made that at this stage of his writing (1983/1984) the author – though in empathy with the underprivileged and "otherwise" coloured South Africans and despite his affiliation with South African eco and cultural heritage – still has an embedded racist/colonial approach to characterisation. Brink's theoretical outputs are measured against his novelistic performance:

Brink's non-fictional discourse on the writer and his/her society alone is enough to stake an immortal reputation on. However, in his novelistic practice, given his privileging of European humanist universals, Brink's engagement with the local but urgent struggle against apartheid often seemed compromised (Diala, 2005:29).

An indication is given of Brink's change from the former political situation to a genderist stance, and that Brink's star is still in the ascendant.

Elmar Lehmann's article (p. 31-41) on "Brinksmanship: storytellers and the novelist" examines the privileged "literary discourse to tell the truth", investigating the novelist "as witness" to "imagining the past/real", and covers a range of novels from 1973/1984 (*Kennis van die aand/Looking on darkness*) to *Sandkastele/Imaginations of sand* (1995/1996). The purport of the article writer is that the omnipresent author has faded away in Brink novels, to be replaced by a homodiegetic narrator; in the later novels especially the genderist voice can be heard. (This view is echoed by the article written by Anette Horn and Peter Horn, p. 104-116.) The Lehmann article concentrates on the narrator as a witness or as first person, experiencing character. In this, and some of the other articles in this volume, the emphasis is on political/genderist agendas, with little or no investigation of the literary qualities of the work. The closure of this article is somewhat disappointing as the *abstract* does not represent the development and eventual conclusion of the argumentation.

Soos Lehmann, maak Hans Ester (p. 41-54) ook gebruik van Ampie Coetzee se artikel ("Literature and Crisis", 1990), maar hy spits hom toe op "André Brink en de marxistiese literatuuropvatting". Hy poneer die feit dat die Afrikaanse skrywer(s) nie uit die industriële omgewing nie, maar uit die akademiese sirkel kom en dus nie veel insig of kennis sou hê van die klassestryd nie. Aan die een kant is Ester van oordeel dat Brink die belangrike punt van *klas* versak het ter wille van *ras*, maar bevind aan die ander kant "(d)e tijd heeft dit boekje (van Coetzee) ingehaald", dat die "gebruikte terminologie volkomen verouderd (...) zijn". Die leser wonder dan waarom Ester Brink se werk toets aan sodanige verouderde standpunte. Sy besluit is geheel-en-al hipoteties: "Ik acht het niet uitgesloten dat André Brink meer sympathie voor het socialistisch realisme zou hebben gehad wanneer hij intiemer vertrouwd zou zijn geweest met de complexe menselijke verhoudingen binnen de materiële productie in Zuid-Afrika." Indien Brink hom in die vroulike psige kan indink, soos in die jongste publikasies, sou hy myns insiens hom ook in "socialistiese ideologie" van "uitgebuite en onderdrukte klassen" kon indink en aan laasgenoemde stem kon gee indien dit hom sou behaag. In die onderhoud met Viljoen (p. 167) meld Brink dat hy hom gewend het van die *rasse-teiken*, wat daarop dui dat *ras* wél meer as *klas* vir hom van belang was.

It is quite interesting to see how often the literary and theoretical work of Brink and J.M. Coetzee is brought to bear on the argumentation in articles in this edition. The article by Alice Brittan (“Reading sex and violence in André Brink’s *Rumours of rain and A dry white season*”, p. 55-77) uses such an approach, but there is also a heavy reliance on Jolly (1996). The Brittan article, however, contains a plethora of citations and quotations; resulting in the fact that a reader has difficulty in deducing the stance of this article writer: the many citations and quotations – a collation of other people’s ideas and expressions – leave behind a feeling of vagueness or opacity in the argumentation. This article emphasises Brink’s rendering of a literary text as being *female* enticing the (male) readers, and Brink’s tendency to foreground the (white) female body, its relationship with the land itself, and violence (“desire and domination”) exerted on the land as in equal measure it is exerted on the female body, which is “a means of ‘offending’ the reader”. Although the title of the article suggests otherwise, what is mainly reflected here is the Afrikaner male as stereotype. Brittan’s *Abstract* closes with “ideological and aesthetic problems”, but the argumentation disappointingly ends with the “female body ... whose construction insidiously supports rather than subverts the vision of apartheid”, while the “aesthetic problems” are not addressed. Brink unwittingly replies to this article when he says to Viljoen that he has moved from a “racial target” to a “gender target”, talks about the “abuse of power” (p. 167), and talks about “die Afrikaner se voorliefde vir foltering” (p. 162).

