

Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama: 1930-1940

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Abstract

This essay explores some of the complexities of Afrikaans drama in the period 1930-1940. The drama of the period was not characterised by any radical break with the past. Most plays continued the social realist and naturalist trends of the twenties. These plays are nevertheless interesting in terms of the portrayal of social concerns of the period. This article explores the aesthetics of the period as well as the themes of the poor whites, family and race.

1 Introduction

This essay explores some of the complexities of Afrikaans drama in the period 1930-1940. The drama of the period was not characterised by any radical break with the past. Most of the plays continued the social realism and naturalism of the twenties. NP van Wyk Louw was the only *Derfiger* (belonging to the important movement of literary renewal in the 1930s) to publish a drama, namely *Die Dieper Reg*, produced for the 1938 Voortrekker centenary. This play relates strongly to the new aesthetic orientation of poetry of the *Derfigers* and therefore stands out from the other drama production of the period.

2 Aesthetics in literature and politics

The *Derfiger*-movement, under the leadership of NP van Wyk Louw, was a movement of aesthetic purification. It reacted against the mass-based populist cultural productions of the period, by emphasising the author as individualist, prophet and craftsperson. For Kannemeyer (1978:360) their work is characterised by the 'more subtle use of the word and a concentration on the inner life of the individual'.

Central to their writing was a concern with beauty. To NP van Wyk Louw (1970:24) the word beauty referred to meanings outside middle class and mass understanding—it meant exploring areas which challenge and threaten middle class society, readers and audiences. The middle class signified to him the downfall and destruction of spiritual life, they 'neutralise all beauty with their own banality'. Only the discontents, those who suffer and stand outside of middle class life can appreciate art. Inner conflict and subjective life become the yardstick of beauty: beauty is measured by pain, suffering, sorrow and desire.

This new aesthetics had its counterpart in the *Purified* National Party (est. 1934) and its tendency to aestheticise politics. Diederichs was the philosopher of this new nationalism. Trained by the Nazi's Anti-Komintern (Wilkins & Strydom 1979:76), he showed some understanding of fascism in articles such as 'Die Fascistiese Staatsfilosofie' in the *Huisgenoot* (3 Nov 1933).

To Diederichs fascism is *l'art pour l'art* on the terrain of politics. Both Diederichs and Van Wyk Louw emphasise hierarchical differentiation as an

essential part of the new aesthetic intellectual attitude in culture and science:

to recognise and investigate the different levels of reality (matter, life, psyche, spirit) each in its own right It is not only a more advanced intellectual development when compared to the earlier denial of differences, but also one which is more true to the natural and aesthetic attitudes of man. Ordinary man sees the world as irreducibly rich and diverse, and he refuses emotionally—even when he agrees intellectually to accept the abstraction that materialism presents him of the world; in his immediate aesthetic experience of the world he recovers everything that was reasoned away: sound and colour, beauty, even pain, and the whole marvellous hierarchy of values and people! (Van Wyk Louw 1970:21).

The aesthetic, to both Diederichs and Van Wyk Louw, is anti-bourgeois. Diederichs describes fascism as 'in its being a romantic and anti-bourgeois impulse' (*Huisgenoot* 3 Nov 1933:17).

The word 'bourgeois' to them does not refer to the owners of the means of production, but rather to mass conformism and materialism. The bourgeois are the 'miserable' audiences, the well-to-do, the important state officials, cultural managers or culturocrats (Van Wyk Louw 1970:23) who attended the Afrikaans plays such as JFW Grosskopf's (1926) *As die Tuig Skawe* in which Van Wyk Louw acted in the mid-thirties (Neethling-Pohl 1974:93; see also Van Wyk Louw's *'n Toneelopvoering in Kaapstad* - 1970). They represent audiences selected according to 'wealth, class or education' (Van Wyk Louw 1970:23). He would have preferred an audience of:

All those who know suffering, who are restless, empty and hungry; sexually unfulfilled: the youth not yet spoiled by other matters ... they are the ones who could appreciate beauty² (Van Wyk Louw 1970:23).

Diederichs places the same emphasis on the youth. Youth is characterised by 'will', 'power' and 'action': 'The spontaneous unity of will, power, youth, movement and action for the sake of action' (*Huisgenoot* 3 Nov 1933:17).

The *deed* is central: 'reason is rejected for the sake of the deed, theory for the sake of practice' (*Huisgenoot* 3 Nov 1933:187).

