

SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE
AND
JOHANNESBURG'S BLACK URBAN TOWNSHIPS

Deborah Mary Hart

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This dissertation is entirely my own work and has not been submitted previously as a dissertation for any degree in any other university.

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ABSTRACT

This study of South African literature and Johannesburg's black urban townships is undertaken in the broader context of humanistic geography. The emergence of literature as a recognised tool of geographical enquiry for the study of place is traced, and several types of literary geography are categorised and reviewed. Among these are Anglo-American cases in which applications and criticism rely on conventional techniques that treat prose and poetry in isolation from the conditions of their production. Such analysis is inappropriate to South African creative writing which may not be considered without comprehending its wider sociological contexts. In an account of the historical development of primarily black urban-focused South African literature, three major eras are identified, namely, liberal, protest and black consciousness. Each period was matched by a distinctive ideology, content and writing form. These trends, together with their influence on the ways in which place is created, and the extent to which it is treated in literature, form a key element in the dissertation. In presenting literary portrayals of Johannesburg's inner city slumyards, her Sophiatown, Alexandra and Soweto, prose and poetry is used to draw attention to their physical fabric, the lifestyles and activities they supported and more importantly, the senses of place or placelessness which they gave to their occupants. The latter experiential dimension of the townships contrasts most vividly with their 'objective' documentation. Following individual examination of literature on each township, recurring themes and topics are discussed by way of conclusion.

PREFACE

The world of the common people has recently begun to attract the scholarly gaze of South African researchers. One may trace a turning point in the history of South African geographical studies to the momentous black township troubles of June 16, 1976 which highlighted the bias of the former decade's research. From the 1980s, a fascination with the previously unexplored local black townships has blossomed.

I was fortunate to begin my studies at the University of the Witwatersrand after the events of 1976 had been digested, and was soon exposed to the fresh awareness among geographers of urban areas which had literally been out of sight and mind. Personal concern with this new found *terra incognita* for human geographers coupled with my interest in South African literature germinated the following study in literary geography. My enthusiasm was kindled two years ago when, virtually ignorant of Black South African literature, I approached Professor Mphahlele, doyen of African literature, and requested a preliminary reading list on urban-related novels by black authors. Within hours he had opened a new and challenging world to me and for this I shall be eternally grateful. The interest was crystallised in its geographical context by the earlier probings into the prospects of literary geography in South Africa by my supervisor, Gordon Pirie.

The task of formulating, executing and writing the research reported here has been made that much easier by a number of acquaintances and organisations. I am indebted to Gordon Pirie who not only sparked and nourished my initial interest in the subject, but also admirably advised

and guided me throughout the research period. His continual encouragement was instrumental in bringing the work to completion. The members of the Geography Department have in many ways, whether social or academic, added to the pleasure of post-graduate research at the University of the Witwatersrand. I mention particularly Professor Keith Beavon, Chris Rogerson and Bernie Moon for their valuable advice during turbulent moments. Mike Proctor must take credit for the final printed form of the dissertation. Without his unfailing assistance, the battle with the word processor would long since have been lost. Grateful thanks go to my mother who kindly typed the initial draft of the dissertation, and to Chris Rogerson who assisted in proofreading the final copy. A special note of appreciation is owed to Professor Tim Couzens and Professor Charles van Onselen for their valuable comments on my research proposal. Some of the findings of the dissertation were presented at the Association of American Geographers Conference held in Washington D.C. in April 1984. Without generous funding obtained from the Senior Bursary Committee, the opportunity for me to attend this meeting would not have been afforded. Finally, to the University of the Witwatersrand and the Human Sciences Research Council whose financial assistance was imperative during this study, I extend my sincerest thanks.

In the course of preparing this dissertation for presentation, awkward stylistic problems, particularly concerning referencing, had to be confronted. Where possible, I have adhered to the Harvard style, with exception in the treatment of poetry. Within the text poems are referred to by their author, followed by title, date of collection or journal, and page number. In cases where poems are part of a collection, their individual titles do not re-appear in the reference list. Those poems appearing in journals are referenced again by title at the end of the

dissertation. Another deviation from the conventional referencing technique concerns the use of various editions of literary texts. In many instances early editions of novels or autobiographies were either out of print or unavailable. Whereas the dates cited in the text are those of the original publication of the works, the page numbers relate to more recent and available editions, the publication dates of which are illustrated in bracketed form in the final reference list. The small print journals of limited circulation have also hampered smooth referencing procedures. *The Classic* journal, for example, has repeatedly faded and been reborn complete with somewhat confusing volume numbers, pagination and even titles. Additionally, in the documentation of the history of South African literature, certain book titles were mentioned only to illustrate the progression of the literature, its dominant nature and themes through time. Unless these works are cited or used in the literary geography analysis of South African black townships, they are not included in the references.

A final word is due regarding the unusual syntax of certain cited literature, especially that composed by black authors and poets. In the text consideration is given to departures from style familiar to those schooled in the 'King's English'. Suffice to remark here that citations have been checked assiduously against the original.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The idea of geography as an art (Meinig, 1963), as a subject with a 'soul' (Wreford Watson, 1983) is presently being asserted with new conviction and determination. Concerned to revive their discipline after the shellshock of a theoretical and quantitative revolution, a number of influential human geographers have openly rejected the rigid, if mathematically elegant, scientific procedures adopted in the quest to earn geography a place among the prestigious natural sciences. Several geographers turned from a fanaticism with hypothesis-testing, theory- and law-formulation, paradigm-trading and model-design (Smith, 1979) to ensconce geography in the arts. Among the growing number of practitioners, the objectivity and rigour of positivist research is being replaced by unconcealed subjectivity; by reflective and unashamedly emotional writing.

Albeit new to some, the search for "real geography, with fire in it" (Wreford Watson, 1983, p. 391) is not a phenomenon only of the past fifteen years. Not all human geographers embraced the scientific methodology of the 1950s. The past decade has nevertheless shown a significant reappraisal of positivist approaches. Objectivity and empiricism have been deemed not only unnecessary on occasion, but also as obstacles to the study of people and their environments (King, 1976; Tuan, 1976; Relph, 1977; Smith, 1979). The call is strengthening for application of non-positivist modes of explanation in the name of a

humanistic geography more suited to analysis of the tapestry of society, its strains and contradictions.

There are a variety of humanistic approaches within the social sciences which assert the primary importance of people, their beliefs, preferences and experience of social and built environments. They have as common goal examination of the subjectivity of both observer and observed (Johnston, 1983). Of these perspectives, three have been identified as particularly relevant to human geography. They are idealism (Guelke, 1974; 1976; 1977; 1981; 1982), phenomenology (Ralph, 1970; 1977; 1981; Tuan, 1971; 1976; 1979a; 1979b; Buttimer, 1976) and existentialism (Samuels, 1978; 1981).

To idealists, phenomenologists and existentialists, geographical knowledge exists only in a person's experience of the world, and can be appreciated solely by sensitive analysis of that experience. On this definition, a humanistic geography is essentially one which studies diversity, subtlety, ambiguity and meaning in a world shaped by sentient beings. Some humanistic geographers advocate the adoption of an idealist, phenomenological or existentialist approach to selected subject matter. Possibly more common, however, is the argument for a general subjectivist orientation without reference to a specific philosophy (Johnston, 1983). In the latter case humanists search for a more comprehensive understanding of lived experience through such avenues as the oral interview and creative literature.

One consequence of the eclectic approaches identified above is the absence of an explicit humanistic tradition in geography. Proponents urge development of a new focus which relates the concepts of humanism to the distinctive perspectives of geography "so that the product really is

'humanistic geography'" and not simply some vaguely humanistic approaches forced onto the *status quo* (Ralph, 1981, p. 135). Besides noting lack of a firm tradition in humanistic geography, critics have condemned its emphasis on the unique at the expense of generalisation and verification, its lack of clarity and its social and environmental irrelevance (Pocock, 1983).

From the above it is plain that there is emerging a hesitant, fragmented and peripheral field of geographic enquiry struggling for academic respectability and definitional clarity. The most sound and unifying strength of contemporary humanistic geography lies in the passionate conviction that "... the soul of geography is the geography of the soul" and that "dreams and ambitions, feelings and beliefs ..." are the measure which shape the map of geographies of the world (Worford Watson, 1983, p. 391).

Whatever the methodology or philosophy adopted, one of the major concerns of any humanistic geography is the subtlety and meaning of environmental experience. Structured interviews, oral histories and creative literatures provide some personal accounts of this experience. Once interpreted, they may offer insight into the symbolism and connotations of place. In particular, such humanistic geography has been responsible for the dawning of a sub-discipline known as literary geography which provides the framework for the research presented here.

The subject of the dissertation is set against the background just sketched of partial explorations and is also offered by positivist research and of a gathering interest in humanistic geography. The dissertation is also a response to gaps in knowledge concerning physical

conditions, daily activities and personal experiences in what are often referred to as black townships in urban South Africa.

Related interest in the black urban residential landscape of South Africa has spawned an increasing volume of research in the name of de-mystified, de-whitened and de-colonised local urban geography (see for example, Beavon and Rogerson, 1981; Crush, Reitsma and Rogerson, 1982). Such research has been conducted within a positivist framework using as sources of information, censuses, *ad hoc* surveys, commission reports and news documents. The information derived from these sources is useful, but partial, failing as it does to convey cognitive elements of the townships. Information is sorted into conventional categories and nothing is known about the personal experience of living in townships, attitudes to townships and human relations in townships.

The principal object of the research reported here is to investigate the treatment of black urbanism in some English language literature, and within that compass, to discern what literature divulges about the meaning of black urban places. Subsidiary to this, it is hoped to determine the value of South African literature as a non-positivist information source about townships and to examine inductively the problems and prospects of literary geography as they become apparent from several local cases. To these ends, the study commences with a review of the literary geographic field (chapter two). Emphasis is upon the notion of place and the role it plays in humanistic interpretation of literature. Chapter three presents a detailed account of the social, political, cultural, historical and economic conditions surrounding South African literature. The importance of this contextual information in understanding township literature is spelled out. Special attention is accorded the theme of urbanism in South

African writing with most consideration being given the authors and poets whose work is drawn upon in a substantive manner in the succeeding chapter.

Research into the treatment of townships in South African literature involved reading and placing into historical, sociological and ideological context several urban-oriented works. The writings of a wide range of local writers representing a variety of race and class backgrounds were drawn upon. Literary sources tapped included the novel, autobiography, and poems published in popular magazines, journals, published texts, edited collections and anthologies. The writings are concentrated between the late-1920s and present day.

In the process of reading township-oriented literature, it became apparent that the writing focuses selectively upon only a handful of black townships. There are, indeed, many townships about which nothing has been written in a literary vein. Other places receive little more than mention in scattered writings. From the earliest days of black urban-related writing, emphasis has been upon Johannesburg's townships including the racially mixed inner city suburbs of Doornfontein and Vrededorp, the freehold townships of Sophiatown and Alexandra and the more rigidly controlled, sprawling township of Soweto. By virtue of the large volume of literature they have generated, it seemed sensible to confine the dissertation to an in-depth analysis of just these areas. This is not to nullify the importance of writings about other South African townships such as Marabastad, one of Pretoria's erstwhile locations and District Six, once famous and infamous suburb of Cape Town inhabited largely by 'coloured' people.

Johannesburg's townships and their literary interpretation are examined individually and historically in the fourth chapter. Although no straitjacketed procedure of analysis is followed, an attempt is made in each case to uncover descriptive information revealing the physical attributes of townships, the lifestyles they support and the experience of them. As indicated, discovering the sense, symbolism and meaning of place engendered by townships is a central task of this project. In the final section of the fourth chapter recurrent themes in township writing are identified and discussed. Issues concerning the relationship between township literature and its social and political background, era, ideology, mode of expression, censorship, intended audience and individual experience are brought to the fore. Matters relating to the subjectivity of literature, fact versus fiction, the representativeness of individual experience as expressed in literature, and the matter of inconsistencies and contradictions are aired. In conclusion, the merits and de-merits of literary geography are assessed.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STUDY OF PLACE AND LITERARY GEOGRAPHY

The Study of Place

"Of all things that are ... the greatest is place, for it holds all things" (Thales, cited by Laertius, 1853 translation, *The Lives and Opinions of Famous Philosophers*, 1, p. 35)

Humanistic geographers have asserted that their discipline should be directed towards understanding environmental perception and experience with specific reference to the study of places (Tuan, 1975; 1976). In this respect the perspective has been successful in recovering person-orientated notions of place from the abstract geometries of the once popular locational analysis: "mere space" is translated into an "intensely human space" (Tuan, 1976, p. 269). Proponents of humanistic geography acknowledge the interest in place as a well-established tradition in human geography. They point nevertheless to the meagre understanding geographers have of the concept (Tuan, 1974; 1976; Relph, 1976; Buttimer, 1980; Godkin, 1980; Seamon, 1980). Concern amongst humanistic geographers is with the *sense of place*; with an individual's subjective, personalised sensitivity to particular environments. Appreciation is shown the *meaning* which specific places hold for both residents and outsiders. This 'quality' of place (Walter, 1980) is shaped by sensory perceptions, moral judgements, passions, feelings, ideas: "A place is seen, heard, smelled, imagined, loved, hated, feared, revered, enjoyed ..." (Walter, 1980, p. 173). Awareness of place is neither absolute nor universally shared:

Every place has a special character for its residents, its visitors, and those who 'know' it only as second hand. Each place has a personality of its own, buried perhaps beneath prejudice and emotion, derived not just from buildings, but also from contours, street patterns, dreams, colour, smells, noises ... Individual cities create varying senses of place. The same environment is not necessarily experienced in the same way by different individuals ... or by different groups (Eliot Hurst, 1975, p. 41).

This individuality of place is evident in the humanistic perspective which proclaims that place is *human* experience. Places are made and identified by people: interpersonal relationships play a central role in their making and meaning. As such people are place and place is people (Pocock, 1979, p. 342); "when we talk about places, we are talking about life" (Briggs, 1968, p. 96).

Literary Geography

Humanist inspired literary geography offers one avenue of enquiry into the study of place (Crist, 1962; Lloyd, 1976; Seamon, 1976; Jeans, 1979; Pocock, 1979; 1981b; 1981c; Tuan, 1978; 1983; Hudson, 1981; Olwig, 1981; Meinig, 1983; Wreford Watson, 1983). It is largely a response to the supposedly objective, often abstruse scientific procedures employed in positivist research. Literary geography may use the subjectivity of novelist, poet, autobiographer and dramatist either to complement and extend or to challenge and correct the empiricism of the quantitatively oriented observer.

The stress placed by positivist geography on abstraction over the past two decades reduced the world to "an empty shell where people (were) strangely absent" (Jones, 1962, p. 9). Over the years several scholars pleaded for humanising geography; making human geography more *human*. A favourite citation is Hägerstrand's (1970, p. 7) "what about people in

regional science?". Speaking specifically of the values of literary geography Wreford Watson (1983, p. 391) remarks: "the poets put the people back in".