Wium van Zyl se artikel, “Karakters en betoog in André P Brink se *Gerugte van reën*” (p. 79-103), noem ook in die *Abstract* dat dit fokus op “the use of characterisation as a vehicle for the implied author’s ideology”. Van Zyl maak verder die aanname: “Die roman wil ... ’n ideologiese stryd stry”, wat die artikelskrywer te staan bring by ’n punt waar hy *inlees* “dit wat die skrywer *blykbaar* (my kursivering – SL) ideologies wil”. Van Zyl se benadering is gebaseer op Smulders se uitsprake van 1983, wat ook *stofferig* aandoen (soos Ester dit in sy artikel noem oor Ampie Coetzee se sienings). In die afdeling onder die onderopskrif “Martin Mynhardt” is dit egter hoofsaaklik Calitz en prof. Pienaar wat onder bespreking kom, soos gesien deur Mynhardt. Bernard Franken word getipeer as die “alternatiewe prototipe van die Afrikaner”, waardeur hierdie artikel in gesprek tree met ander in dieselfde band. Ook die verskeie verwysings na *materialisme* en die *mynmaatskappy* bring dit in gesprek met onder andere Ester se artikel oor Marxistiese oorskouings van Brink se romans.

Neil Cochrane se “Die pikareske tematiek in André P. Brink se *Inteendeel*” (p. 93-103) word getoets aan Wicks se beskrywing van die pikareske. In die openingsinne word hierdie eienskappe aangetoon as “outsiderskap, rolverwisseling, vryheid en die individu se stryd om oorlewing” (sonder sitaat of bron) terwyl die *Abstract* die volgende eienskappe meld: “disillusionment, freedom, hunger, loneliness and gullibility”. Cochrane volg die kenmerke in die *Abstract* genoem, later op met verwysing na Wicks: “ontnugtering, vryheid, hongerte, eensaamheid en goedgeelowigheid”. Die meeste van hierdie kenmerke word op bondige wyse deur Cochrane uitgelig in die genoemde teks van Brink. Cochrane poog in sy navorsingsverslag om te wys op tekortkominge in Wicks se uiteensetting en van sy winste is die identifikasie van “die kousale verband tussen hongerte en skelmstreke” en die hiermee gepaardgaande politieke mag van heersers wanneer onderdane in ’n stryd om oorlewing verkeer. ’n Tekort in die artikel is egter die “rolverwisseling” – genoem aan die begin – wat nie ontgin word aan die hand van die gegewe Brinkteks nie.

Anette Horn and Peter Horn’s article, “It is much more complicated and much more fluid than mere linearity” – female genealogies in André Brink’s *Imaginations of sand* (p. 104-116) posits (in the *Abstract*) that the male author purports to adopt the “female persona”, but that the “male gaze nevertheless shows in his ‘female’ narratives”, and states that “Brink’s postmodern novel ... is one of those spaces over which the narrative has lost control”, but that “it attempts to re-question ‘the major topics of that philosophy: Man, the Subject, Truth, History, Meaning’”. It is unclear whether by mentioning *man* the focus is on *male* or *person*. A *female discourse* is opposed to the *phallogocentric discourse* and “ultimately refers to the transcendental signified of the phallus”. The authors pose the question whether “a man (can) write as a woman”. In this instance Brink indicates his own doubts about speaking on behalf on another: “as die man ... uit ’n vrou se hoek skryf, dan kan dit baie maklik net weer wees om haar stem weer weg te neem en namens haar te praat” (p. 168).