The *deed*, as theme, found its most pure expression in Van Wyk Louw's (1938) *Die Dieper Reg*. This play, written for the Voortrekker Centenary of 1938, consists of choruses and individual voices allegorically representing the Voortrekkers in the Court of Eternal Right which must decide over their continued existence as a people. They are charged for rising

1. ... om die verskillende range van die werklikheid (stof, lewe, psige, gees) elkeen in sy eie reg te erken en te ondersoek en om nie dié een voorbarig tot die ander te probeer herlei nie Dit is nie alleen 'n strengere intellektuele ontwikkeling hierdie as die vroeëre uitwis van verskille nie, maar ook een wat nader aan die natuurlike en die estetiese instelling van die mens kom. Die gewone mens sien juis die wêreld as onoor-sigtelik ryk en verskillend, en hy weier emosioneel, selfs wanneer hy intellektueel meen dat hy toestem, om die abstraksie wat die materialisme hom bied, te aanvaar as die wêreld wat hy ken en waarin hy leef; in sy onmiddellike, estetiese ervaring van daardie wêreld kom al die dinge wat weggedeneer was, weer terug: klank en kleur, die skoonheid, selfs die pyn, en die hele pragtige rangordening van waardes en van mense.
2. Almal wat smart ken, wat nog rusteloos is, leeg, honger; wat in geslagentelike en ander sake onbevredig is ... hulle kan die mooi dinge waardeer as hulle ook die vermoë om te verstaan, daarby besit.

up against, and breaking all ties with the law; for appropriating land and enriching themselves; for being motivated by lawlessness and self-righteousness. In their defence they name their suffering, the fact that they paid the highest price by sacrificing their lives.

They are redeemed, not because of their suffering, but because of the power and simplicity, the *deed*, which motivated them and which made them an expression of God himself who is the 'mysterious Council, mysterious Source, of restlessness, deed and life itself'³ (Van Wyk Louw 1938:16). Because of the deed their existence is secured in the land South Africa. God is the unreasoning, motivating force of history transcending intellectuality and human law. This play is the most profound exploration of the 'birth of a nation' in lawlessness.

3 Poor whites

An important theme of the drama of the 1930s was the 'poor whites'.

By 1930 there were about 300 000 poor whites out of a population of one million Afrikaners. They made their living from farming as tenants, worked as hired farm labourers, or were owners of small pieces of land, squatters or unskilled labourers. Others were roaming trek farmers, hunters, woodcutters, the poor of the towns, diggers and manual labourers on the railways and relief workers (Touleier 1938:4f). The poor white was defined as a person whose income did not enable him/her to maintain a standard of living in accordance with general norms of respectability (Touleier 1938:5).

By the 1930s the poor white already constituted an established literary category: poor whiteism as theme abounded in prose and drama. As in the many social studies on the topic, the poor whites in literature were seen as the direct descendants of the Voortrekkers: they represented the last of the people living according to the Voortrekker ethic—as the character Jan in PWS Schumann's (1933) *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* makes clear when he points to the parallels between the Voortrekkers and Hantie's parents:

Is it not true that he (Louis Trichardt, the Voortrekker leader) was possibly just as poor, if not poorer, than your father is today? Your mother and father still live like the real Voortrekkers of the olden days. And what right do we have to reproach them for still living in the same way? They are still Voortrekkers, just like their parents were⁴ (Schumann 1933:84).

The poor whites are portrayed as the remnants and descendants of the people who lived according to the unthinking deed that Diederichs and Van Wyk Louw romanticised: 'they did not gather material possessions, pursue wealth or luxury. Nature was their wealth and freedom, their luxury and pleasure' and 'They roamed from here to there ... from the diggings to the settlements, to wherever their instinct lead them' (Schumann 1933:94).

3. ... verborge Raad, verborge Bron van onrus, daad en lewe self—.

4. Is dit nie waar dat hy waarskynlik net so armoedig was, so nie nog armoediger as wat jou pa vandag is nie? Jou pa en ma leef nog soos die egte ou Voortrekkers. Dis ons wat anderste is. En watter reg het ons om hulle dit te verwyt dat hulle dieselfde leefwyse behou? Hulle is nog Voortrekkers, net soos hul ouers was.

From this perspective the term 'poor whites' seems to be a misnomer. Indeed the poor white character, Annie Oosthuizen, points out that the tag poor white is a discursive invention by the petit bourgeois rather than a reality as experienced by the poor whites themselves:

I am no 'blinking street woman' and also not a 'poor white' It is the 'charities' and the 'Distress' and the 'Mayor's Fund' and all the people who want to make 'poor whites' of us. My husband says they are just like doctors who discovered a new illness and now want everyone to have it⁵ (Schumann 1933:84).

The poor white in literature was more than just the depiction of a social fact of the time. The theme introduced modernism, in the form of naturalism, to Afrikaans literature.