Reacting to such stimuli, the engagement of geographers with literature has not been uniform. At the most innocuous level, literary citations are selected on the basis of their ability to describe and inform in a particularly evocative, entertaining and/or anecdotal fashion. Such literary geography colours and revitalises "the drab and lifeless body of regional geography" (Neinig, 1983, p. 316), and may throw light on and make problematic the more mundane aspects of life which are taken for granted. As Seamon (1976, p. 290) observes:

By uncovering and understanding environmental experience as other, more sensitive individuals have known it, we, as more typical people, may become more aware of patterns in our own experience that we had not known before. In this way we ourselves become more sensitive to our own geographical situation.

For these reasons several geographers have advocated the use of creative literature texts in teaching cultural geography (e.g. 4; Hoy and Elbow, 1976; Silverman, 1977; Lamme, 1977; Wyskoff, 1979; Salter, 1981).

At a more complex level, exploration of creative literature is conducted with the intention of unravelling the delicate nuances of place meaning; untangling the subjective, personalised construction and connotations of location. At its most valuable the latter treatment of literature involves research into the sociology of the text. Under these circumstances literary geography has contributed not only to the study of place, but to particularly sensitive, perceptive studies of the human condition and life experience.

The considerable volume of creative literature devoted to the portrayal of place offers a vast, often untapped source for the ardent literary geographer. In the face of an abundance of creative writing which penetrates the subjective dimensions of environmental experience, the hesitation among human geographers to pursue literary enquiry may seem surprising. One reason for the limited support accorded the sub-discipline is the geographer's lack of literary training and thus lack of confidence in his or her ability to analyse creative composition for its geographical value (Lanegran and Toth, 1976).

Some geographers, whilst acknowledging that the vision of the literary geographer is unlikely to be hampered by the disciplinary blinkers of scientific method, reject without question the bias of highly personal, emotion-laden writing. To this one may counter that the 'failing' or 'weakness' is actually invaluable to geography. Following Wreford Watson (1983, p. 391), it is possible to insist that "... a poet caught up in passion can point to issues essential for geography. Geography can't afford to miss out on passion - far less dismiss it. Geography without passion is about as alive as a body without blood". Other geographers have either merely presumed that literature serves no useful purpose in geographical understanding or have regarded the exercise as window dressing, as naive, uninformed raiding, ignoring the complex totality of the literary work from which the prose is extracted and isolated (Thrift 1978). Gregory (1981, p. 2) harshly condemns

The casual ransacking of fictional writing as a ready means of uncovering the most obvious images of intentionality prised from the material structures which help give them their effectivity, and divorced from any serious recognition of ... the sociology of the text ... the exasperating interrogation of the mundane and transparently trivial devoid of any attempt to locate the social actions in wider sequences of social reproduction and transformation.

although these points reveal the disadvantages of a-contextual literary analysis (possibly the prime failing of literary geography), they themselves are not beyond criticism. Words do have an appeal in their own right, intentionality is not always that obvious, the mundane and trivial often escapes notice. Taking care not to understate or deny the intrinsic appeal of literary descriptions, the superiority of a literary geography more committed to contextual interpretation cannot be overlooked (Morrison, 1981; Silk, 1984). As Thrift (1983, p. 12) clarifies:

The literary meaning of the experience of place and the literary expression of that meaning of place are both part of a cultural creation and destruction. They do not reside in the text. They are not contained in the production and distribution of the work. They do not begin or end with the pattern and the nature of the readership. They are a function of these things and more. They are all moments in a historically cumulative spiral of signification.

In this context literature is clearly 'the mirror of life' (Apte, 1970), an attempt by people to understand and tell the truth about human experience (Hall, 1979). It reflects social change, and the salient features of social processes and structures of interest to human geographers. The challenge for literary geography must be to probe, contextualise and explain as well as to entertain through rollicking, seamy, leisurely, desperate, gentle portrayal of place.

Although consistent in their overall concern with place, studies in literary geography vary considerably in terms of the depth of literary analysis, the number of works and authors/poets considered, the type of literary material selected, the themes chosen for discussion and the extent and categorisation/scale of place examined (for example, region, nation, city or rural district). For the purposes of this presentation, the field is reviewed in three sections. Following an account of the origins and early development of literary geography, the second section

observes contemporary works which demonstrate the use of creative literature in an attempt to reconstruct regions and/or capture the spirit and personality of locales. In the second category, studies which testify to the use of literature in furnishing insight into the meaning and sense of place are presented. Also within this category are pieces which, rather than concentrating on place, use literature as primary evidence in geographical interpretation of particular social phenomena, themes and problems. A final section pays specific attention to studies in literary geography which examine exclusively urban-related themes.

Initial Departures

The first collection of writings concentrating on material of geographical interest, albeit by a non-geographer, is found in Sharp's *Literary Geography* published in 1907. Essays focus primarily on the descriptions of nature and rural landscapes in the works of such novelists as Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Hardy. The earliest acknowledgement by a geographer of the existence in literature of material of geographic interest can be traced to Wright's (1924a; 1924b; 1928) articles published in the *Geographical Review*. Interpreting the works of Dante and Homer, Wright draws attention to the reflection in early literature of then current ideas and theories concerning such geographical features as the shape and constituents of the earth, and latitude and longitude of land masses. He points, further, to the highly developed "geographical instinct" of "men of letters"; a "fascinating" reality to which students of geography (unlike those of history) had devoted scant research. Researchers warmed slowly to Wright's work. It was only in 1948 that Darby's pioneering 'Geography of Thomas Hardy's Wessex' was published. Wright's long before the formalisation of phenomenological and humanist

movements in human geography, Darby's paper attempted reconstruction of the landscape in Thomas Hardy's novels. Darby confined his study to the Dorset area and discussed each of five regions in terms of their physical surroundings, settlement and economy.

Literary geography attracted no further adherents in the following decade and only a handful in the technocratic era which was the 1960s. Abstinence was undoubtedly a consequence of many human geographers having dismissed descriptive regional geography in the rush to join the ranks jostling for scientific respectability.

Regional Reconstruction

From the mid-1960s and significantly post-1972 (when a number of geographers attending the annual conference of the International Geographical Union agreed to explore the regional novel in teaching regional geography), a flood of attention by geographers attempting to demonstrate the use of creative literature in depicting landscape took up where Darby had left off. Vividly descriptive and apparently factual information was extracted from the regional novel and applied in the reconstruction of district histories. In some instances explicit attention was paid to the manner in which regions were perceived by the creative writers concerned. Such perception was usually explained following fairly detailed research into biographical and autobiographical accounts of the authors whose writing was under scrutiny. More often than not the new literary-regional geography concerned itself primarily with restating the 'personality' of place captured by the literary artist. Central to these and indeed most subsequent studies in literary geography was the conviction that creative literature revealed the spirit of place

in a manner which had previously eluded the geographer. As Gilbert (1960, p. 167) asserts "Reality is faithfully shown: it is not lost in the dim twilight of modern geographical jargon. The novelists paint a picture of real earth".

Examples of studies in the tradition commence with Paterson's (1965) interpretation of Scotland presented in the writings of Sir Walter Scott. The detailed regional nuances pervading Scott's poetry and novels are carefully examined. Similar studies include discussions of regional themes in the writings of D.H. Lawrence (Spolton, 1970; Simpson-Housley and Paul, 1984), and examination of the personality of the South Staffordshire coalfield area as conveyed in the regional novels of Francis Brett Young (Jay, 1975). The writings of Young are identified as a valuable complementary source to empirical research in the 'Black Country'. In a slightly different vein, one geographer elucidates the extent to which a consistent image of the Northern England region is projected in the works of a variety of British regional writers (Pocock, 1979). Individual examination of those features most indicative and symbolic of the North (smoke, land disfigurement, encroachment of industrial ugliness into the English countryside) provides a basis for creating a representative image of the region. Equally committed in the preoccupation with regional construction is work which attempts to justify the allegedly fictitious Yoknapatawpha County depicted in the work of William Faulkner as a representation and replica of real-life Lafayette County, Pennsylvania (Aiken, 1977; 1979). Unlike most literary geographers, the prime motivation here is not to measure Faulkner's work as a document for geography. Instead, interest is shown in how he worked with ideas and shaped his material so as to convey a set of understandings at various levels of sophistication. Accordingly, the literary

geographical work on Faulkner has been praised as an attempt to transcend utilitarian assessment of literature by passing into the realm of literary criticism (Meinig, 1983).

In contemporary research, a number of geographers have explored the possibilities offered by less conventional sources of fiction for regional and place information. Science fiction (Elbow and Martinson, 1980; Martinson, 1980), children's stories (Lloyd, 1974) and mystery novels (Mc Manis, 1978; Brooker-Gross, 1981) have come under the scrutiny of adventurous literary geographers. In most instances, such studies proceed little beyond evocative place reconstruction. At best they might stimulate thought about categories of place.

Literature and the Sense of Place

The distinction between presentations outlined above and studies concerned with literature and the sense of place is the degree to which regions/places are interpreted in terms of the connotations and meaning which they hold. Whereas many literary geographic studies were and are primarily concerned with illuminating the tangible characteristics of concrete places, the following pose as central problem the *experience* of place. Analysis goes beyond recapturing the image or personality of locales to uncover and allow insight into specific literary responses to environments. Examples of themes pursued and analysed include "conflicting emotions between intense attachment to place and an anguished awareness of alienation" (Radcliff-Umstead, 1981, p. 1) and "existential insideness and existential outsideness" (Seamon, 1981, p. 85). The titles of articles are a good indication of this more abstracted and thematic approach. Rather than 'The geography of Thomas Hardy's

Wesssex', 'The black country of Francis Brett Young', 'Scotland through the eyes of Sir Walter Scott' and 'The novelist and the north', publications allude plainly to such issues as 'roots and rootlessness' and 'yearning for home'.

The most substantial number of essays concerned with the sense of place are to be found in Pocock's (1981a) edited collection. Contributions include an interpretation of novelist George Crabbe's evocation of the Sandlings region, Suffolk (Prince, 1981). Crabbe's writing reveals a powerful attachment to place. Emotional experiences are often projected into landscape symbols, that is features and aspects of the landscape are reflections of the author's mood, state of mind or beliefs at a particular moment in time. The implications and significance of landscape symbolism are further examined in a study of Mary Webb's experience of Shropshire (Paterson and Paterson, 1981). Another essay dwells upon the treatment of specific notions of roots and rootlessness in the novels of George Eliot (Middleton, 1981). Allegiance to the home place and reluctance to settle elsewhere is explained in terms of these concepts.

Other presentations investigate the 'insider's' view of South Central Nebraska at the turn of the nineteenth century (Krone, 1979), the isolation and placelessness experienced in Rolvaag's North Dakota regional novel *Giants in the Earth* (Lanegran, 1972), the treatment of place in the literature by Western United States regional writers (Erisman, 1980), and Sarat Chandra's perception and sentimental attachment to his Bengali home region (Dhussa, 1976; Dutt, 1981). Of particular interest, by virtue of its reliance on local poetry rather than the novel, is an investigation of the 'insider's' response to Kansas (Stump, 1981).

Literary Geography of the City

It is convenient to set literary interpretations of urbanism apart from other literary geographical studies for two reasons. First, much work has been undertaken by researchers who are not geographers. Second, since the subject of this dissertation is the urban black township, the relevant literature might best be seen in the context of specifically urban-oriented analyses.

Among those scholars who have examined urbanism and urbanisation as themes in historical and contemporary literature, particular interest has been shown in portrayal of the city in the writings of widely acclaimed poets and novelists (see for example, Dunlop, 1934; Gelfant, 1954; Raleigh, 1968; Strange, 1968; Walker, 1969; Apte, 1970; Williams, 1970; 1973; Zelliot, 1970; Briggs, 1972; Gibian, 1978; Pike, 1982). The wealth of critical literature analysing Dickens' ambivalent, complex, detailed image of London - a place combining power, prestige, beauty, ugliness and all types of humanity - is striking in this respect (Welsh, 1971; Howe, 1973; Andrews, 1979; Schwartzbach, 1979).

Vivid literary presentation of the city is not only a phenomenon of First World literature. The theme of the city, its attraction, power and often negation of traditional values is also prominent in Third World African literature. The writings of Ekwensi (1954; 1961a; 1961b), Nwapa (1973), Achebe (1958; 1960; 1964), Nzekwu (1961; 1962) and Soyinka (1965) portray the city as a major force with which the characters continuously struggle. With a few exceptions (most notably perhaps the work of Noss (1974)) the treatment of the city in African literature has nevertheless escaped the attention of both literary critic and geographer.

Regarding research by literary geographers, it appears that in their interpretation of the city through literature, emphasis is upon the creative writer's ability to reveal the atmosphere, ambience and meaning of city life. Some have gone so far as to pronounce the specifically literary image of the city as the "best focused image ... sensitive to both structural design and the significance of detail, identity, meaning ... how it feels to live in it" (Ramanujan, 1970, p. 224). Although not writing under the banner of literary geography, one particular geographer (Eliot Hurst, 1975, p. 40) has illustrated and asserted the value of literature in revealing otherwise hidden city images. He suggests that the sense of place offered by otherwise inanimate "collections of wood, brick, steel, concrete and asphalt" is both facilitated by and experienced by city residents. This notion that people are a vital element of place, that they 'make' place, emerges strongly in the South African literature to be examined.

The literary contributions of city inhabitants who share their experience of city life by writing about it are invaluable to the geographer. Firstly, such writings bring out the more fully expressed, insensate and conventional descriptions of urbanism. Secondly, they enliven and add nuance to the city picture and/or capture attitudes towards these places. Literature may also offer primary evidence central to geographic insight. The latter application is well illustrated in Wreford Watson's (1979) *Social Geography of the United States* (although the work does not use literature as the primary source of information and cannot be classified as an exercise in literary geography *per se*).

Most literary geographic studies of the city have focused upon the American city. The work of Paterson (1976) and Lloyd (1976; 1981) in

particular, has attempted to probe respectively urban poetry and fiction in the interpretation of American urbanism. Paterson (1976) outlines in detail the constantly changing attitudes towards the rapidly developing American city as revealed in poetry of different times. Perceptions of the city which he identifies include the mid-nineteenth century view of the city as an alien force (an encroachment of the urban and man-made upon the beauty of the natural); the image of the city as a source of endless and varied stimulation; the city as representative of gargantuan feats of human engineering; the city as hero, destination, challenge, and finally, the city as conflict, separation and desolation associated with increased white migration to the suburbs and black ghetto occupation of the central city areas.

Lloyd (1976) discusses the way in which the characters portrayed in ten novels depicting life in late-nineteenth century Boston cognise their environment in terms of identifiable places, their spatial relations and their personal meaning. In a further study (Lloyd, 1981) he remarks upon the unique value of urban fiction in its ability to illuminate aspects of American middle class suburban life. Once again examining the literary works of several Boston residents, Lloyd emphasises the prominence of residential landscapes in their writings. Residential mobility was found to dominate the lives of major characters in these novels. Lloyd attributes this tendency to perception of the residential neighbourhood as a vital measure of individual and family worth. His analysis brings home the socially determined meaning attached to various residential components of the city.

