

Some Afrikaans Novels of 1993

Die Stoetmeester

deur Etienne van Heerden
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1993, 325 pp.
ISBN 0 624 03228 0.

Foxtrot van die Vleiseters

deur Eben Venter
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1993, 264 pp.
ISBN 0 624 03205 1.

Die Reuk van Appels

deur Mark Behr
Strand: Queillerie, 1993, 208 pp.
ISBN 1 874901 06 6.

o.a. Daantjie Dromer

deur Jeanne Goosen
Strand: Queillerie, 1993, 133 pp.
ISBN 1 87490110 4.

Karolina Ferreira

deur Lettie Viljoen
Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 1993, 191 pp.
ISBN 0 79813191 8.

Die Duiwel se Tuin

deur Francois Bloemhof
Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1993, 212 pp.
ISBN 0 624 02531 4.

Juffrou Sophia Vlugg Vorentoe

deur Berta Smit
Strand: Queillerie, 1993, 253 pp.
ISBN 187490111 2.

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The early 1990s saw an inflated production of Afrikaans prose. Various factors contributed to this: the perceived threat to Afrikaans as language, the relaxation of censorship, the support of the independent press such as *Die Vrye Weekblad* and the yuppie monthly *De Kar*, the impact that the publishing house Taurus had on bringing younger authors to the fore, the general willingness of publishers to publish and the substantial literary prizes to be won. But most important, possibly, was the unfolding rich political narrative of the country itself which formed the violent backdrop to the moment when South Africans of all hues embraced to give substance to the new national identity. Most of the texts of 1993 reflect on this political transition from the yuppie perspective. In a nutshell: Afrikaans prose entered its post-historical phase. It has triumphed over its major enemy: censorship. The political conflict has been resolved for those entrenched in their urban and middle-

class lifestyles. The post-historical moment is embodied in the rich mannerist style of the Afrikaans novel as represented by especially Etienne van Heerden (*Die Stoetmeester*) and Eben Venter (*Foxtrot van die Vleisetters*). This style is characterised by its episodic construction and its multiple characters and situations (juxtaposing farm and city).

Die Stoetmeester is a high point in Van Heerden's oeuvre. Despite the forced diction, Van Heerden manages to combine the surreal with psychological depth. A narrator, speaking from death, is one of the most attractive features of the text. The text is also original, for Afrikaans, in dealing with the settler families of the Eastern Cape.

Eben Venter published his first volume of prose, *Withlitz*, in 1986. As a very nuanced and subtle evocation of racial politics in the eighties, *Withlitz* is one of the most underrated collections of short stories in Afrikaans. In contrast, the virtuosity of the more ambitious *Foxtrot van die Vleisetters*, is also its shortcoming. Political torture and *cordon bleu* cooking constitute a postmodern architecture in this text. The Breughlesque and apocalyptic country fair of chapter 11, nevertheless, is one of the masterpieces in Afrikaans literature.

Some of the texts of 1993 do not fall into the trap of excessive decoration and stylistic pomp. The most interesting of these texts is Mark Behr's *Die Reuk van Appels*, published by the recently established Queillerie. Unfortunately, the kitsch cover repels the reader. This text stands out because of its unadorned language (the narrator being the eleven-year-old Marnus) yet complex structure. It is one of the most human and disturbing Afrikaans stories about apartheid. The credulous Marnus idealises his father, a general in the South African army, who passes on to his son all the apartheid values, prejudices, and commonplaces. Through a series of events Marnus's world falls apart when he discovers his father sodomising his class mate and best friend, Frikkie, and his mother making love to a visiting South American general. These discoveries are not explicitly stated. The reader's view is as limited as the small hole in the floor through which Marnus peeps. The story of Marnus, the child, is juxtaposed with the story of an older and more cynical Marnus who is trapped in the Angolan war. This juxtaposition seems to express the consequences of the lie of the father, but also that life continues despite the tragedies of childhood. Marnus further struggles to understand why there are black South Africans fighting on the side of the SADF. This continues the theme of the discrepancy between the apparent and the real. Black South Africans are expected to be the enemy while in reality they just struggle to make ends meet.

In a lighter vein is Jeanne Goosen's *o.a. Daantjie Dromer*. The narrator is the adolescent Bubbles Swanepoel, who belongs to an unconventional working class family of Tiervlei. The text, through its unconventional characters, moves away from the stereotype of the Afrikaans working class as sub-intelligent fascists. The carnivalesque tone of the text, although funny, cannot really give expression to the dilemma of the contemporary Afrikaans working class. In this regard RR Ryger's violent

text, *Beertjie en sy Boytjies* (from 1992) is more convincing.

Lettie Viljoen won the M-Net prize for her *Karolina Ferreira*. It is unusual in the way it links up with the experimental and intellectual prose tradition represented by Etienne Leroux and John Miles. The novel centres on the pool room of a hotel in the Free State town, Voorspoed, and its archetypal and dreamlike visitors. The attorney, Pol, the farmer, Tonnie de Melck and the policeman, Kieliemann, all link up on a deep psychological level with the entomologist and main character, Karolina Ferreira. The primal forces, the sexuality and violence embedded in the small town intrigues, seem to liberate Karolina from her urban background with its civilising repression. As in a dream, the reasons for things happening are not important. Instead the focus is on the revitalising effect that they have on Karolina. The destruction of the hotel itself becomes part of the therapeutic effect of the dream. This destruction leads to a further week-long dreaming by the main character.

Satanism and the occult, the abduction and sacrifice of children are explored in Francois Bloemhof's allegorical suspense story *Die Duiwel se Tuin*. Although situated in the suburban Durbanville, the story happens in a political vacuum. Not one reference is made to either Africans or the South African political situation.

In the early sixties, Berta Smit wrote one of the most expressive surrealist allegories in Afrikaans: *Die Vrou en die Bees*. In *Juffrou Sophia Vlug Vorentoe* various elements of this earlier text recur: but the earlier text's theme of the absurdity of faith becomes explicit moralising in *Juffrou Sophia Vlug Vorentoe*. It deals with potentially very interesting material: the aged Juffrou Sophia, being discharged from hospital, is confined to the four walls of her flat. Her only links with the world outside are her television and the domestic servant, Mavis. She tries to reach out to Mavis, who becomes central to her existence. The novel falls flat, however, when Smit introduces the allegorical and experimental elements that marked her earlier style. Juffrou Sophia's story-writing attempts, interwoven with the main storyline as meta-narrative, is not really functional and inhibits the full exploration of the theme of helplessness and old age.

Bushman and Afrikaner: Cultural Interaction¹

Koms van die Hyreën

deur Dolf Van Niekerk

Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1994, 70 pp.

ISBN 0 624 03293 0.

Die Spoorsnyer

deur Piet van Rooyen

Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1994, 117 pp.

ISBN 0 624 03289 2.

1. This review article is a reworked and translated version of a review that first appeared in the Afrikaans Durban weekly, *Tempo* (3 March 1995:2) as 'Boesman en Afrikaner: Interkulturele Wisselwerking'.