Naturalism—especially the petit bourgeois family drama—formed part of the materialist tradition rejected by NP van Wyk Louw and Diederichs, especially in so far as it shows individual characters as victims of external forces: the social environment and heredity.

Naturalism, nevertheless, was in vogue in Afrikaans theatre in the 1930s. Many of the naturalist classics were translated and performed—among them Ibsen's *A Doll's House* staged by Paul de Groot and his travelling players in the rural areas. Before every performance De Groot would give a lecture on the importance of naturalism to Western literature and during the performance:

The public followed the play in silence, a silence of 'non-comprehension'. The ending, if anything, surprised them. They simply threw their hands indignantly in the air at the thought that Nora would leave her children rather than sacrifice her individuality (Huguenet 1950:59).

On the other hand naturalist melodrama also displayed a crude realism: an exact but superficial imitation of reality that the audiences—unaccustomed to the artifices of theatre—loved:

Because they have never seen a production by 'strangers' who play with so much conviction and vigour, so much 'naturalness' as they called it, the experience was a revelation. For them the play was something real, a reality, and without much effort they displaced themselves into that reality. Without any conception of what a theatrical performance actually is, they were convinced by the play and believed in it. It is to this unconditional surrender that I attribute the initial big successes of Afrikaans theatre (Huguenet 1950:52).

One of the interesting examples of this extreme realism was Hendrik Hanekom's production of the historic and symbolical play *Oom Paul* by DC Postma in 1935. This play, based on the life of the Transvaal president, Paul Kruger, was an attempt to recreate history: Paul Kruger's house, the wallpaper, the uniforms of the time, the gestures as recorded from the memories of people who knew the president, his drinking of coffee from a

5. Dis die 'charities' en die 'Distress' en die 'Mayor's Fund' en al die mense wat 'poor whites' van ons wil maak. My man het gesê hulle is net soos die dokters wat 'n nuwe siekte uitgevind het en nou wil hulle hê almal moet daaraan ly.

saucer and being addressed by the black servants as 'uncle' were portrayed in the greatest of detail (Binge 1969:175).

Naturalism in Afrikaans literature dates back to Harm Oost's *Ou Daniel* (Old Daniel) in 1906. This was also the first depiction of the poor white. Old Daniel, the main character, is seen as the 'first truly living character in Afrikaans drama' (Bosman 1951:11). This play is the first psychological and sociological study in Afrikaans literature: Old Daniel is the 'personification of the clash between the old and the new in the changed Afrikaans society after the Anglo-Boer War and he becomes the distant precursor of the social problem drama' (Bosman 1951:11). The poor white theme enabled writers to depict the 'Afrikaner as a human being instead of as a patriot, or simply man as man' (Bosman 1951:12).

The following plays have the poor white as theme: *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* by PWS Schumann (1933), *Die Skeidsmuur* by AJ Hanekom (1938), *Drankwet* by EA Venter (1933) and *Die Stad Sodom* by FW Boonzaier (1931). A nationalist perspective is explicitly inscribed in these texts. The poor white is seen from the outside⁹from a concerned petit bourgeois perspective⁹as a difference that must be returned to the same of the nation. One of the main criticisms by directors against Afrikaans playwrights was the fact that the political prejudices of the authors made objective depiction of the characters impossible:

until recently no playwright in Afrikaans could withhold himself from personal interference with his character portrayals. This inability to portray objectively the many different characters is the main criticism against their work (Huguenet 1950:126).

Most of these texts are critical of the wealthy Afrikaner's preconceptions and exploitation of the poor whites. The class differentiation, implied by poor whiteism, was experienced as a threat to Afrikaner unity. Uninspired nationalist strategies towards the poor white problem were even criticised in some plays:

HANTIE (*With renewed passion*): Yes, they have congresses, and make resolutions, and choose delegates and appoint commissions of inquiry and send deputations and do research and publish blueprints That will not be my approach⁶ (Schumann 1933:96).

The most extreme portrayal of the raw reality of the poor whites is found in Schumann's (1933) *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe*. This play was produced in Cape Town by Anna Neethling-Pohl with the assistance of Van Wyk Louw. Neethling-Pohl (1974:93) felt that the HA Fagan plays usually produced in Cape Town 'were too civilised' for her 'rebellious taste, and not relevant enough'. In contrast, *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* represented 'a piece of realism, crude and raw, saying things as explicitly as possible' (Neethling-Pohl 1974:93). Anna Neethling-Pohl would later be confronted with the reality of the poor whites

6. Ja, hulle hou kongresse, en stuur beskrywingspunte, en kies afgevaardigdes en stel kommissies van ondersoek aan en vaardig deputasies af en doen nasporingswerk en publiseer blouboeke Dit gaan nie my werk wees nie.

as represented in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* when she became the secretary of Schumann's wife, who was a social worker in the Krugersdorp area.