Moving from British and North American city themes, one might mention that one geographer draws attention to the treatment of St. Petersburg in

nineteenth century Russian literature (Andrews, 1981). Dominant themes are those of place and image. Special attention is paid to the manner in which the physical reality of the city is transcended in the works of Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky and Bely. This experience of the Russian city is perceived to be mirrored in the literary devices of image and symbol. For example, the inhabitants of Bely's St. Petersburg are portrayed as phantoms, thereby symbolising their hypnosis by a sinister, illusive, ethereal, modern city in which "passers-by and actors, in the daily round are simply marked participants in the continuing masquerade of the urban carnival" (Andrews, 1981 p. 181). Further work dealing with non-American or British cities refers to reflections of urban life and the city in Indian literature (Dutt and Dhussa, 1976; Noble, 1976). In these studies focus is upon the image and meaning of some Indian cities and various manifestations of urbanisation in the indigenous literature.

Although the South African city, and for that matter, town, village and region, is referred to generously in local literature, this 'backdrop' has received scant attention by literary writers and geographers. Other than a handful of exercises in literary geography (Butler-Adam, 1981; Pirie, 1982; Steenkamp, 1983; Hart and Pirie, 1984; Titlestad, 1984), and the odd citation to embellish an article or adorn a chapter (of which the 'frontispiece' in D.M. Smith's *Living Under Apartheid* (1982) is a good example), a rich and unique body writing lies largely untapped. Especially vital and informative is a proliferating body of South African literature by blacks in which urbanism features as a prominent theme. This urbanism is primarily that of black residential areas or townships, districts which have recently been magnets of increasing attraction to social scientists.

Whereas this chapter has been concerned with the underpinnings and content of the literary geographical approach with particular reference to Britain and North America, the remainder of the dissertation shifts to the specifically South African instance. As mentioned in the review of literary geography, perhaps the most meaningful studies in the field are those which are sensitive to the significance of the social conditions surrounding literary creation. Accordingly, the following chapter provides a review of the *making of the texts* relied upon in the examination of black townships in South African literature.

CHAPTER THREE

SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE, 1820 - 1983

In the previous chapter, attention was drawn to the tendency among British and North American literary geographers to overlook the significance of conditions surrounding the creation, production and reception of literature. This omission is largely explained by the specific mode of literary analysis adopted in Western nations. There, adherence is to a Eurocentric practical-critique method which asserts the value of a literary piece in its own right. As such, the isolated poem or prose passage is treated without much consideration of its socio-political contexts.

Whilst the practical-critique method may or may not be adequate with respect to Western-based literary geographies, it is certainly inappropriate in the case of South African studies. South African literature is a product of widely differing ideologies, classes, races and cultures. It is also intrinsically tied to the country's peculiar apartheid doctrine which places the welfare of a suppressed black majority in the hands of an elite white minority. Segregation policy has vitally shaped and influenced the writing, publication and distribution of indigenous literary texts. The unique situation which arises is clarified by an established authoress and critic:

... there is no country in the Western world where the daily enactment of the law reflects politics as intimately and blatantly as in South Africa. There is no country in the Western world where the creative imagination, whatever it seizes upon, finds the focus of even the most private event set in the overall social determination of racial laws (Gordimer, 1975, p. 132).

Indeed, racialism is so pervasive an aspect of South African life that one author goes so far as to assert " ... a writer in that land is unimportant, irrelevant and probably alienated unless he is political. Art and politics in South Africa ... have become inseparable ..." (Mzamane, 1978, p. 42). In a literature in which even the most day-to-day activities are fused with overt political connotations, local critics have pleaded for analytical techniques which take cognizance of both the discrete text and its social, political and historical background. Contextual analysis is further necessitated by the often vastly differing ideologies propounded by Afrikaans and English writers on the one hand, and by white and black writers on the other.

South African literature has been portrayed metaphorically as a scrapyard where the only relationship between the pieces is their geographic origin (Pinchuk, 1963). Until recently Afrikaans and English language writers tackled vastly differing themes and problems. Early Afrikaans writers were notably less conscious of being in Africa than their English counterparts (Deliuss, 1952). As such, problems and tensions specific to South Africa were avoided in literature. Not only white literature, but also black writing has been deemed 'one eyed', concentrating on only one section of the racial spectrum (Monyana, 1976, p. 8). With no evidence of social mobility across the colour line, attempts in South Africa to present a totality of human experience are subverted before they reach the printed page:

The black writer in South Africa writes from 'inside' about the experience of the black masses, because the colour-bar keeps him steeped in its circumstances, confined in a black township and carrying a pass that regulates his movements from the day he is born to the status of a 'piccania' to the day he is buried in a segregated cemetery. The white writer, ascetically quarantined in his test-tube elite existence, is cut off by enforced privilege from the greater part of the society in which he lives: the life of the proletariat, the nineteen millions whose potential of experience he

does not share, from the day he is born 'bass' to the day he is buried in his segregated cemetery (Gordimer, 1973, p. 148).

The call has been sounded at various stages in South Africa's literary past for a unified literature (Plomer, 1957; Gordimer, 1975; Motsana, 1976; Mphahlele, 1980). Recent trends, particularly in black writing, nevertheless appear to negate all previous attempts at reconciliation. As such the need to contextualise these 'one eyed' writings is that much more important.

A further peculiarity of South African writing is the censorship it faces (Kumene, 1981; du Toit, 1983; van der Vyver, 1983). The pervasive political theme of most South African writing is largely responsible for enforcement of literary censorship within the country. For the black South African writer, in particular, the mere act of literary creation is fraught with state-imposed restrictions. South African legislation has pursued a path bent on circumscribing if not obliterating black writing in English. The three principal measures responsible for this role are the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the amendment to the Suppression of Communism Act of 1966, and the Publications Act of 1974. Established writers have repeatedly lambasted the crippling effects of the censored imagination (Gordimer, 1963a; 1968; Mphahlele, 1967; Manganyi, 1979; Sepamla, 1980; Nkomo, 1964; 1981; Brink, 1983). Casualties of censorship and the country's literary scene include exiled writers, banning, imprisonment, struggling publishers and an audience starved of a complete, indigenous literature.

Occurrences such as those listed above serve to support the contention that examination of the treatment of black urban townships in South Africa must be mindful of the various processes operating at particular stages in

the country's past. Black and white literature each manifest these changing forces in significant and differing ways. An extensive study of changes in the mode of expression (that is, the literary genre whether prose or poem), the literary outlets selected (for example, popular magazines or radical journals) and their relationship to these processes is also required.

The following is a narrative account of the development of South African literature. Since the township theme is one tackled overwhelmingly by black writers, emphasis is given to black creative literature. The formative years of white writing receive fairly detailed attention owing to their importance in establishing the liberal tradition culminating in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948). Throughout, the accent is upon those writers whose works are examined and cited in the final chapter.

Pre-1920: Liberal Writing

Although white settlement in South Africa began in the middle of the seventeenth century, the origins of local creative writing are traceable only to the early years of the eighteenth century (Vigne, 1961; Gérard, 1975; Gordimer, 1975). In most documentation of South African literary development, Thomas Pringle (1789-1834), leader of a party of British settlers, is identified as the first major contributor. His writings foreshadowed the contemporary South African liberal view "obliquely comforting to the white conscience, but none-the-less true, that any form of slavery degrades oppressor as well as oppressed" (Gordimer, 1975, p. 133). Interestingly, Pringle pursued the theme of inter-racial love, a

dominant subject in subsequent and contemporary South African literature, long before miscegnation laws deemed it statutory crime (Gordimer, 1975).

After Pringle's departure from the Cape in 1862, a long colonial silence fell. The literary vacuum was punctuated only partially by white missionary and settler. Books which were published during this period comprised quasi-scientific discussions in narrative form of local fauna and flora or adventure stories involving game hunting. Numbering fewer than twenty, these works are dismissed by one critic as crude, exclusively descriptive and sensational; their poor quality and sparseness attributed to settler preoccupation with safety at the expense of intellectual nourishment (Rive, 1977).

It is only with the appearance of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* in 1883 that the depths of imaginative writing are again reached. The novel which was set in the South African semi-desert of the Karoo was a response to the then existing socio-political condition of colonialism. It exposed the shallowness of frontier society. Schreiner's classic was succeeded by the works of "half-forgotten versifiers", "far-flung novelists" and "the usual diarists and analysts" (Vigna, 1961, p. 82) until well into the twentieth century.

The 1920s were a landmark in South African literary achievement in more ways than one. At a time of the first entrenchment of racial oppression in the country, the decade witnessed firstly the start of a fresh, robust, argumentative, more politically oriented literature best observed in the works of William Plomer, Roy Campbell, Laurens van der Post, Sarah Gertrude Millin and Pauline Smith. Although black urbanism had not yet featured as a theme in these writings, brief references and descriptio...

of 'locations' were to be found. In general, these novels and poems reflected a new literary consciousness dominated by reaction against racialism and colonialism. Secondly, the years between 1930 and 1932 saw the publication of two well-known works by early black writers, namely, Sol Plaatje's (1930) *Nthudi* and Rolfes Dhlomo's (1931) *An African Tragedy*.

To associate the birth of South African literature with the novels of Dhlomo and Plaatje is, however, misleading. As critics have shown (Vigne, 1961; Nkosi, 1967; Couzens, 1974; 1976; Parrott, 1976; Hofmeyer, 1980; Barnett, 1983), creative writing by blacks commenced as early as the mid-nineteenth century, and was indissolubly linked with missionary activity. The Paris Evangelical Mission press at Maseru (Lusitane) and the Church of Scotland mission station at Lovedale (Eastern Cape) became the centres of early black literature, initially in the vernacular and later in English. Missions encouraged both the preservation of folklore and the writing of novels with a religious and moral background. Accordingly, the earliest work to be published in English was John Bokwe's *Ntsikana, The Story of an African Courtier* (1914). Bokwe, and most black novelists and poets of his time were experienced journalists and editors (usually of newspapers). This tradition persisted among black writers until the 1960s and is partially responsible for Nkosi's (1965, p. 126) condemnation of most black writing as "journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature." Newspapers were the primary outlets for educated blacks influencing the style, form and content of their imaginative work. Preference was shown for the essay and short story, genres which have dominated subsequent literary endeavour by blacks. Likewise the preoccupation of black newspapers with public concern and social critique considerably influenced the work of early black creative writers (Couzens, 1974). Indeed, the relationship between journalism and

literature before 1950 (and especially during the *Drum* period of the 1950s and early 1960s) is an area in need of close attention and further research (Couzens, 1974).

1920-1950: From Liberal to Protest Writing

Between 1920 and 1940, the subject matter of much black writing was the massive scale and extent of black urbanisation associated with expansion of mining and later industrial development. Mining emerged as a major preoccupation in the work of Rolfes Dhlomo, Vilikazi and later Peter Abrahams. Conditions under which blacks lived, worked and suffered on the mines and in the swelling inner city slums and overcrowded locations were recorded alongside observations of crime, alcoholism, prostitution and police brutality (Parrott, 1976). Although this period witnessed the emergence of a working class culture known as 'marabi', it remained unpublished until the 1970s. The thriving culture fashioned around vigorous 'marabi' music and the illegal drinking dens, 'shebeens', offered the only form of recreation available to the poverty-stricken black working class. Failure to record the presence and appeal of working class culture during the 1920s is attributed to the class position of the prominent black writers during the period. They were petty-bourgeois in origin and an educated minority in a largely illiterate society. Their writings appealed to white sympathisers and reflected middle class aspirations (Parrott, 1976). Urbanism was viewed from an elite perspective and works were infused with Christian morals. The city, and especially Johannesburg, was accordingly judged to be the proverbial den of vice and evil (Hofmeyr, 1980). Rolfes Dhlomo's (1931, p. 5) portrait of Johannesburg is that of a "revolting, immoral place", beset by vice, prostitution, gambling and crime. The first novel by a black writer to

deal with black urbanism is motivated by a missionary inspired zeal to instruct and reform a backsliding generation. Interestingly, Dhlomo's approach is likened to that of the Reverend Kumalo, leading character in Paton's (white, liberal) *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Only some thirty (Mphahlele, 1959) and forty-five (Dikobe, 1973) years later was the half forgotten slumyard culture of the 1930s and 1940s revived and revered as a vital, redeeming dimension of black urban life.

In adopting and internalising Christian and mission ideologies, black writers of the early twentieth century were encouraged to criticise not only black urbanisation and urbanism, but also certain aspects of traditional African societies. Despite pressures to reject tribal customs and lifestyles, a number of black South African writers documented the history and cultures of their respective societies. Plaatje's *Nhudi* was set in the context of black South Africa between 1820 and 1850. In *Valley of a Thousand Hills*, Herbert Dhlomo attempted to revive the historical and legendary figures of the Zulus, their gods and ancestral spirits to re-create the past in order to remove the despair of the present (Cousens, 1971). Thomas Mofolo traced in *Chaka* (1925) the life of the Zulu leader. The poetry of Benedict Vilikazi, whilst influenced by the English romantics, was infused with Zulu heritage (Parrott, 1980).

Although the view expounded by the majority of South African literary critics is that black writing prior to 1951 consisted of but a few isolated literary events, recent archival research has illuminated virtually continuous literary creation during this period. The reception of early black writing by contemporary writers is ambivalent. Mphahlele (1980) acknowledges the value of writing which moulded a black South African literature. Others judge early attempts as a "rickety beginning",

... imitative of writing by whites ... stilted and banal. The chief motive behind its creation seemed to have been to impress on a patronising white readership the measure of sophistication achieved by the Black author (Rive, 1982, p. 12).

During the 1930s and 1940s literary contribution by white South Africans was once more slowed. The war years inhibited indigenous literature, producing generalised emotional accounts of and reflections on the Second World War (Gordimer, 1975). Of the innovative white writers to have emerged in the previous decade, both Plomer and van der Post were in exile. Although no further novels appeared from Mofolo or Plaatje, black writing maintained its foothold. Herbert Dhlomo produced *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (1936) and *The Valley of a Thousand Hills* (1940). Poetic output flourished, its most notable contributors being Benedict Vilikazi and James Jolobe. The period witnessed also the rise to recognition of the coloured poet and novelist, Peter Abrahams. Abrahams began his career by contributing protest poetry to the *Cape Standard* between 1938 and 1939. His first collection of poems was published in 1940. Thereafter several novels appeared including *Mine Boy* (1946) which records conditions in the primarily black urban township of Malay Camp. The work leans on the 'Jim-goes-to-Jo'burg' motif which deals with black demoralisation and corruption by city life. His autobiography, *Tell Freedom*, followed in 1950. The book documents Abrahams' experiences in the multiracial area known as Vrededorp.

Following their accession to power in 1948, the Afrikaner nationalists began to rigidify, codify and implement long entrenched colour prejudice as apartheid. It was during this formalisation of racialism that a new wave of South African writers emerged giving expression to the oppressive system under which they lived and wrote.

The first (and possibly most influential) novel of this keenly sensitive and perceptive genre of white South African literature was Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Published in 1948, the work was the first attempt by a white writer to deal explicitly with the problems of black urbanisation and urbanism. Paton devotes a provocative chapter of his novel to the chronic housing shortage confronting urban blacks in Johannesburg. The reader is introduced to the black slumyards, freehold townships, squatter settlements and locations, their overcrowdedness, deviance and bleak physical appearance. Paton's controversial work suggested a Christian solution to the political problems of racist South Africa. Albeit the focus of considerable criticism, the impact of Paton's novel, both locally and internationally, was striking. Favourable critiques acknowledged its lyrical beauty and power that moved the conscience of South Africa as no previous book had done (Gordimer, 1975). It was asserted that whilst the novel may not have occasioned the restructuring of the country, it marked the beginning of attempts to critically reappraise the warped society with which it was concerned. Paton was labelled as an initiator, an innovator and one of South Africa's most sincere creative writers (Rive, 1983).