H.P. van Coller se artikel, “*Anderkant die stilte* (André P. Brink) en die verwerking van trauma” (p. 117-133), is in wese ’n verdediging van ’n standpunt vroeër deur hom ingeneem en is ’n repliek op Philip John se reaksie op genoemde standpunt. Van Coller kyk na uitinge oor die *Holocaust*. Van Coller poneer verder, en haal talle bronne aan ter ondersteuning van sy standpunt, dat “herinnering ... sosiaal gestruktureerd (is)” en dat dit altyd beteken “opnuut uitvind”. Alhoewel verder verwys word na *ervaring*, word *herinnering*, hetsy

sosiaal of individueel, nie in ooreenstemming gebring met *ervaring* nie. Van Coller se slotbetoog, dat “stories stemloses stemme gee, hul bemagtig én genees”, sluit wel aan by die titel van sy bydrae, maar weereens is die Abstrak en die argumentasie nie werklik in ooreenstemming gebring met die besluit nie.

Sue Kossew’s article, “Giving voice: narrating silence, history and memory in André Brink’s *The other side of silence* and *Before I forget*” (p. 134-146) also investigates the “voicing of silence and the rewriting of history and memory”. In her well-expressed argumentation Kossew directs the attention to the healing power of representation of the silenced experiences of characters in (our) history. She, however, also focuses attention on the “unreliability of memory” and the fact that all “representation” is “suspect” while “storytelling” is “a way of making sense of the world”, which brings us back to the fact that we are dealing with Brink’s fictional writings.

Philip John se vergelykende artikel, “Globale paradys of plaaslike hel? – ’n Lesing van *Duiwelskloof* André P. Brink), *Lituma en los Andes* (Maria Vargas Llosa) en *Paradise* (Toni Morrison)” (p. 147-159), ondersoek die feit dat letterkunde gebiede kan betree wat nie toeganklik is vir feitelike gegewens of bevindings nie, maar te doen het met ’n weergawe of daargestelde omgewing waarin “sosiale en psigiese kompleksiteite, teenstrydighede, dubbelsinnighede, onstabieliteit, onsekerheid, ensovoorts ondersoek kan word”. Die aandag word verdeel tussen die drie romans en Brink se *Duiwelskloof* ondergaan nie diepsinnige analise nie; tog is die gevolgtrekking ten opsigte van spanning tussen globalisering en lokalisme geldig “tussen die nuwe en die oue, die moderne en die premoderne, die verligte en bygelowige, die kosmopolitiese en die parogiale, en les bes, die globale en die plaaslike”. Sy bevinding is dat “die romans op die relatiewe aard van die moderne waardestelsel en op die insig [dui] dat hierdie waardestelsel nie op dieselfde manier in alle gemeenskappe bestaan nie”.

Die inleiding tot Louise Viljoen se “gesprek” met Brink (p. 160-177) verwys na sy “formidabele loopbaan as skrywer en akademikus” en meld “sy werk as romanskrywer, dramaturg, kritikus en akademikus”, maar die artikels wat in hierdie uitgawe van *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* opgeneem is, wy net aandag aan die akademikus/teoretikus en romansier. Brink se formidabele invloed as kritikus en sy dramaturgiese bydraes word nie in oënskou geneem nie.

Sonder kennis van die artikels, neem 'n mens aan, lewer hierdie outeur in sy reaksie op Viljoen se vroeë kommentaar op sy werk en ook op die manier waarop dit benader en behandel word, en doen in talle gevalle regstellings op sienings deur skrywers opgeneem in hierdie publikasie. Hy verklaar ook (p. 171) dat 'n skrywer afsterf van vorige boeke, en dat die herontdekking/herlees van sekere romans 'n outeur soms tot die besef laat kom hoe sleg dit is of dat dit dalk nie so sleg is as wat hy gedink het nie. Brink bind sy jongste werk, *Bidsprinkaan*, deur "sentimentele verknogtheid" aan 'n *Oomblik in die wind* en *Houd-den-Bek*.

Zandra Bezuidenhout se interessante poëtiese kyk, opgedra aan "'n Sestiger op sewentig" bied 'n humoristiese insig nie net op die indruk wat dié Sestiger op jong lesers gemaak het nie, maar betrek talle elemente van die tydperk waarin Brink opgang gemaak het.

Die temanommer, *André P. Brink @ 70*, is 'n gepaste huldeblyk.