Politically, poor whiteism—'that factory of idiotic monstrosities'⁷ (Jan in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* - Schumann 1933:76)—is of interest because it points to an emerging class differentiation undermining the unity of the nation. ('JAN:... I do not believe in classes for white people'⁸ - Schumann 1933:56.) As a class that may define its interest in opposition to that of the nationalists the poor whites posed a threat to the nationalists.

The increasing assimilation of the poor whites into a racially integrated South African society was perceived with shock by the nationalists. This process of integration is symbolised by *Lappiesdorp* where the poor whites of *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* lived with 'Greek and Syrian, and Hottentot and Malay' (Schumann 1933:73). In the same play, evidence that the poor whites were outgrowing their racial prejudices is seen in the friendly relations between them and Abdoel, the Indian shop owner, called 'Oupa' (Grandfather) by some children.

A most interesting description of emerging class differentiation is found in the articles 'Nogeens die bediendevraagstuk' (Once again the servant question) and 'Die wit meisie in huisdiens' (The white girl in domestic service) from the *Huisgenoot* (21 Aug and 18 Sept respectively). The problems that employers could expect when employing poor whites according to the *Huisgenoot* were:

- 1 the fact that they saw themselves as the equals of their employers because no clear-cut class differences existed amongst Afrikaners.
- 2 a prejudice against work that they considered to be the work of blacks. ('AUNT GRIETA: ... I won't allow my child to do kaffir work'⁹—Schumann 1933:29.)

The *Huisgenoot* (21 Aug 1931:67) then gives the following advice:

Make such a domestic understand for her own sake that although she is not of the same class as the coloured servant, she also does not belong to the class of the employer, just like children cannot be the equals of parents. She is the servant and must therefore serve at the table, but at the same time it must be seen to that she eats in respectable conditions.

Class differentiation and the question of white domestic servants are depicted in AJ Hanekom's (1938) play *Die Skeidsmuur* (The Partition Wall). This play attempts to show that poverty in itself does not define poor whiteism: the poor white here is rather the person that has lost his/her self-respect and is no longer of any use to the Afrikaner people. This is shown by contrasting the poor but respectable railway family of Johan Terblanche with the alcoholic neighbour, Gert. Gert's loss of self-respect is especially evident in the following aspects of his use of language:

- 1 In the form of address: he addresses Mrs Terblanche as *Miesies* (Mevrou).

7. ... die armlankedom—'n fabriek vir idiotiese misgewasse.
8. Ek glo mos nie in stande vir witmense nie.
9. Ek laat nie my kind kafferwerk doen nie.

Miesies was the form of address used by black servants when speaking to white women. It indicated a class and racial difference. Compare also *Hantie Kom Huis- Toe* where Mrs van Niekerk reproaches Aunt Grieta for calling her *Miesies* because she is 'also white' (Schumann 1933:26).

2 In the 'carnavalesque' (Bakhtin 1984) aspects of his discourse: he uses the words 'poor whites' as if between quotation marks, thereby humouring learned society's definition of him. The quotation marks show that he puts on the mask of society when he utters the words 'poor whites'.

3 In his particular way of transforming English words into Afrikaans: this can be seen as a banalisation of the self: *paartie* (party), *fekrie* (factory), and *wiekend* (weekend).

4 In his use of idiomatic expressions like *erfgeld is swerfgeld* (easy come easy go): he invokes the folkish wisdom of tradition and the forefathers.

5 In his use of homespun forms of standard Afrikaans words: *kenners* (kinders), *eergeester* (eergister).

Through his use of language he attempts to establish a sense of equality between his family and that of his neighbour; he wants to make the Ter-blanches feel at home in their poor white environment. By calling Mrs. Ter-blanche *Nig Maria* (Cousin Mary) he accentuates kinship ties. He says this was the way 'our grandfathers and grandmothers spoke' (Hanekom 1938:4).

Terblanche, on the other hand, resists his assimilation into poor white society by maintaining his family's dignity or his family's difference from poor whiteism at all costs although they are economically in a similar situation. Gert, on the other hand, as a typical carnivalesque character, reduces everything to the lowest common denominator: namely the body. The carnivalesque language of the working class (Gert) is typified by its ability to assimilate and to generate a rich and lively diversity of expression.