Whilst Paton's courageous plea for racial justice earned him the respect of many blacks, the liberalism propounded by the novel was often rejected. The liberalist philosophy was embodied in the novel's leading character, Stephen Kumalo of whom a leading black critic writes:

... we, the young, suspected that the priest was a cunning expression of white liberal sentiment ... Stephen Kumalo: an embodiment of all the pieties, trepidations, and humilities we the young had begun to despise with such a consuming passion (Nkosi, 1965, p. 5).

White liberal South African writing as epitomised by Paton was developed by Harry Bloom, Dan Jacobson, Nadine Gordimer, Daphne Rooke and Jack Cope in the 1950s and decade following. Of these writers Jacobson makes pointed reference to life in an African township near Johannesburg (see *The Beginners* (1966, p. 193)) while Gordimer (*A World of Strangers* (1958), and to a lesser extent in *The Lying Days* (1953)) and Bloom (in *Episode*, (1956)) treat as central theme the township, its physical structure, atmosphere, and meaning. *A World of Strangers* is, moreover, recognised as the first novel by a white South African in which the black character transcended the stereotyped image of the passive black as propounded by white liberals (Nakasa, 1975). In their committed attempts to study the effects of racialism and apartheid on white and black people alike, so-called liberal novels were identified as "South Africa's largest contribution to literature" (Vigne, 1961, p. 95).

For the purpose of avoiding confusion it seems appropriate at this juncture to define and elaborate upon the concepts of 'liberal' and 'protest' writing with respect to South African literature. Local liberal writing is defined as the product of white South Africans who feel they have a role to play in attempting peaceful and bourgeois solutions to the country's political problems. Proposed solutions are overridingly moral; attitudes towards the black recipient indignant, yet paternalistic. The victimised spectator tends to remain passive rather than become an activist in search of his own freedom (Rive, 1977).

The line drawn between liberal writing and what has become known as protest writing is fine and not always clear. Novels such as Gordimer's *A World of Strangers* and Bloom's *Episode*, for example, fall uncomfortably into the liberal category by virtue of the race of their writers. Neither

novel complies with the standard 'definitions' of liberal writing, since each fulfils criteria of the more radical 'protest' school.

Protest writing is more or less chronologically located between liberal and post-1976 black consciousness writing. It is loosely defined as "writing by blacks describing their situation to whites whom they felt had the power to effect change" (Riva, 1982, p. 12). Such writing began in the late 1940s although traces are evident in the works of the Dhlomo brothers, Sol Plaatje and the earlier work of Peter Abrahams. An important distinction between liberal and protest writing lies in the emphasis of the former on the victim and that of the latter on victimisation. On account of its favourable selling power, most of the South African literature published abroad has been protest literature (Lindfors, 1966). Protest writing although attacked by some black and many white recipients, is defended by Gordimer (1979, interviewed in *English in Africa*, 6(2), p. 15):

... protest is in the people. And if you write honestly about the life around you, the protest comes out of that. It's not a goal on its own. A writer's purpose is to try and express the truth of his society in a particular time and a particular place, and if protest is arising out of the people, if it's the yeast that is there, if it's bubbling, it will come out in the writing.

1950-1960: The Drum Era

The 1950s saw once more an accelerating rate of black urbanisation and associated accommodation crises. In response to the proclamation of Johannesburg as a 'white' area which blacks were prohibited from inhabiting, a vast movement from inner city areas to the unproclaimed freehold western areas of Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare occurred. Overcrowded Sophiatown became the centre and topic of a new surge of black

writing. Blacks began to write about themselves, not in terms of the epic past, but in terms of the present. The experience of black urban life, especially in Sophiatown, was brought to paper for the first time (Nkosi, 1965). Ideological influences exerted by church and rural social structures were considerably weakened (Sole, 1979). The journalistic tradition maintained its earlier role, increasing its influence and culminating in the launching of *Drum* magazine.

Drum was the first South African magazine of wide circulation to invite black writers to submit literary contributions in English. By promoting several talented writers, it was possibly the most important landmark in the development of black South African literature in English. The first few issues of the magazine (originally titled *African Drum*) featured script which the white proprietor and white editors thought would best express 'the African'. They contained:

... articles on 'music of the Tribes', and 'Know yourselves' recounting the history of the Bantu tribes, instalments of *Cry, the Beloved Country*; features about religion, farming, sport and famous men; and strip cartoons about Gulliver and St. Paul (Sampson, 1956, p. 15).

Anthony Sampson, *African Drum's* editor, soon realised that he had misjudged his audience. Stories based upon explanations and portrayal of black customs and tradition appealed to white readers but failed to attract blacks. Accordingly, tribal references were eliminated, Gulliver's Travels and The Bible were replaced by American comic strips featuring black heroes, and more black journalists were hired (Barnett, 1983). The newly titled *Drum* reshaped its image to encompass the preoccupations of black township life. It became "a real proletarian paper. It talked about the urban black man generally" (Nphahlele, 1982, interviewed in M. Chapman (ed.), *South African Poetry*, p. 42). "It was a symbol

of the new African cut adrift from the tribal reserve - urbanised, eager, fast-talking and brash" (Nkosi, 1965, p. 10). "The black writer was asserting his sense of permanence in an urban ghetto life ... The writers helped fashion a township culture and gave it literary expression" (Mphahlele, 1980, p. 7).

Drum's leading fictional writers included Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba, Todd Matshikiza, Arthur Masekane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Nat Nakasa, Bloke Modisane and Casey Motsisi. Together they produced vigorous, lively sketches of life in the black urban townships of Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. Alongside crime exposures, sport, jazz, picture features, cover girls and exposés of social conditions, the fiction spoke of "the drama of black life, its triumphs and defeats, survival, its culture and sub-culture, the police terror and legislated restrictions it was subjected to" (Mphahlele, 1980, p. 7).

The literary style adopted by the *Drum* writers was borrowed from the Harlem Renaissance School. It was best represented in the writing of Todd Matshikiza (see Matshikiza, 1961) and hence known as "Matshikize". *Drum* writing style has been variously described as "racy, agitated, impressionistic" (Mphahlele, 1980, p. 7), "daring, and exciting ... a language that spoke of violence, depression, exhilaration" (Rive, 1980, p. 23) and "sharp, elliptical, immediate ... a style that seems particularly adopted to black South African living" (Treadgold, 1962, p. 57).

The short story form was widely preferred as that most suited to black writing. It allowed an immediate, intense and concentrated way of unburdening frustration and anger. Moreover, the nature of the black

urban environment rendered sustained, long, complex, reflective literary works an impossible feat (Nkosi, 1965; Maimane, 1971; Monyana, 1976).

According to Nkosi:

It is not so much the intense suffering ... which makes it impossible for black writers to produce long and complex works of literary genius as it is the very absorbing, violent and immediate nature of experience which impinges upon individual life ... in Johannesburg there was too much of this direct experience to be had; there was no privacy in which to reflect (Nkosi, 1965, pp. 17-18).

It is this directness of experience and subject matter in black writing which is perceived to be responsible for its journalistic tendencies: its presentation of "concrete reality with cinematic accuracy but untransmuted by the creative imagination into art" (Monyana, 1976, p. 86).

The fiction of the *Drum* era, as in the case of writing prior to 1950, was aimed at the black intelligentsia and white liberals. It attempted to arouse white consciousness to the plight of those racially dominated (Sole, 1979). Courting little political confrontation (Rive, 1983) it retained many of the attitudes of black elite writing in South Africa three decades before. Although writers were more aware of their contradictory position than were their predecessors, the writing of the 1950s was still petty-bourgeois oriented. It identified more with white liberals than with the black masses (Sole, 1979).

Following the establishment of *Drum* there arose a group of liberal and radical serials that took a strong anti-apartheid line and encouraged black authors to write militant protest fiction (Barnett, 1983). Publications such as *Fighting Talk*, *New Age*, *Africa South* and *The New African* advocated social and political change in South Africa. They published stories that revealed the frustrations, pains and indignities suffered by blacks in a white-ruled society. Such stories provided an

outlet for a vigorous literature of political commitment which grew up alongside the escapist literature of *Drum* (Barnett, 1983). Contributions included the prose of Alex la Guma, James Matthews and Richard Rive (all of whom wrote against a backdrop of District Six), Modisane's short stories set in Sophiatown and Themba's best known work 'Requiem for Sophiatown' which was initially published in *Africa South*.

It was during the *Drum* period that the "cultural immorality act" (Abrahams, 1970, p. 20), the Bantu Education Act of 1955, became law. Bantu Education sought to retribelise individuals who had two or three decades of urban living behind them (Sole, 1979). As a result of this venture, English as a medium for black writing in South Africa suffered an almost killing blow. The Act was one more manifestation of apartheid. It transferred control of black education from the provincial education department to the level of central government, and within government from the Department of Education to that of Native Affairs (Barnett, 1983). Schools and higher education institutions were required to accept students only from their own ethnic groups. The medium of instruction in primary schools became the vernacular of the particular area. Private schools which had nurtured and developed the writing potential of such authors as Mphahlele and Abrahams were closed. Fort Hare, the only black university, was transformed into a tribal college with several white academics dismissed on grounds that they were "destroying the government's policy of apartheid" (Sole, 1979, p. 157). Displaying contempt for traditional Western conventions in terms of style and techniques, contemporary black writing (to be examined later) is a manifestation of post-1955 Bantu Education.

Having served as an important testing ground for a generation of black writers, *Drum* had fulfilled its role in promoting black South African literature. By 1957 the fictional content of the magazine had declined considerably. Black short story writers opted for a more serious platform and began contributing to a number of emerging journals which were anxious to encourage black writing. These include *The Classic*, *New Coin*, *The Purple Renoster*, and *New Nation*. Writing by blacks existed alongside that by whites such as Nadine Gordimer, Lionel Abrahams and André Brink. This co-existence went some way to achieving a 'unified' South African literature. Writers to have been introduced through the pages of these new magazines include Don Mattera who wrote poignantly of Sophiatown and Oswald Mtshali who later published his poems of urban township life in *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* (1971).

Within a short period of time, however, almost all black writers of the 1950s were silenced. The 1966 amendment to the Suppression of Communism Act placed a blanket ban on the works of many of these authors. Forty-six writers were banned by a Government Gazette Extraordinary of April 1, 1966, among them Mphahlele, Nkosi, Modisane, Matshikiza and Nakasa. The Act prohibited the reproduction, printing, publication, reading or dissemination of any speech, utterance, writing or statement made or produced by such writers (Barnett, 1983). Possession of the material of both banned writers and those few to remain unbanned (Motsisi, Matthews, Rive) was controlled by censorship laws.

In the years between 1940 and 1970, most influential black and coloured South African writers either chose or were forced into exile. Those who volunteered exile so as to preserve their creative abilities away from South Africa's stifling atmosphere of censorship and harassment included

Jebavu and Nakasa. Mphahlele, Nkosi, Themba, La Guma and Modisane were among those forced into exile under the Suppression of Communism Act. The exiled writers were compelled to rely on foreign journals and publishers for their work. *The New Statesman*, *Encounter*, *Observer*, *Black Orpheus*, *Transition* and *Presence Africaine* were some such outlets. After arriving in their newly adopted countries, exiled writers began to publish full length books. One of the novels published during this period was La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, (1962) which provides a vivid account of ghetto existence in Cape Town's District Six. Possibly of most significance was the spate of autobiographical writing that occurred in exile: Mphahlele's accounts of Marabastad in *Down Second Avenue*, (1959) Modisane's Sophiatown in *Blame me on History*, (1963) and the township experiences and expectations of Nkosi (*Rose and Exile* (1965)) and Jabavu (*Drawn in Colour* (1960) and *The Ochre People* (1963)). In re-creating South Africa overseas, exiled writers often focused upon townships and gave them highly personal and detailed treatment.

South African censorship has been responsible for the growth of two separate and divergent literatures, one by exiles and another by people remaining in their home country to struggle against the curtailment of free literary expression. Of interest in the latter regard is Monyama's (1976, p. 90) observation that the creativity of the totally deprived writer (one exiled or imprisoned) often blooms. But,

where the oppressor has not taken everything - for example where Gordimer is permitted to operate in the half-light of spurious freedom - human spirit does indeed wither, the creative imagination dying with it.

The effect of banned black writers (who were so influential in their day) on today's young South African blacks has been minimal (Grant, 1978).

As Gordimer (1973) points out, few of the young aspirants writing at present have read even the early work of the exiled writers: it was banned while they were still school-going. It is, moreover, not only South African audiences that are deprived by banning. The exiled writer is himself ensnared by the 'tyranny of place' (Mphahlele, 1982). One of his most tragic dilemmas is how long he can continue to draw on a country spiritually when he is removed from it physically (Anderson, 1977; Grant, 1978).

Post-1990: Black Consciousness Writing

The 1960s were barren for black South African writing. Of the few authors to remain in South Africa following the mass exodus of the previous decade were Rive, Matthews and Motsisi. The only novels by black writers published during this period were Rive's *Emergency* (1964), set in District Six and Dugmore Boetie's *Familiarity is the Kingdom of the Lost* (1969), created against the backdrop of Sophiatown. Matthews and Motsisi produced the occasional short story respectively against backdrops of the Cape slums and Sophiatown.

Contributions by white writers were equally scant - a characteristic which has persisted to the present day. Gordimer continued to write short stories and novels from an increasingly radical perspective. Paton produced short story collections, an autobiography and two further novels. A trickle of writers best represented by 'bestiger' Afrikaners Andre Brink and John Coetzee stimulated a tradition of increasingly radical literature forever at the mercy of the censors. Other than the occasional incidental references to black urban areas, South African literature by whites, whilst dealing with racial issues, was not concerned

with the township as major setting or theme. After the novels of Paton, Gordimer and Bloom of the late 1940s and 1950s the only significant contributions to the literature about townships were a first novel *Tsotsi* (1980) written by playwright Athol Fugard and two novellas under the title *Sad Laughter Memories* (1983) by Jse de Ridder, a newcomer to the literary scene. These works offered fresh insight into the now demolished freehold township of Sophiatown. *Tsotsi* and *Sad Laughter Memories* have in common 'outcast' central characters, namely, a tsotsi (villain; petty criminal) and a gangster through whose eyes Sophiatown life unfolds.

Whereas writing by whites has changed little in volume, content, style and theme over the past century, the transformation in black literature has been little short of revolutionary. Contributions by black writers changed both qualitatively and quantitatively following the excellent reception of Mtshali's poetry collection *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* (1971) which reached out to the liberal white. It was an unusual combination of personal reflections and sharp observations (Lindfors, 1977) illuminating the harsher aspects of Sowetan life. The poetic trend initiated by Mtshali gained impetus and replaced the short story, novel and autobiography as the dominant mode of literary expression. Reasons given for the change in literary mode include the belief that poems were less likely to fall foul of the censors due to their limited intellectual appeal. Condensed writing techniques were perceived to be more suited to convey the new urgency of the South African political sphere. Moreover, because it lends itself to communal activity (in the form of reading groups) rather than private contemplation, poetry is an extension of an oral tradition in black society. In the face of escalating black consciousness and pursuit to reaffirm these traditional roots, poetry is the preferred medium for creative writing.