Terblanche's daughter, Aletha, works as a domestic servant in the house of the mayor and prospective member of parliament, Van Zeelen. Van Zeelen sees the poor whites as backward types who are nothing but a social burden and completely worthless to society. In his house Aletha has to pander to all the whims of the spoilt daughter, Helena. In these circumstances Aletha has to maintain her self-respect.

Helena senses in the dignity of Aletha that Aletha has forgotten her place as servant in the house. She refuses to be tolerant towards Aletha, because then Aletha might see herself as an equal. Aletha represents a class to Helena that has to be kept in its place.

Van Zeelen's son, Albert, on the other hand, challenges the stereotypical images of the poor whites shared by his sister and father. He sees that the rich, instead of helping the Church and the State in the struggle against poor whiteism, are strengthening the dividing wall between rich and poor. According to him the wealthy should rather encourage the poor whites to maintain and develop their self-respect. The poor whites must be taught that the history of the Afrikaner people also belongs to them, that they are fellow Afrikaners and equally part of the people. He gives effect to these words by

falling in love with Aletha and marrying her against the wishes of his father.

Like the Nationalists of the time, Albert emphasises the unity of the People and the need to struggle against developing class divisions; in this way he is verbalising the author's own views.

4 Family

In most plays of the period a conflict between father and children is developed on the plot structure of the biblical parable of the prodigal son. The conflict implies the tension between the modern and the traditional, the rural and the urban, the past and the future. Sometimes as in *Die Skeidsmuur* (Hanekom 1938) it is a struggle by the son against the preconceptions of the father. In *Agersteveoor Boerdery* (Backward Farming) by David J Coetsee (1932), the son wants to introduce scientific methods of farming against his father's wishes. In the foreword to *Die Stad Sodom* (The City Sodom) FW Boonzaier (1931) states that his play should serve as a warning to the daughters who want to settle in the city. In this play poverty forces the urbanised young woman to prostitution. Her father disowns her and, unlike the father of the Prodigal Son, he does not welcome her back when she returns to the farm dying of TB.

Another depiction of the generational conflict is Fritz Steyn's (1938) *Grond* (Land) which is about the duty of the unwilling son towards the dead father's wish to keep the inherited farm within the family. The son is a qualified teacher and does not enjoy farming. He keeps his feelings towards the farm a secret from his children who in their turn also rebel against the farm and the rural milieu. He forces them not to abandon the farm, but to be part of his promise to the dead. However, circumstances such as a bond repayment and a hailstorm force them off the farm. The loss of the farm leads to the reunification of the family and enables the children to go to university and pursue professional careers.

Loss of the farm signifies the loss of the means of production; the inability to reproduce independent life itself; it means alienation—the fact that the independent person is forced to become a wage labourer. This is made clear by Terblanche in *Die Skeidsmuur* (Hanekom 1938:2) when he says: 'How can I forget that once we were also independent farmers, that we could face people as equals'.¹⁰

The duty to the ancestors in *Grond* (Steyn 1938) expresses the duty to 'the ideal of the glorious fatherland' (Diederichs 1933:17) which is so central in Nationalist ideology.

In *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* (Schumann 1933) the father is identified with God and the devil. Hantie—who never knew her father and was taken away from her poor white family at the age of five—has mystical conversations with God. Gertjie, her poor white little brother also has moments of clairvoyancy. Hantie dates her mystical conversations back to her childhood from the time that she was taken from her real family:

10. Hoe kan ek vergeet dat ons ook eenmaal selfstandige boere was, dat ons ander in die oë kon kyk en op gelyke voet met ons medemens kon beweeg?

It's not so strange ... at least I am used to it now He has been everywhere with me since my childhood I see Him often ... always I don't know how to explain it!¹¹ (Schumann 1933:16).

When her friend, Jan, asks her about her father she answers:

I do not know much about Father. Do not ask me about Father, because ... aunt never talks about Father. Sometimes I feel so scared!¹² (Schumann 1933:20).

When Hantie meets her real father, without knowing that he is her real father, he stirs irrational revulsions in her. He is a most violent poor white. She tells her mother: 'he has the most abhorrent face I have ever seen'¹³ (Schumann 1933:65). She becomes completely irrational in his presence:

if only I never have to see him again—the devil marked him I feel like that day when I slipped on the mountain slope, when I had to cling onto some shrubs to prevent my fall!¹⁴ (Schumann 1933:70).

At the end God and devil merge in the father when she discovers with shock that he is her real father:

He?—Then I've got his blood in my veins? My body is of his, and my nerves and my constitution and my spirit descended from him? There is not a part of my body, or of my soul, where his stamp is not! My Creator, One-That-Formed-Me, that saw me before I existed, that knew me before my birth—was it really your aim with me? Then the night is part of me, and I embrace the darkness like a bride!¹⁵ (Schumann 1933:100).