The new black writing is largely a delayed response to the Pan African Congress anti-pass campaign which ended in violence at Sharpeville township on 21 March, 1960. Questions of black rights in a white-ruled society are expressed through a poetry of overt protest which is concerned with describing to a white readership the oppression of blacks. As in the past, writing is designed to mobilise sympathetic white liberals into effecting change. It has become known as Soweto poetry, or post-Sharpeville poetry, and has been stamped as "the single most important socio-literary phenomenon of the seventies in South Africa" (Chapman, 1982, p. 11). Following the tradition set by the racy Sophiatown prose of the 1950s, the poetry of the 1970s and 1980s concentrates on the immediacy of day-to-day township life. It adopts a "stark English idiom and ghetto-derived imagery" (Chapman, 1982, p. 11) which eschews rhyme and closed forms in favour of open or 'naked' forms. These stylistic features are believed to be more appropriate to the "textures of contemporary black experience" (Chapman, 1982, p. 11).

In the five years following the publication of Mtshali's collection, twelve books of poetry by blacks appeared. Those to be extensively cited later include the works of Mongane Serote whose several poems of Alexandra township were published in his collections *Yakhal'inkomo* (1972) and *Tsetlo* (1974). The newly established Sipho Sepapala put to paper his satirical, ironic reflections of urban black experience in *Hurry up to It!* (1975) and *The Blues is You In Me* (1976).

By the mid-1970s, the volume of black literature published within South Africa has dramatically increased. This was largely attributable to the establishment of a number of local publishing houses including Bataleur, Ad Donker, David Philip, Raven Press and Blac. Following the Soweto riots

of June 1976 (a response to the immediate issue of Afrikaners as a medium of instruction in black schools which sparked off nation-wide confrontation), black writing underwent a shift in motivation, theme and tone. It found its full power in an expression of uncompromising resistance. Writing was primarily a response to the black consciousness movement which has become an important aspect of the South African political scene. Initially spread by black student organisations in the early 1970s and accelerated after the Soweto disturbances and death of Steve Biko, black consciousness sought to repair the damages inflicted by apartheid. It is defined as "an awareness by black people that their humanity is constituted by their blackness ... It is a determination to be judged no longer by white values, and it signifies a re-discovery of their history and culture" (Boesak, 1977, p. 9).

Post-1976 black writing of townships seldom pauses to convey township description, atmosphere, lifestyle and experience. Moreover, the central confrontation of black lives - apartheid - no longer appears in the form of shebeens or pass raids, but in the lives of communities uprooted and dumped by resettlement, the experiences of strikes, student demonstrations, detentions and imprisonment (Gordimer, 1980).

In the new writing, concern is not with urbanism or township life but with issues and events deriving from white arrogance and black subordination (see for example Tlali's *Amandla* (1980), Sepamla's *The Root is One* (1979) and *Ride on the Whirlwind* (1981)) or with issues of black liberation (see the freedom songs which suffuse *Staffrider* magazine). There seems to be little cause for celebrating urban living, and those writings which reflect upon townships do so within the context of oppression. Accordingly, Soweto is portrayed as a stifling, terror struck

abode (see especially in the poems of Mafika Gwala's *Joi Inkomo* (1976), Sepamla's *The Soweto I Love* (1977), and the short stories of Mtshali. Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* (1979) and in contributions to the popular journal, *frider*). The lurid depictions by Chris van Wyk of the coloured townships and those of Alexandra in Sarote's *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) are further products of the new critical trend in black literature.

In addition to its new motivation and themes, contemporary black writing has taken on a different tone and style. Although still a literature of protest, it shows confidence in the inevitable future of a South Africa led by blacks. Regarding style, traditional African oral techniques of repetition and parallelism have been incorporated into the literature. Writings are further shaped by the authentic township milieu of jazz music and punctuated with black power rhetoric. More than dislike, there is actually contempt shown for Western continuities and stylistic traditions:

We will have to *donder* (smash) conventional literature, old fashioned critic and reader alike. We are going to *gob*, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through, we are going to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say. Because we are in search of our true selves - undergoing self-discovery as a people (Mtshali, 1981, p. 5).

English that we use in our poetry ... is the language of urgency which we use because we have got an urgent message to deliver ... We have not got the time to embellish this urgent message with unnecessary and cumbersome ornaments like rhyme, iambic pentameter, abstract figures of speech and an ornate and lofty style (Mtshali, 1976, p. 127).

The audience in mind is for the first time, a black communal one engaged in oral performance. Contemporary black writers regard themselves as social beings involved first hand in a people's struggle. The prime importance of literature is accordingly to communicate. As such, literature workshops and readings (especially poetry) have grown in

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the townships. Several poets organise themselves in groups often avoiding publication for fear of banning and/or in refusal to gear their writing to the norms of white publishers and editors (Emmett, 1979).

Although there seems to be evidence of a dilution in the use of literature towards lower petty-bourgeois and even worker elements, black consciousness poetry retains a strong petty-bourgeois and intellectual bias (Sole, 1983). A number of established writers are nevertheless distinguishable in their commitment to the class struggle (for example, Gwala, Serote, and Matshoba).

Publication of black consciousness writing in South Africa is meagre. This is largely attributable to the risks confronting potential publishers of the overtly political. Publishers face irredeemable financial losses incurred by banning and loss of readership by white audiences who have condemned the new black literature as shrill hysteria. One outlet for Soweto writing has nevertheless been successful. The literary magazine *Staffrider* which first appeared in March 1978 has both challenged and transformed the social image and meaning of literature in South Africa (Vaughan, 1982a; 1982b). *Staffrider* publishes the works of all races although the majority of contributions are by black writers. The journal has fostered an ideology of communal spirit (Couzens, 1982). Its readership is large and almost exclusively black. Contents express life in the raw and speak of survival usually in the form of short stories and poems. Established writers rub shoulders with youthful members of small regional groups and the individuality of the writer is played down by omitting biographical notes on the pages. Several non-communal outlets in the form of writer's groups aid in the distribution of the magazine to the townships (Visser, 1982). Editorial control is in the

hands of various black art groups who select and forward the material they wish to have published. In so doing the popular, communal nature of the magazine is accentuated and preserved. As occurred in the case of *Drum*, several writers have earned recognition through the pages of *Staffrider*. Many have proceeded to have novels as well as poetry and short story collections published in the *Staffrider* series put out by Raven Press (for example Miriam Tlali, Mbulelo Mzamane, and Mthobeni Mutloatshe).

The startling growth of contemporary black writing in recent years stands as proof that censorship procedures, however effective, have not obliterated South African literature. Moreover, the persistently brave attempts of publishers and authors has led to the lifting of bans and re-publication of a number of early works. South African literature survives, if somewhat shyly and deviously. As a poet assures:

They don't in prison
so they banned Erutus' poems
and Wopko Jansma's poems
and Breyten Breytenbach's poems
and Wally Serote's poems
and Sipho Sepamla's poems
and James Matthew's poems
and my own poems

They hate music and poems
and pictures and statues
they have cleaned out the country
there is silence between its bare walls
cleaned by the vultures

But unaccountably
music crosses the border
on waves of ether
through every crack
between the heavily armed border posts
(*'Silence in Jail'*, Horn, 1979, p. 17)

Appreciation of this 'music' is vital to an understanding of facets of South African life. It supplements more conventional sources of

information employed in social science research. In the study which follows it is shown to bring new dimensions to a proliferating interest among South African scholars in black urban residential areas. Having sketched the circumstances surrounding the development of township-oriented South African literature, it is appropriate to proceed to the analysis of Johannesburg's black urban townships in South African literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

JOHANNESBURG'S BLACK URBAN TOWNSHIPS IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

There is reason on an intellectual plane for all human geographers to consider carefully the promise of literary geography as an investigative tool in any real world setting. The distinctive urban geography of South Africa, however, adds special weight to the case for a literary geography. It is commonplace in the social and political history of the country that many thousands of people have been displaced from their homes, communities and local areas (from *their places*) and moved elsewhere. South Africa's socio-geographic landscapes bear testimony to the creation and destruction of countless places at all geographical and emotional scales (Butler-Adam, n.d.). Many more places are under threat of destruction, and many thousands of people may lose places of substantial meaning and value to them. For those people bereft of places or denied the freedom to make and define their own places, namely, the black population, the South African landscape is characterised by 'almost places' rather than 'fully realised places' (Butler-Adam, n.d.). What may be a whole landscape is for many an experiential landscape of holes.

Through the medium of South African literature, many residents and outsiders have articulated their personal impressions of the homes and places they have known, lost and been forced to know. In keeping with the increasing and massive rate of black urbanisation over the past century such writing has been predominantly urban in nature. Although the phrase 'almost places' embraces with equal validity rural and urban areas which

have been destroyed and from which black residents have been heartlessly displaced, the emphasis in the literature and the focus of this study falls upon places inhabited by urban blacks. In the South African context these contentious segregated districts are generally known as townships.

At the outset a distinction must be drawn between the original and contemporary meanings of the word 'township'. In earlier periods 'township' often referred to inner city areas and freehold suburbs of white urban South Africa which housed working and middle class Indian, coloured and black (and less often white) landowners, tenants and sub-tenants. By contrast the term 'location' described specifically segregated, strictly controlled and most often enclosed black residential areas commonly found on the periphery of South African towns and cities. In later years, following the demise of multiracial city suburbs and displacement of their inhabitants to isolated segregated areas, 'township' came to be used synonymously with 'location'. Certainly within the Johannesburg metropolitan area, adoption of the term township is both preferred and widespread.

Virtually without exception each of the four areas to be discussed has been referred to in the past, or is presently known as a township. In spite of this shared label and in the light of the comments made above, at least three of the four places differ vastly in terms of their histories, sensens for establishment, and physical fabric. The literary record of townships points to even more profound contrasts in the ways in which the areas were and are perceived; in what they symbolise(d) for occupants and onlookers. With an insight and perception that often eludes the academic researcher, creative writers have convincingly displayed the character or personality peculiar to specific townships. Through their poetry and

prose are re-created the souls of places that were cherished, feared, hated, lost and saved.

In the following presentation four geographic areas have been chosen for discussion. Each has played a vital role in the lives of Johannesburg's black population. The first area for discussion comprises the inner city slumyards of early Johannesburg. These were places of multiracial occupation established and destroyed before the formal entrenchment of apartheid. Second and third are Alexandra and Sophiatown, freehold townships of more or less spontaneous settlement which were established in the first decade of this century. Whereas the history of the former is one of hardship and despair mingled with triumph, that of the latter is only of traumatic struggle and loss. The final place for consideration is Soweto. Although initially formed in the 1930s, this sprawling dormitory of one and a half million people and arena of torrid racial confrontation is regarded by many as epitomising contemporary black urban living.

Prior to interpreting the treatment of Johannesburg's townships in literature, a brief history of black settlement in and around the city will be set out. The primary purpose of this venture is to supply an objective empirical referent against which backcloth the literature should be viewed. The information will also reveal the complex relationships which exist between the townships. The histories of all four places are indeed inextricably linked. Clearance of the slumyards and freehold suburbs, for example, was the major contributing factor to the explosive growth of Soweto.

Many people have known intimately more than one of the townships. Memories of and attachment to one particular place in turn shaped expectations of and dissatisfaction with another. All four places share common elements: each was an overcrowded incubator of social distress and all have bred rare ingenuity for survival. Differing circumstances of their establishment, and in some cases, their obliteration have, however, given the everyday drama of black urban existence a different gloss. The literary product of each township represents a unique response to that particular place, at a particular moment in time. As such and as will be shown shortly, certain environments have been imbued with strikingly dissimilar meaning, significance and emotion.

Brief History of Black Settlement in Johannesburg

After the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, the area attracted a growing heterogeneous population. Johannesburg was rapidly transformed from a mining town into an industrialised city. As early as 1896 the census recorded a population of 102 000 of whom half were black (Mazisi, 1980). The vast majority of blacks served initially as contract workers on the mines, but as the town developed, many secured employment as domestic servants and in the industrial and service sectors.

Whereas mine workers were housed in compounds, most urban blacks were expected to find their own accommodation in the vicinity of places of employment. At the time little attempt was made to enforce racial separation although various suburbs had been set aside for occupation by specific race groups. Multiracial communities soon developed in areas such as Vrededorp, the 'Malay', 'Coolie' and 'Kafir' locations to the south of the area later to be known as Pageview (Fraser, 1978; Kagan,

1979). Insanitary conditions in these two locations were ignored by city authorities and black employers, until bubonic plague broke in 1904. In accordance with what has become known as the sanitation syndrome (whereby black populations were removed from central areas to distant locations for allegedly constituting a health hazard), large numbers of people were moved from the slums to Klipspruit location, twenty kilometres south of Johannesburg city centre (Kagan, 1978). The ground allocated to the residents of Klipspruit (which later became known as Pieterville, Soweto) adjoined a municipal sewage works. Corrugated iron shelters and rainwater tanks (which gave the township the indigenous title: *emaTankini*) were provided and remained in use for several decades (Lewis, 1966). The irony of transporting persons from an insanitary slum to land in the vicinity of sewage works on grounds of health control cannot be missed. The outbreak in 1918 of an influenza epidemic amongst Klipspruit inhabitants was to be expected. As this occurred during a period in which white ratepayers were complaining that their labour force was too far removed (Frankel, 1979), the city council was compelled to establish Western Native Township to the south of the rapidly developing suburb of Sophiatown.

Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare (collectively known as the Western Areas and often simply as Sophiatown) were established in 1905 and 1908 (Lewsen, 1953). Of his own volition the owner of Sophiatown and Martindale restricted large portions of the townships to white occupancy. The siting of the municipal refuse dump and sewage works in the vicinity of the suburbs discouraged white settlement and the restrictive title deeds precluding purchase of stands by blacks were amended to ensure sales. Newclare became a coloured township with freehold rights in 1908 and the western edge of Johannesburg developed as an area predominantly settled by blacks, coloureds and Indians employed in Johannesburg.

In addition to the Western Areas townships, Alexandra township some thirteen kilometres from the centre of Johannesburg operated as a freehold district for black and coloured settlement. The township, although originally intended for white occupation, was established in 1912 as a 'non-white' area. In the following decades it earned the title 'Dark City' possibly on account of its absence of street lighting, shortage of amenities and bleak appearance.

The Johannesburg City Council's segregated townships at Klipspruit and Western Native Township, together with the freehold areas, were incapable of absorbing the entire black population of Johannesburg. The way for a rampant and lucrative rack-renting business in 'white' areas was consequently opened (Koch, 1983). White landowners would buy or rent ground on which shanties would be constructed and let to blacks at exorbitant rates. In this manner, once fashionable suburbs were transformed into overcrowded slumyard areas. Doornfontein serves as a prime example having been transformed from an elite suburb to an extensive network of yards by the 1920s. The profitability of rack-renting created a belt of slumyards from the western suburbs through the city centre to the districts on the eastern side of Johannesburg. The belt included Fordsburg, Ferreirastown, Marshalltown, Doornfontein, Jeppe, Ophirton, Prospect Township and Vrededorp (Kagan, 1978; Koch, 1983).