After this she faints, recovers a few minutes later and declares the ground holy where she saw God. She finally feels relieved of material reality.

5 Race

Race in the 1930s still referred to the differences between Afrikaners and the English. When Mrs Van Niekerk says 'There are so many mixed marriages these days'¹⁶ (Schumann 1933:56) in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe*, she is referring to marriages between Afrikaners and the English. The 'Native Question' indicated the thinking on the future of the African peoples—an obsession of

11. Dis niks so wonderlik nie ... tenminste ek kan amper sê ek is dit al gewoon Hy is orals by my reeds vandat ek 'n kind is, dis te sê ek merk hom baie maal ... altyd ... ek weet nie hoe ek dit moet sê nie.

12. Ek weet nie veel van Pa af nie. Moenie my van Pa uitvra nie, want ... Tante praat nooit van hom nie. Ek voel soms so benoud.

13. Ag Moeder, hy het vir my die walglikste gesig wat ek nog ooit gesien het.

14. ... as ek hom net nie weer hoef te sien nie—die duiwel het nou al sy merkteken op hom gesit Ek voel soos ek daardie dag langs die bergkrans gevoel het, toe my voete gly en my hande bossies en gras uitruk om my val te keer.

15. Hy?—Dan het ek sy bloed in my are? My vlees van syne, en my senuwees, my gestel, my gees van syne afkomstig? Nie 'n deel van my liggaaam, of ook van my siel waarop sy stempel nie agedruk is nie! My Skepper en Formeerder, wat my gesien het toe ek nog nie daar was nie, wat my geken het voor my geboorte—is dit U raadslae, was dit werklik so die bedoeling met my gewees? Dan is die nag my deel, en ek omhels die duisternis soos 'n bruidegom.

16. Jy weet daar vind so baie gemengde huwelike plaas.

especially general Hertzog. In the early thirties the Native Question was seen as a 'matter of the utmost gravity calling for a meticulously thought-out long term policy' (Pirow nd:193). No coherent plan on the political future of the Africans seems to have existed. The Native Question went hand in hand with what was called the 'survival of White Civilisation' and the fear that whites would become 'swamped politically' (Pirow nd:195) when a 'black skin would no longer be a test of civilisation' (Pirow nd:195).

Hertzog differentiated in the late twenties between the future of the coloureds on the one hand and the Africans on the other. His view of the coloureds was that ultimately they should be integrated 'into the White Man's world industrially, economically and politically, but not socially' (Pirow nd:127). On the other hand his 'native policy was based on the principle of segregation and has as its ideal the development of the native along his own lines in his own territory' (Pirow nd:128).

Hertzog, according to Pirow, was not a protagonist of *Baasskap*, but of differentiation with 'benevolent guardianship' (Pirow nd:193). The determining factor for eventual self-government by Africans was not 'the acquisition of the white man's booklearning, but of his ethical conceptions' (Pirow nd:193). There was a general fear amongst whites about the political consequences of education for Africans. This is expressed as follows by the patriarch Van Riet in the play *Van Riet, van Rietfontein*:

The Kaffir is here to work. Make it compulsory. Close down that mission school. They only spoil the blacks. Why must they learn to read and write? A Kaffir that can read and write is worthless. And if he speaks English I'll kick him from my property!¹⁷ (Van Niekerk 1930:28).

Central to the propagation of the white man's ethical conceptions was the spread of Christianity: 'The paramount position of the European population vis-à-vis the native is accepted in a spirit of Christian guardianship' (Pirow nd:198). The play *Jim*, by JC Oosthuysen (1935) which could be performed by any drama society as long as they sent ten shillings of the takings to be used for missionary work in the Eastern Province and the Transkei, aimed to make white children on the farms aware of their duty to spread the gospel amongst the 'heathen' children of African farm labourers.

By 1933 the Broederbond began to formulate its ideas on black and white relations systematically. These ideas would eventually become the policy of the Purified National Party. In a secret circular it defined the main points of the policy as follows:

- 1 Total segregation should be implemented;
- 2 Black people be removed from white areas to separate areas provided for the different tribes and 'purchased by the natives from the State through a form of taxation such as hut tax, or occupied in freehold from the State' (Wilkins & Strydom 1979:193).

17. Die Kaffer is hier om te werk. Maak dit verpligtend. Sluit al daardie sending-skole. Daar word die swartgoed net bederf. Waarom moet hulle leer lees en skrywe? 'n Kaffer wat kan lees en skrywe is niks werd nie. En as hy Engels kan praat, skop ek hom dadelik van my werf af.