The years after 1920 saw the promulgation and implementation of various measures to clear Johannesburg of its black population. It was reported in the 1921 Native Affairs Commission that "the town is a European area in which there is no place for the redundant Native" and proposed in the Stallard Commission of 1922 that it "should be a recognised principle that Natives ... should only be permitted within municipal areas in so far and

for so long as their presence is demanded by the white population." (both citations in Kane-Berman, 1978, p. 71). These two recommendations were embodied in the Native (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 which provided for compulsory residential segregation. As such, local authorities were forced to supply housing for the black labour residing within their boundaries and to control the influx of blacks into urban areas (Rich, 1978; 1980).

In response to the provisions of the Act, the first steps were taken to develop what was heralded as the model township of Orlando, the nucleus of the present complex of townships known as Soweto (Seavon, 1982). The march of inner city slumyard clearance contributed considerably to the growth of Orlando prior to 1939 (Trump, 1979). Many blacks, however, continued to live illegally in the slumyards and remaining freehold areas (Koch, 1983).

The Western Areas and Alexandra township soon degenerated into severely overcrowded and blighted areas. In addition to housing workers ineligible for or resisting accommodation in the strictly controlled locations, they absorbed a massive influx of blacks to Johannesburg. This cityward movement was stimulated by demand for labour in the war industries and abject poverty in the reserves (Proctor, 1979; Lodge, 1981). In the early 1950s some 40 000 people occupied 1700 plots in Sophiatown. The number of families in the township averaged just over eight and over one half of all families occupied only one room (Johannesburg, 1950). Tenure was overwhelmingly leasehold and exploitative rack-renting was rife (Pirie and Hart, 1985). By 1958 Alexandra likewise had a swollen population of 98 000 (Anon, 1980).

Whites raised objections to black settlement in Sophiatown and urged local authorities on several occasions to clear the township. Their pleas became louder as suburban growth in the Johannesburg area brought the houses of whites closer to the fringes of Sophiatown, eventually enveloped it, and made it a black enclave in an otherwise white region. By the mid-1940s, proponents of removal argued that displacement of blacks from Sophiatown was not only a racially motivated action but also a slum clearance programme. It was laid to the Natives Resettlement Act of 1954 to facilitate the demolition of the Western Areas and removal of their inhabitants to Meadowlands and Diepkloof in Soweto. Within ten years Sophiatown had ceased to exist both in name and physically. The campaign had represented an attack on black freehold rights which symbolised a permanence incompatible with the prevailing doctrine of blacks as temporary sojourners.

Following the pattern set in the Sophiatown example, the rapid growth of Alexandra coupled with its 'encroachment' onto nearby white suburbia alarmed the authorities. Alexandra was perceived to be a health menace and harbour of criminals, and from the 1940s resolutions were made to abolish the township. Immediately preceding the passage of the Better Administration of Designated Areas Act of 1962 which allowed the State greater power in the control and administration of Alexandra, it was declared that family accommodation would be eliminated from the township. Houses were to be replaced by hostels for 'single' men and women. Between 1962 and 1979 Alexandra faced its share of removals; over 50 000 people in all.

Whereas the hotly disputed Western Areas Removal Scheme was ingeniously devised and effectively implemented between 1955 and 1962,

with 60 000 persons uprooted and relocated, the Alexandra removals were halted in 1979. The earlier decision to convert the township into a hostel area was reversed and the last 4 000 families officially permitted to remain in the township which was to become a family residential area. Survival of Alexandra is attributed to a number of factors including incompetence among the Resettlement Board, shortage of funds and lack of alternative accommodation.

The slumyards, as well as Sophiatown and Alexandra do not stand as the only areas in the local urban history to face clearance and demolition. Countless other townships have experienced similar fates. The three areas are nevertheless distinguished in respect of their freehold status and the rich literatures they generated.

Since the establishment of Orlando in 1930, Soweto has developed into the largest complex of South African townships. Located twenty kilometres to the south west of central Johannesburg, it is the product of programmed population removal and homogenised dumping mostly in the post-1950s era. Small uniform units built in sprawling institutional rows house most of the removees from the schemes outlined above, together with a vast number of victims from later schemes.

From the 1930s, the black housing problem in Johannesburg became critical. The war years brought not only a tremendous influx of blacks into the city, but also a shortage of manpower and building materials. Housing construction in the townships was drastically slowed. The authorities responded in 1940 by permitting tenants in Orlando to take in sub-tenants. This practice was to spread immeasurably both legally and illegally, and in the early 1940s there were estimated to be 8 000

sub-tenants in Orlando East alone (Stadler, 1979). The housing situation deteriorated further with construction reaching a standstill in 1943 and 1944. Eleven squatter settlements containing between 60 000 and 90 000 people sprang up outside the city (Kane-Berman, 1978).

In March 1944, a group of sub-tenants from Orlando East, Newclare and Kliptown led by James Softsewe Mpanza set up 250 shanties of hessian around wooden frames on municipal land in Orlando. The camp which came to be known as Shanty Town, grew to support over 20 000 people. In spite of protest and resistance the Shanty Town community was uprooted within a few years and housed in an emergency camp at Moreka, on the far side of Orlando (Kane-Berman, 1978).

In 1948 it was estimated that 50 000 black families in and around Johannesburg required housing (Hellmann, 1949). It was only in 1950 that a serious attempt was made to alleviate the housing shortage. The building process was spurred on by relaxation of the industrial colour bar in the Bantu Building Workers Act of 1951. The legislation allowed blacks to be trained to construct houses in the townships, thereby substantially reducing labour costs (Morris, 1980). The housing crisis was further ameliorated by the introduction of site and service schemes whereby blacks were permitted to build temporary shacks on serviced sites until houses could be constructed.

The population of Soweto increased from 18 000 in 1935 (Lewis, 1966) to 191 000 two decades later and 347 397 in 1963 (Hlope, 1977). Between 1955 and 1976, the number of houses built in Soweto had once more declined. In 1973 the number of families on waiting lists for houses in the township was 14 250 and in 1976 the figure was 22 131 (Kane-Berman, 1978). The

situation has altered little today in spite of a trend towards acceptance of the permanent status of the urban black (especially after the Soweto riots of 1976) and the increasing involvement of the private sector in providing housing in the townships.

Soweto has its share of rutted roads, darkness, filth and smog. The infrastructure of the township is appalling. In 1980 there were no supermarkets, pharmacies, modern shopping centres, office blocks or large buildings. Telephones are rare and recreational facilities scarce. The hostile Soweto environment has nevertheless failed to mar (and in some instances may even have kindled) the creative spirit of many of its inhabitants. Whereas Soweto contrasts with the slumyards, and with Sophiatown and Alexandra by virtue of its artificial establishment, racial homogeneity and different physical appearance, it too boasts a generous and instructive literature.

Inner City Slumyards

The collection of writers to have captured the personality of the slumyards is probably as varied as were the areas themselves. Whereas the authors and poets preoccupied with the townships still to be examined are relatively homogeneous in terms of race and background (predominantly black with occasional white representatives), contributions to the slumyard literature come from black, white, coloured and Indian authors. Writings also range across a broad time period extending from the 1920s to the 1980s.

The works of two major authors, Dikobe and Abrahams are extensively cited in the following pages. Dikobe's novel, *The Marabi Dance*, published

in 1973, is devoted to recollection of Doornfontein during the 1930s. His work forsakes description of the sordid details of Doornfontein's endemic poverty and overcrowding in a convincing representation of the urban social process as was evident in the slumyards. Dikobe has earned the unique reputation as the only established author to have belonged to the working class at the time he wrote. Unlike most black petty-bourgeois writers serving petit-bourgeois (and/or ruling class) interests and expounding petty-bourgeois ideology, the man who was once newspaper vendor, washer and hawker produced a novel representative of ghetto society (Couzens, 1978). *The Marabi Dance* has been cited as an authentic portrayal of the Doornfontein with which its author was so familiar (Couzens, 1976). In its analysis of working class life in Johannesburg during the 1930s and 1940s it is perceived to be more factual than fictional. One of the themes of Dikobe's novel centres around recognition of the inevitable permanence of black urbanisation and the need to adapt to the urban way of life.

The second prominent writer of the urban black experience in the 1930s and 1940s is Abrahams. Abrahams was one of the forerunners of the protest school of literature identified in the previous chapter. His work, whilst effectively bringing to life the charm of his home place, Vrededorp, reveals his passionate desire to leave the suburb and all it stands for. The unifying theme of Abrahams' autobiography *Tell Freedom*, becomes the author's successful escape from conditions which crippled his family, friends, childhood acquaintances and others belonging to the coloured race (Ogunbesan, 1979).

In this section an attempt is made to bring together the literatures of the slumyards. A fleeting impression is given of their appearance and

population structures. More detailed attention is paid to the activities and lifestyles they supported, the senses of place or placelessness with which they were associated and the effects which their demolition and clearance had on inhabitants.

Detailed description of the physical fabric of the slumyards is uncommon in literature. Those authors to have memorised and captured aspects of these areas in writing appear to have dwelled more upon such intangible features as atmosphere and personality. There are nevertheless, scattered literary citations that revive a picture of the slumyards. Scully (1923, p. 207) sheds light on typical accommodation in the Ferreirasdorp area. He recalls a galvanised iron warren which comprised four narrow sheds enclosed by a fence of iron sheets. The sheds were divided into cubicles which measured approximately two metres square. In the tradition of the rack-renting practices predominant in the slumyards and outlined at the beginning of this chapter, cubicles were let to couples and families at high costs.

Although Dikobe is more concerned with re-creating the activities and social processes at work in Doornfontein than he is with pictorial representation, he does afford brief insight into typical housing conditions in the suburb. It is made known that the Molefe yard, home of his chief character is "also home to more than twenty other people. It comprised a row of five rooms, each about fourteen by twelve feet in size" (Dikobe, 1973, p. 1).

A further portrayal of the slumyard areas (in this case the western edge of the belt) emerges in the writing of Fugard (1980, p. 70) who draws attention to their furtive nature. He vividly recalls:

... a fringe world of unkempt, mostly ugly, mostly double-storied buildings whose doorways led off the pavement into darker corridors and cement grey backyards. At ground level there was a host of nondescript little businesses run by whites, Indians and an occasional coloured ... In the rooms above them could be found anything from cast-off white men lying on their beds and staring vacantly at the ceiling to shyster lawyers and pass book racketeers. In the side streets were factories and warehouses. A few of the big hostels for bachelor Africans were also in the neighbourhood.

The notion of the slumyards as home to outcast society and dubious practices is further brought out by Scully (1923) and Jiggs (1981, p. 358). The latter remembers Doornfontein as "chrobbing and bursting / shebeens and brothels". Fugard's passage points also to the multiracial composition of the inner city. In contrast to the racial homogeneity of modern day townships, the slumyards housed a startling variety of race groups and nationalities. In his penetration of the hidden, and largely undisclosed inner city world, Scully (1923, p. 207), for example, records the population of Ferreira'sdorp as being black and representing some twelve African races; of the remainder, four-fifths were of mixed origin and the balance white. The white inhabitants were by and large foreigners of European origin.

Moving from a discussion of the composition of the slumyards to the lifestyles and activities they supported, it becomes clear that informal activities feature prominently in the slumyard literature. Then, as now, poverty was endemic among the black population of Johannesburg. Wages paid to men in the mining and industrial fields and to women in domestic service were meagre. Survival frequently necessitated a supplementary source of income which was usually secured through informal activities. These activities are often illegal and dangerous as in cases of illicit liquor dealing in 'shebeens' or gangsterism. They are so integral a part of black literature that they have merited increased attention (see for example, Hart and Rogerson, 1984).

The brewing and selling of liquor emerges as a major preoccupation of slumyard dwellers, especially women. Dikobe recalls of the Molefe yard, Doornfontein:

When it rained the yard was as muddy as a cattle kraal, and the smell of beer, thrown out by the police on their raids, was nauseating. The beer business was mostly done on Sundays for the benefit of the domestic workers. The skokicam enabled men to fight more bravely in the Amalaita boxing bouts. Those with stronger heads drank methylated spirits (Dikobe, 1973, p. 1).

Home-brewing served a multifold purpose. Women were able to carry out a tradition which they had brought with them from the rural areas. They were further able to supplement the paltry earnings of their husbands or fathers employed in industry and mining. Moreover, drinking formed the core of the wild 'marabi' parties which offered the prime recreational outlet for slum dwellers. Tumultuous, crowded, noisy social occasions centred around the liquor trade are responsible for the radiant and energetic Doornfontein atmosphere to emerge in Dikobe's novel.

Not all writers, however, saw a positive side to the brewing trade. Writing in the 1920s of Prospect Township (another area in the slumyard belt), the first black novelist to write in English openly reveals his horror at:

... a revolting and immoral place: where the black sons and daughters of Africa are kicked about by unbridled passions as a football is on the playfields. Here one may come across any kind of debased humanity ... Murders are committed here with animalish ferocity through the influence of drinks and faithless women ... strong and violent drinks are brewed in broad daylight (Dhlomo, 1951, p. 5).

Dhlomo's writing smacks of a missionary education (and reliance upon the mission press for publication of his novel) in its strong moral overtones and condemnation of urbanisation and urbanism. This

notwithstanding, his perception of the essence of life in Prospect is reconcilable with that of Mphahlele (1959, p. 117) who asserts "If you have never seen Prospect then you don't know the world. You must sell beer to live or else work for a white man".

Besides illicit liquor brewing and selling, activities of the slum world inhabitants included gangsterism and gambling (Abrahams, 1950; Dikobe, 1973). Children played street games in a manner typical of a ghetto existence (Abrahams, 1950). The reality of extreme impoverishment effectively strikes a chord when told of ragged children who scavenge "for unknown treasures in the rubbish heaps" (Dikobe, 1973, p. 101). Social activities were, however, not exclusively reflective of working class culture. One of the major tensions in Dikobe's novel, for example, is concerned with class differentiation among slum dwellers. This tension is reflected in two contrasting forms of culture - the petty-bourgeois Europeanised concerts and ballroom dancing of the Bantu Men's Social Centre, and the working class culture centred around the shebeens and marabi music (Gouzens, 1978). Likewise, Abrahams records a typically wercernised love among Vrededorp inhabitants of cinema which was

... Vrededorp's most powerful link with the outside world. Through it we kept in touch with the scientific advances of our time. From it we drew our picture of the world of white folk. Our morals were fashioned there ... illusion and reality often merged at the bioscope (Abrahams, 1950, pp. 111-112).

One informal activity characteristic of black urban areas is street vending. Together with brewing and gangsterism, hawkers and their activities are a vital dimension of township literature. In most instances the colour and exuberance surrounding their activities are identified as a major contribution to township atmosphere and personality. One writer of the slumyards so have evoked beautifully the

movement, variety and noise of informal selling and shopping in Vrededorp writes:

And from the streets and houses of Vrededorp, from the back-yards and muddy alleys, a loud babel of shouting, laughing, cursing voices rise, are swallowed by the limitless sky, and rise again in unending tumult There were small, well-built Basuto women. They balanced their shopping, baskets, paraffin-tins, bundles tied in spotless white sheets, delicately on their heads ... There were tall, swaying Zulu women ... And the women of the Bechuanas and the Barolong ... The women paused at the stalls that lined the sidewalk, bought, and moved on. The traders were Indians. They stood by tables piled high with hard-boiled eggs, steaming sweet potatoes, Indian sweetmeats, fruit, vegetables, and all manner of edibles. They called out their wares in high, tinny voices; reedy and sounding strange against the deep-throated African voices. Darting in and out among the women and stalls were ragged boys of all shapes, and of colours ranging from black to a pale, almost white, yellowish fairness ... Boys fell over each other battling for orange-peels swimming on the black water of the gutters ... carts pulled by great horses moved slowly by ... children played in the streets till the motors were nearly on them then jumped clear; screams, laughter, shouts, cries, everything but silence (Abrahams, 1950, pp. 58-60).

In these respects Vrededorp justified its characterisation as "heart throb of the dark people of the city" (Abrahams, 1950, p. 95). The sentiments are echoed in the heartfelt prose of Indian author, Ahmed Essop. To him Vrededorp embodied an oasis of sociality. He remembers particularly "the raucous voices of vendors, the eternal voices of children in streets and backyards - the variety of people, the spicy odours of Oriental foods, the bonhomie of communal life ..." (Essop, 1978, p. 99). White suburbs were alien and chilling by comparison as were the sterile new areas to which Vrededorp inhabitants were moved. Embedded in Essop's memory of the suburb is Fifteenth Street where "every house shared a common wall with another, each had its distinctive architectural beauty and character" (Essop, 1983, p. 8).

Referring to the sense of place invoked by the slumyards, literary evidence points for the most part to a sincere affection for these areas.

Allegiance to the inner city slums emerges most acutely in literature which documents their destruction. Acceptance if not love of life in the slumyards is nevertheless not unanimous in literature. This is most noticeable in the work of Abrahams. Whereas Abrahams' image of Vrededorp is certainly portrayed with energy and enthusiasm (a tremendous contrast to the stark descriptions of his childhood location, Elsburg (Abrahams, 1950, pp. 18-19)), the theme of his autobiography *Tell Freedom*, almost contradicts this impression. A major theme of the work is in fact the author's successful escape from life in such places as Vrededorp. In the opening lines of the book, Abrahams' desire to break away from his surroundings and achieve his dream outside South Africa is made clear:

I pushed my nose and lips against the pane and tried to lick a raindrop sliding down on the other side. As it slid past my eyes, I saw many colours in the raindrop ... It must be warm in there. Warm and dry. And perhaps the sun will be shining in there ... I was inside the raindrop, away from the misery of the cold, damp room" (Abrahams, 1950, p. 9).

Two worlds are presented: the raindrop world of "warmth and sunshine" which is the quest that gives direction to the author's life, and the abject reality in which he is forced to dwell. What the passage and indeed the autobiography suggest is not the sense of belonging offered by Vrededorp. The suburb is more a symbol of the stifling South African environment in which black dreams and ambitions are fettered.

Appropriate to Abrahams' rejection of his home environment was his incessant yearning for and identification with the "broad, clean, tree-lined streets" of the white suburbs which he would roam frequently and listlessly. The "silences" of these streets were "sweet" to him, and there was "living, breathing space", strong brick houses, the magic of electricity and "beautiful" sounds of a "rarity never heard in Vrededorp (Abrahams, 1950, pp. 163-164). And yet Abrahams' writing of the squalor

and poverty of his childhood is neither embittered nor angry. It does not dwell upon deprivation, and the colour and personality of his home suburb permeates his work.

The attitudes and responses to the slumyards as reflected in the works of both Abrahams and Dikobe are complex and ambivalent. Whilst undoubtedly capturing the vibrant atmospheres of Doornfontein and Vrededorp, place appears almost incidental and is not celebrated in their literature as in the example of writing about Sophiatown to be examined later. Dikobe's comment is more a revelation of adaptation to and survival strategies in working class urban environments, than it is a glorifying of those lifestyles. Nostalgia for rural lifestyles and attraction to the white suburbs of Johannesburg permeate respectively Dikobe's novel and Abrahams' autobiography. Sophiatown writers, by contrast, revel in their urban existence regardless of its squalor and danger. In their work, the orderly, sober, inert suburbs of affluent Johannesburg are targets only of contempt.

Somewhat contrary to Abrahams and Dikobe (whose work fails to evoke either a strong sense of place or a traumatic sense of loss brought about by slumyard clearance), stand the writings of a number of literati who have mourned the passing of the slumyards. Writing of the "one-time soulful ghetto" of Doornfontein (Rabothatha, 1981, p. 45) a poet indignantly asserts:

... And now they are
bulldozing the place down
there's hardly anyone left
except the whores and oars ...
Sometime we going to
bulldoze down their

Home as a
 And send them to a
 Township and see
 How they like it ...
 ('Doornfontein', Jiggs, 1981, p. 358)

The appalling tragedy occasioned by the suburb's demolition incited a contemporary authoress to anger and resentment. Reproaching the injustice of segregationist legislation, she grieves for the home of "The Modikwe Dikobe's, the Jazz Maniacs and the famous backyard communities". Her story reveals the tragic symbols of the progression of apartheid. It tells of a Doornfontein reduced to "hideouts of corrugated tin" that lurked "behind every horrifying ramshackle". The pathos of Group Areas legislation is dramatically captured in the vision of a pitiful group of men, women and children nestled amidst the remnants of the "last of the un-group'd shanties ... of the We - group - you - there - fools - and animals - one - side - and - people - my - please Act" (Rabothatha, 1981, p. 45).

Others bemoaned Vrededorp's doom. For many the suburb had symbolised "the heart-warming pleasure of existence in a time-hallowed suburb where every brick, finger-stained pillar and wall, creaking window had become part of the mellow aura of urban definition" (Essop, 1983, p. 8). Destruction of the suburb had devastated a treasury of human relationships that had constituted the living tissue of communal existence. The pain of loss became even more acute when removees experienced their new township, Lenasia. In Essop's opinion the richness of communal life was denied in Lenasia where "stereotyped houses were separated by concrete walls, hedges, gardens and open spaces where each family was thrown back upon its sterile individuality" (Essop, 1983, p. 8).

The emotional declaration of one of the characters about whom Mphahlele writes stands as a further revelation of the magnitude of loss imparted through the slumyard clearance:

I thought I had seen enough darkness in the world until the government of Johannesburg wanted to take away Prospect and build factories. Our people refused to move ... (Mphahlele, 1959, p. 117)

A final illustration of the meaning which the slumyards held in the eyes of their occupants is made clear through the words of a contemporary Sowetan poet. Although the exact location of his 'slum' is not known, it is likely to have been somewhere within Johannesburg city. The poem affirms firstly the loss experienced by those writers quoted above. More important, though, is the preference expressed for slum life over and above a possibly more comfortable existence in Soweto.

I will have to ask for my slum location again
I feel a lot went wrong when I was moved from it
a lot died in the process
I lost my stance for standing up straight
I lost the rhythm of walking right
I lost my sense of humour
I lost the feel for loving
I lost my sense of smell
I lost the sense of discriminating
I lost my pride of not caring for smart things
I lost that heart for sharing ...

I need to hold onto something
like the shine of corrugated-iron roofs or the rusted coating
I need to take in something
less obnoxious than the billowing smoke from
nearby factories
I need a big wide yard
in which to dance in prayer or do the jive
I need a roofing that can resound
with hard-clapping soulful singing and foot stamping
or just the thud of drunken brawls

I know I don't just want fresh air
I need the smell of sweaty life
oh yes I want to live colourfully once more
(*'When I lost slum life'*, Sepamla, 1977, pp. 18-19)

Conventional documentation of the slumyards adequately conveys the histories and to a lesser extent, the conditions of these areas. Literature allows the researcher to probe the lifestyles they support, their atmospheres and personality. As this section has dealt with more than one suburb, it is difficult to summarise adequately their literary presentation. Inconsistent attitudes towards the same place and towards different places serve to underline the personal nature of creative writing and the matter of author idiosyncrasy. Literature has nevertheless instructively illuminated the paradox of a slumyard existence which combines poverty, suffering and danger with warmth and charm. The paradox is further brought to the fore when considering varied attitudes to the slumyards. On the one hand there is the writing of Abrahams which testifies to his ultimate rejection of life in Vrasedorp and all that it stands for. On the other hand there stand the laments of a group of writers bitterly opposed to the destruction of their homes and slumyards and bemoaning their passing. Although thematically not as unified and clear as the writing of some of the townships to be discussed, it is beyond doubt that South African literature informatively supplements more bland documentation of the slumyard component of local urbanism.

Sophiatown

"When Sophiatown is finally obliterated and her people finally scattered ... South Africa will have lost not only a place, but an *idadi*" (Ruddieston, 1956, p. 137)

The words cited above are those of one of Sophiatown's most favourably disposed residents and their message is resounded in all the literature

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Sophistown

"When Sophistown is finally obliterated and her people finally scattered ... South Africa will have lost not only a place, but an ideal" (Huddleston, 1956, p. 137)

The words cited above are those of one of Sophistown's most favourably disposed residents and their message is resounded in all the literature

about the township. More than any other black urban area, Sophiatown was "celebrated ... in ... literature" (Nkosi, 1965, p. 40). Both the overwhelming number of writers to have preserved the memory of Sophiatown in their work and the volume of literature it provoked, stand as eloquent testimony to a legendary 'slum' of unique and captivating personality.

The vast majority of Sophiatown literature was fashioned in an era of increasing racial repression which ultimately manifested itself in destruction of the township. As outlined in chapter three, writing of the 1950s flourished with the emergence of the first outlet for black literature in the form of *Drum* magazine. Several of the authors cited in the following presentation at some stage either worked on the *Drum* staff or contributed short stories to the journal. The careers of many were in fact launched as journalists or creative writers through the pages of the popular magazine. Their writing generally conforms with that of the 'protest' school. It comprised, for the first time on any significant scale, work about black urbanism by blacks themselves. Several of the authors wrote in the racy, caustic style of America's Harlem Renaissance school (see Bone (1965) for more information on this subject). Their outspoken writing was not overlooked by South African censors and much of the material quoted in this section has been banned from local circulation and quotation (with exception of scholarly consultation and citation in high degree dissertations).

Exiled Modisane is one of the prime contributors to the literature of Sophiatown. The theme threading through his autobiography (banned in South Africa) is the senseless destruction of his past. This is symbolised by the destruction of Sophiatown, his cherished home. Modisane's autobiography is unified by hatred and bitterness. It has been

labelled an ungarnished account of intensely personal suffering (Barnett, 1983) in which everyday degradation and brutality are widely exaggerated. Such exaggeration is perceived to reveal the "posturing fantasy" bled by the urban black lifestyle (Gordimer, 1967, p. 47).

Motsisi and Themba both wrote in a lusty, jocular, satirical, witty sometimes cynical style as if to conceal the anxiety and insecurity of living in Sop' atown. Their writing was a wry and subtle exposé of the sometimes absurd world they inhabited - a world of "early morning bear raids, pass raids, permit raids. Raids, raids, raids" (Motsisi, 1963, p. 31). Of the Sophiatown literary coterie, Themba's work has possibly received the most critical attention. He is reputed to have "fused into the English language the township idiom and rejuvenated tired words with an extreme imagery deriving from a life of danger and violence" (Nkosi, 1975, p. 103). Themba's best creative moments are his celebrations of Sophiatown, a place which he saw as embodying the strength and the will of black people to survive. In his belief, the most splendid moments of life in Sophiatown surpassed all that white Johannesburg had to offer (Nkosi, 1975). Themba's pungent prose was dipped into the potent brew of backstreet urban life, with its ingenious methods of survival and lawlessness which he came to admire increasingly.

Fugard, Huddleston, Sampson, Gordimer and de Ridder are the five whites to have written about aspects of life in Sophiatown. Each in their own way was closely linked to the township. Fugard was said to spend much time in the suburb, discovering how people lived there (Nkosi, 1975). His only novel, *Tsotsi*, is one of the few unbanned full length works offering an insight into the Sophiatown experience (Gray, 1981, p. 61). Gordimer formed a close relationship with the *Drum* writers who then became the

inspiration for *A World of Strangers*, subsequently praised as the first novel by a white writer to penetrate and bring to life the complexity of the black character and his/her abode. Huddleston lived and loved Sophiatown. His roles in the community ranged from parish priest to leader of the campaign against its removal. Sampson was the first editor of *Drum*. He came to know Sophiatown through his many visits to and experiences in the homes and shebeens of his fellow co-editors, creative writers and journalists. Whereas de Ridder may not have had first hand experience of Sophiatown, he describes *Sad Daughter Memories* as "largely true" (de Ridder, 1983, preface). The 'novel' is based on recordings of his interviews with a group of ex-Sophiatown gangsters. Through their experiences, de Ridder re-creates the world they had known so well.

Sophiatown, a "crowded, ramshackle slum set on a hill about four miles out of Johannesburg" (Sampson, 1957, p. 703) was overcrowded, blighted and poverty-stricken: part of "the garbage heap of the proud city" (Paton, 1948, p. 27). Physically, the slumscape was composed of "sordid and over-crowded backyards ... dusty, dirty streets ... slovenly shops ... sprawling and unplanned stretches of corrugated-iron roofs ... fetid and insanitary yards" (Huddleston, 1956, p. 132). The insalubrious expanse was marked by absence of street lighting, open gutters, garbage, inadequate filthy lavatories and stench (Sampson, 1956; Gordimer, 1958; Modisane, 1963; Fugard, 1980).

In keeping with its material trappings, Sophiatown took on the characteristics of a poor ghetto and a slum underworld in respect of the labour and lives of its youth and adults. The games played by the township children were typically those of the public street: "dodging

traffic, stealing rides on horse-drawn trolleys" (Modisane, 1963, p. 18). Activities which engaged adults included the legal and illegal ways of eking out a survival in the informal sector. Among those earning a livelihood in this fashion were:

... sweet-potato sellers, maize sellers, and sweet-reed sellers
... squash sellers, shoe-lace sellers ... women squatting in their
timeless patience behind their huge dishes of maize-cobs, dried
morogo peanut cubes, wild fruits like *marula*, *mahlatswa* ...
(Themba, 1972, p. 27)

Others included washerwomen, newsvendors, dry-bone vendors, coffee-cart traders, beggars, truant loafers and 'odd job boys' who ran errands for shopkeepers (Modisane, 1963; Fugard, 1980). The range of illegal activities pursued included gambling, prostitution and crime, which gave Sophiatown the label 'Chicago of South Africa' (Dikobe, 1977). The township was "a pretty tough place. The living was fast and the money came and went easily. You knew who your friends were, you knew your enemies and you kept a careful eye on the rest" (de Ridder, 1983, p. 18). Shebeen 'queens' and 'kings' sold liquor discretely in their ingeniously concealed dens which went by such exotic names as 'The Cabin the Sky', 'The Thirty-Nine Steps', 'The House Back of the Moon', 'House of Truth', and 'House of Saints' (Sampson, 1957; Themba, 1972). Professional gamblers conducted illicit lotteries ('fah-fee') and thieves, pickpockets and frauds extorted money and property. Thugs and killers sometimes operating in vicious gangs named, for instance, Americans, Vultures, Berliners, Gestapo, spread terror over the neighbourhood (Nxumalo, 1954; Modisane, 1963; Mattera, 1971; Themba, 1972). Mattera (1971, p. 33) recalls his experiences as leader of the Vultures as a "sordid chapter" in his life. Gangsterism was "a way of life in Sophiatown" (Mattera, 1971, p. 33) "Violence and death walk(ed) abroad ... striking out in revenge for thrills and caprice" (Modisane, 1963, p. 59). The staggering waste of

life which resulted was claimed to account for "the raw experience of living ... intensely and dramatically" (Nkosi, 1958, p. 5). "Sophiatown became a slum jungle of here-today-and-dead-tomorrow" (Boetie, 1969, p. 15).