The 'detrified native' in urban areas would be seen as 'temporary occupants' of locations in white areas and living there 'of their own choice and for gain'. The same would apply to the coloured people who would get their own homeland (Wilkins & Strydom 1979:193,197).

The integration which became discernible in the mixed areas (such as Lappiesdorp in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* - Schumann 1933) was looked on with horror by the educated and wealthier Afrikaners: it was a direct assault on their sense of propriety.

A concern with what is proper was one of the obsessions of university-educated Afrikaners of the time. It manifested itself in a concern with the minutest detail. Compare M.E.R.'s outrage during a performance of Langenhoven's *Petronella* at the torn and tattered red velvet curtains and at the constant laughing of the town's people who saw all drama as comedy (*Huisgenoot* 29 May 1931:67). She calls it 'cultural disorder'. The concern with what is proper is further manifested in Hantie's dismay at her mother wearing a night gown in the streets in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* (Schumann 1933:67).

The concern with 'cultural order' and what is proper explains much of the nationalist's racism. But this racism also has economic motives. The obsession of the wealthy Mrs van Niekerk with the friendly relations between the Indian shopowner and the poor whites in *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* indicates her fear of the growing economic power of the Indians:

Yes my child, here you can see the bare truth about poor whiteism. And as you noticed, one is astonished by the big Indian shops. But the reason is: the Indians treat the poor as their equals. They feel at home with them. Do you see that shop? It is Abdoel's. The people call him Grandpa¹⁸ (Schumann 1933:25).

In another passage Mrs van Niekerk scolds Aunt Grieta:

Are you again at the Indian's shop. You promised me last time you will not buy from the Indian if you could be helped elsewhere¹⁹ (Schumann 1933:54).

To this Aunt Grieta answers:

Oh Miesies, it is easy for you. You rich people do not care where you buy and what you pay, but we poor people must be happy to buy at the cheapest place²⁰ (Schumann 1933:55).

It is more than the price of goods that attracts Aunt Grieta to the Indian shop: there she does not feel discriminated against, she does not feel she is looked down upon by her own kind. When Mrs van Niekerk suggests that she should

18. Ja my kind, hier kan jy nou die armlankedom in al sy naaktheid sien. En soos jy sê: mens verwonder jou oor die groot Koeliewinkels. Maar die rede is: die Koelies behandel die armense soos hulle gelyke. Hulle voel daar tuis. Sien jy daardie winkel? Dis ou Abdoel s'n. Die mense noem hom oupa.

19. Is jy alweer voor die Koelie se winkel? Jy het my laas belowe jy sal nie by die Koelie koop as jy op 'n ander geholpe kan raak nie. (Interestingly, in the 1955 edition, the word 'Coolie' is replaced by 'Indian'.)

20. Julle ryk mense gee nie om waar julle koop en wat julle betaal nie, maar ons armense moet maar by die goedkoopste plek koop.

buy from Goodman, a white man in spite of being a Jew, Aunt Grieta says:

I went to old Goodman's shop, and do you know who I saw there behind the counter? Was it not Katryn, you know Roelf Visagie's Katryn, Roelf whom they call Red Roelf. But she was so dressed up and powdered that I nearly did not recognise her and she was so full of airs, the little snob. I wanted a few yards of lace, but I refuse to be intimidated by such a little upstart. Who is she or her parents that she imagines herself to be so much better than me?²¹ (Schumann 1933:55).

Another reason why they prefer buying from old Abdoel is because he gives credit to the poor (Schumann 1933:57).

When with her educated daughter, however, Aunt Grieta returns to a crude racism. When Abdoel addresses her with the familiar 'you' she replies:

What! You saying to me 'you'! I am Miesies Diedericks. Imagine such a Coolie. Where does he get his 'you' from?²² (Schumann 1933:67)

The author's own prejudice towards Indians (and their goods) is manifest in the many scenes in which the quality of the products comes into question: the hat and night-gown are described as ghastly to everybody except Aunt Grieta. The stigmatisation of Abdoel's goods is part of the campaign for the proper.

In *Hantie Kom Huis-Toe* (Schumann 1933) Africans are only marginally present. One senses in this presence an immense fear, as if the poor whites saw in the dehumanisation of the Africans their own possible fate. The women react with intense irrational fear to the African loitering around the veranda and asking for Hans (the real father). The African's presence forecasts the looming trouble: he is the bait which leads to the arrest of Krisjan and Hans for selling liquor illegally to Africans.

The play which most consistently and most interestingly explores the obsession with colour prejudice is JCB van Niekerk's (1930) *Van Riet, van Rietfontein*. Van Riet, the owner of the farm Rietfontein, upholds crude racist ideas: he is upset about the prominence given to the native question in the newspapers and the fact that there are always new laws to define the relationship between master and servant. This means that he cannot 'discipline' (assault) his labourers any longer without being challenged in court. He is especially upset because the educated always interfere with existing relationships. To him this interference is unnecessary. The 'native question' is a 'question of experience and common sense'²³ (Van Niekerk 1930:21).

In contrast, Prins, a university professor, pleads for the 'upliftment' (Van Niekerk 1930:29) of Africans. To him,

21. Ek was laaste daar in ou Goodman se winkel, en weet jy wie sal ek daar sien staan agter die toonbank? Of dit tog nie Katryn is nie, jy weet, Roelf Visagie se Katryn wat hulle sê rooi Roelf. Maar sy is so aangetrek en so gepoeier, ek sou haar nooit geken het nie, en sy stel haar so aan, die klein wipstert. Ek wou nog 'n paar jaart kant daar gekoop het, maar ek sal my nie van so 'n klein jukstrooi laat vermaak nie.

22. Wat, jy moet vir my sê 'jy'! Ek is miesies Diedericks. Verbeel jou so 'n Koelie! Waar haal jy jou 'jy' vandaan?

23. Dis 'n saak van ondervinding en gesonde verstand.

The Kaffir is no longer a barbarian. He is beginning to think. He refuses to be the property of the white man in the servile sense of the word²⁴ (Van Niekerk 1930:29).

Later on he states:

there is a possession nobody can deny their fellow human beings: freedom. Freedom of movement, freedom of thought, freedom to search for the own salvation²⁵ (Van Niekerk 1930:29).

and,

The time will come when the native will play a part in the government of the country. It is for us to decide whether we want to co-operate with them as friends or resist them as enemies²⁶ (Van Niekerk 1930:31).

These arguments set the context in which Van Riet's son, Pieter, announces his love for Malie Hartman, a world-renowned violinist, but 'unfortunately' coloured. In his love for Malie, he expresses 'powers that are stronger than prejudice and hate'²⁷ (Van Niekerk 1930:33) and which have to struggle against the autocratic father's 'willpower and ... race pride' (Van Niekerk 1930:33). Despite her colour Malie as violinist is representative of what is most noble in 'white civilisation'.

The whole play is then an exposure of the father's unreasonableness. Malie makes it clear: 'Your father condemned me for my descendance, before he knew me'²⁸ (Van Niekerk 1930:52). His racism is further extremely self-destructive. All his farm labourers desert him and he goes bankrupt. Klara, the faithful African domestic servant, sacrifices her life's savings in an attempt to postpone the due date for bond repayment on his farm.

When his son arrives to help in these circumstances, he still refuses to accept Malie as possible daughter-in-law. Although he has sympathy for her, he is possibly echoing the sentiments of the author when he says to her:

You, innocent, today suffer for a crime that you did not commit No person can do more than sacrifice their own life for others. This you do today There is no other way out²⁹ (Van Niekerk 1930:99).

Although the play shows Van Riet's racism as irrational, unreasonable and self-destructive, it is still victorious in the end. This play—which is one of the most persistent in its rejection of the rationality of racism—still condones

24. Die Kaffer is vandag nie meer 'n barbaar nie. Hy begint te dink. Hy weier om die eiendom van die witman te wees in die slaafse sin van die woord.

25. A! Maar daar is 'n besitting wat niemand sy medemens kan ontsê nie—vryheid. Vryheid van beweging, vryheid van gedagte, vryheid van sy eie heil te soek.

26. Die tyd sal kom dat die naturel 'n rol in die bestuur van die land sal speel. Dis vir ons om te besluit of ons met hom wil saamwerk as 'n vriend of hom wil teëwerk as 'n vyand.

27. ... kragte wat sterker is as vooroordeel of haat.

28. Jou vader het my om my afkoms veroordeel, voordat hy my gesien en geken het.

29. Jy, onskuldige, boet vandag vir 'n misdaad wat jy nie gepleeg het nie Geen mens kan meer doen dan om sy eie lewe op te offer vir sy naaste nie. Dit doen jy vandag Daar is geen ander uitweg nie.

racism in so far as it presupposes a transcendental rationality. Racism is then right, exactly because it is irrational and absurd. This links *Van Riet, van Rietfontein* (Van Niekerk 1930) with Van Wyk Louw and Diederichs' romanticisation of the 'unthinking deed' as the ideological foundation of Afrikaner nationalism (and racism?).

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