The repellant decay and squalor of Sophiatown, its overcrowdedness, deviance, poverty and flourishing informal economy justified its slum reputation. The suburb was, however, also home to a number of well-housed middle class professionals who lived so as to benefit from proximity to places of work and services, and in most instances from freehold title. Their "beautiful" homes, sometimes "double storied mansions", stood side-by-side with quaint cottages and rusty tin shacks, "locked in a fraternal embrace of filth and felony" (Mattezza, 1971, p. 31). The impression created by the presence of this petty-bourgeois element was that:

... the most talented African men and women from all walks of life - in spite of the hardships they had to encounter - came from Sophiatown. The best musicians, scholars, educationists, singers, artists, doctors, lawyers, clergymen (Tlali, 1975, p. 70)

Various race groups representing all strata of society mingled in the township earning it the status of "the most cosmopolitan of ... black social igloos and perhaps the most perfect experiment in non-racial community living" (Modisane, 1963, p. 16). Shopkeeping, likewise, obeyed no clustering principles:

... an 'American' barber's shop stands next to an African herbalist's store, with its dried roots and dust-laden animal hides hanging in the window. You can go into a store to buy a packet of cigarettes and be served by a Chinaman, Indian or a Pakistani (Huddleston, 1956, p. 127)

There was

... Moosa's store with all those fruity, sweet things in the window was a Chink butcher ... And, next to the butcher, the Bicycle Shop with its blaring juke-box (Thomba, 1972, p. 26).

Writers of Sophiatown unanimously reveal the complexity and vast contrasts offered by the township. Thamba (1972, p. 104) assures "it was not all just shabby, smutty, illegal stuff. Some places it was the stuff that dreams are made of." In one place there was both squalor and charm, violence as much as companionship, bleakness as well as vitality, light and darkness, hope and despair. Sophiatown represented "a complex paradox which attracted opposites; the ring of joy, the sound of laughter was interposed with the growl and smell of insult" (Modisane, 1963, p. 9). The township was "clear and pleasing in places, drab and disgusting in others. Everywhere are the extremes of life" (Mokoto, 1960, p. 11). It embodied "all that was best and worst of African life in towns" (Sampson, 1956, p. 161). There "everything teemed, rotted and flourished" (Gordimer, 1958, p. 161). "Sophiatown for all its horror was civilisation" (Manganyi, writing of Mphahlele, 1983, p. 127). Finally, Sophiatown was

the skeleton with the permanent grin. A live carcass bloated with grief and happiness. Where decency was found in filth and beauty hidden behind ugliness. Where vice was a virtue and virtue a vice. A black heaven crawling with hell (Boetie, 1969, pp. 18-19).

In Huddleston's (1956, p. 132) opinion Sophiatown boasted "a vitality and exuberance ... which belong to no other suburb in South Africa ... It positively sparkles with life". These sentiments are echoed by Sampson (1957, p. 703) who on driving through the white suburb of Westdene located immediately adjacent to Sophiatown, would become highly aware of its neatness, staidness and deadly quiet. He was struck by "the contrast, and the surge of life" on reaching the first crumbling cottages and tumbledown shacks of Sophiatown: "the swart (black) jowl against the rosy cheek of Westdene" (Thamba, 1972, p. 107).

In the restless and energetic township which mirrored "an American Musical" (Sampson, 1957, p. 702)

... the whole cycle of living made a continuous and simultaneous assault on your senses ... men shouting in the street, a procession of some sort, perhaps a school or funeral parade, children quarrelling, a baby crying, a woman singing at a washtub, the rusty bray and clam of the communal lavatory in the yard as people trooped in and out of it ... There were summer nights in Sophiatown ... when no one seemed to go to bed at all ... Urchins gambled under the street-lights ... There was singing and strolling; now and then one of the big American cars that the gangsters use would tear scrunching over the stones, down the street, setting long tongues of dust uncurling ... There was giggling and flirting ... On such a night, suddenly, a procession would burst round the corner, swaying, rocking, moving by a musical peristalsis: men, women and children, led by a saxophone and tin whistles ... (Gordimer, 1958, pp. 160 and 162-163).

On Friday afternoons the township resembled an overturned beehive "the maddest, craziest, noisiest bloody stew of people in the whole of this world ... a human volcano ... a jostling, dusty, heaving mass" (de Ridder, 1983, p. 112). Yet on Saturday mornings

The sun peeped out slowly from the Easterly womb. Slowly, almost furtively as though it wanted to take Sophiatown by surprise. But Sophiatown cannot be taken by surprise. Sophiatown may go to sleep late in the night, drunk, violent and rowdy. But in the small hours of the morning she wakes up, yawns away her hangover and prepares herself for another uncertain day" (Motsisi, 1963, p. 31).

On Sunday Sophiatown put on another face of colour and spectacle:

The streets seethed with people and the usual drums, trombones, bugles and concertinas sounded the 'Marabi' as gaily dressed women danced ... Some walked to and from church, erect and proud and cleansed, from one week's sinning and debauchery, 'a preparation for another. The sun was at its Sunday best" (Mattera, 1971, p. 35).

In these respects, Sophiatown acquired the symbolic status of being at the "centre of the metropolis" (Tlali, 1975, p. 70). It was "the most lively, important and sophisticated" of townships (Sampson, 1957, p. 703). Appropriate to its proud standing the township was likened to "the gay Paris of Johannesburg", to "New York" (Mattera, 1971) and to

"Limehouse, Chelsea, Tottenham Court Road and Surbiton rolled into one" (Sampson, 1956, p. 28). Several writers have described its life in a flood of rich adjectives: "swarming, cacophonous, strutting, brawling, vibrating" (Thembe, 1972, p. 104), "wild, exciting, tumultuous ... vital, raw, violent" (Paton, 1981, p. 111), "gay, squalid, dangerous and intensely human" (Sampson, 1957, p. 702).

The bustle and variety of Sophiatown were responsible for transforming the suburb from a labour camp to a lived-in home:

... we made the desert bloom; made alterations, converted half-verandas into kitchens, decorated the houses and filled them with music. We were house-proud. We took the ugliness of life in a slum and wove a kind of beauty; we established bonds of human relationships which set a pattern of communal living, far richer and more satisfying - materially and spiritually - than any model housing could substitute (Modisane, 1963, p. 16).

Giving credence to Eliot Hurst's assertion that people are place and place is people, Sophiatown both moulded and became the personality of its people. Modisane asserts: "we did not live in it. we were Sophiatown" (Modisane, 1963, p. 9). In one instance the township nourished part of a strait-laced character which had previously been starved (Gordimer, 1958). Thembe goes even further to declaim that "you don't just find yourself here, you make it and find yourself" (1972, p. 107). The powerful sense of belonging and attachment to Sophiatown is poignantly revealed in the following two testimonies:

Something in me died, a piece of me died with the dying of Sophiatown (Modisane, 1963, p. 3).

I cannot say why I was left behind to mark the ultimate death of Sophiatown, because with it something was dying within, small and unnoticeable, but dying just the same" (Matters, 1971, p. 44)

The soul of Sophiatown was not only a product of its own unique attributes. It was also defined in relation to the soulless municipally controlled locations, places whose qualities were intimately shaped by Sophiatown memories and expectations:

Sophiatown is not a location. That is my first reason for loving it. It is so utterly free from monotony, in its siting, in its buildings and in its people .. (Locations) are abstract, colourless places (Huddleston, 1956, pp. 124 and 126).

As in the case of Soweto, the pallor and rigidity of the matchbox houses in the black locations is a recurrent theme in South African literature. Meadowlands, the suburb of Soweto to which the majority of Sophiatown residents were moved was described as:

... soul-destroying, a depressing monotony, the houses look like thousands of mushrooms on a hillside, small unit detached houses dispatched without love or propriety, monolithic monsters from the architect's boards of the National Building Research Institute (Modisane, 1963, p. 105).

Meadowlands is much too clean for us. It's been cleaned up of all colour and spiritual values that one still recognises in the life of Sophiatown (Nkosi, 1958, p. 5).

The sense of placelessness and unbelonging conveyed by the locations emphasised Sophiatown's peculiar embrace. By virtue of the tall iron fences around most locations, and by virtue of the presence in every location of a white superintendent and officials, it was remarked that "a location cannot *belong* to anyone except the people who control it, the European officials who live far away in the city, that other abstraction, 'the municipality'" (Huddleston, 1956, p. 126). Sophiatown was not fenced in, there was no superintendent, nobody had to ask permission to live or visit there. So it was that Tlali wrote of "our Sophiatown" (Tlali, 1973, p. 73).

The sense of loss which was occasioned by the destruction of Sophiatown in the name of slum clearance is a final indication of the meaning which suffused the township. In his poem 'The Day They Came For Our House', Mattered poignantly captures the torment, animosity and hopelessness brought about by the municipal wreckers.

... Armed with bulldozers
they came
to do a job
nothing more
just hired killers

We gave way
there was nothing we could do
although the bitterness stung in us,
in the place we knew to be part of us
and in the earth around

We stood
Slow, painfully slow
clumsy crushers crawled
over the firm pillars
into the rooms that held us
and the roof that covered our heads

We stood
Dust clouded our vision
We held back our tears
It was over in minutes,
Done.
Bulldozers have power
They can take apart in a few minutes
all that had been built up over the years
and raised over generations
and generations of children.

The power of destroying
the pain of being destroyed

Dust ...

('The Day They Came for Our House', Mattered, 1983, pp. 5-6)

The pain of Sophiatown's removal lurked behind the prose of even the most witty, light-hearted and jocular of writers

I do not like the dead eyes with which some of these ghost houses stare back at me. One of these days I, too, will get me out of here. Finish and clear! (Themba, 1972, p. 108)

The callous, bureaucratic destruction transformed Sophiatown into "a wasteland, like a canvas by Salvador Dali, with all the despairing posture of mass desolation" (Modisane, 1963, p. 42). "Buildings lie beaten by bulldozers / and scavengers rake / The skeletal dreams / Of a dispossessed people" (Mattera, 1963, p. 3)). All that remained of the township was its "proud indestructable soul ... an undying symbol for those who loved Sophiatown, and those who feared it" (Modisane, 1963, p. 33). Before its demise Sophiatown had been "a symbol of the black man's capacity to endure the worst; it was also a symbol of his arrogance, resilience and scorn for the white suburb from which he was excluded" (Nkosi, 1965, p. 40). Prostrate Sophiatown had become a stark symbol of faded dreams and broken lives, its people "pawns on the devil's board" (Boetie, 1969, p. 14).

There is little doubt that the lived world of Sophiatown preserved in writing adds richly to the scientific information sources on the township. Whereas official reports have emphasised observable and quantifiable features of the place - its rundown appearance especially - literary sources make much more of the underlying qualities of community, vitality and opportunity. Above all it appears that Sophiatown offered a sense of stature, belonging and individuality in conditions of poverty. The heartfelt accounts given in literature underline the paradox of Sophiatown: emotional plenty among material shortage.

Sophiatown has been demolished and her people scattered. As in cases where districts have changed their character and when there are few people able to articulate their memories of those places, literature is one of the only sources of 'sense-data' about the township. Under these circumstances, a literary geography is particularly apt.

Alexandra

Alexandra stands out in local black urban history as a tract of territory to have survived continual promise of obliteration. The literature pertaining to the township (particularly that by residents) mirrors uncertainty, frustration, despair and fear of the imminent doom awaiting its people. Loss of Alexandra meant not only losing one's home, friends and family, but also losing a treasured and rare sense of freedom. Soweto, the distant township to which residents were moved, held verifiable connotations of sterility, monotony and control - characteristics from which Alexandra had been spared. Especially significant was the resilience of Alexandra's people, their resistance to the removals and struggle to save a place they loved. Powerful allegiance to Alexandra permeates the creative writing dedicated to her cause. In the following examination of South African writing, the sense of Alexandra is brought to the fore. The study commences with a presentation of the township's physical appearance and atmosphere and proceeds to unravel the meaning which it held for its residents.

Certainly for the white, and often to the black writer, Alexandra's bleak physical appearance could not be denied. Unlit streets, filth, poverty, urban decay and high incidence of gangsterism and crime had earned the township the title 'Dark City'. Although official documents and news reports have chronicled the squalid fabric which was Alexandra, nowhere is the portrait of the township as convincingly and evocatively painted as in literature. One observes for example the manner in which one of the township's most revered and sensitive poets captures the startling contrast between Alexandra and adjacent Johannesburg:

Alexandra is closely related to Johannesburg. From the centre of the Golden City to the Centre of the Dark City is a mere nine miles. Where one starts the other ends. The difference between the two is like day and night. Everything that says anything about the progress of man, the distance which man has made in terms of technology, efficiency and comfort: the Golden City says it well; the Dark City, by contrast is dirty and deathly. The Golden City belongs to the white people of South Africa, and the Dark City to the black people (Sarote, 1981, p. 28).

Effectively employing simple images of darkness and light, the poet emphasises the physical proximity yet emotional distance between Alexandra and Johannesburg. Inextricably linked as are night and day, the two 'cities' differ vastly in terms of the 'quality of life' they offer.

The image of Alexandra as a 'dirty and deathly ghetto' is commonly painted in the literature of the township. The picture of extreme deprivation has, moreover, altered little over the years. In the 1940s, Alexandra's unkempt streets, absence of lighting, extensive yards, overcrowding, thieving and illicit brewing was remarked upon:

Things are so bad ... that the white people of Orange Grove and Norwood and Highlands North got up a petition to do away with the place altogether (Paton, 1948, p. 41).

A decade later the township is painted in all its squalor as

... an abandoned-looking place outside the northern boundaries of Johannesburg, a kind of vast, smoking rubbish-pile picked over by voracious humanity. All the people who lived there worked in Johannesburg, but the town did not own the place, nor was it responsible to it. It had the aged look of all slums - even the earth, the red dirt roads, seemed worn down to their knobbly shins, and there was nothing, no brick, post or piece of tin that was new and had not been battered in and out of the shape of a succession of uses - but, in fact, like everything else in Johannesburg, it was, in terms of human habitation, young, fresh, hardly begun; perhaps thirty or forty years old. From the beginning, it must have been a proliferation of dirt and decay ... (Gordimer, 1958, p. 130).

As a place of mean shops and sordid, patched and pocked hovels, of naked children and skeletal dogs, Alexandra was perceived to epitomise rotting drabness (Gordimer, 1963b, pp. 174 and 270). Some twenty years

later contemporary writing records the appalling physical fabric of the 'Dark City'. Echoing the seed appearance which struck Gordimer in 1958, de Ridder (1983, p.52) likens Alexandra's tangle of streets and side alleys to the "scars of time on an old man's face":

Its a mass of rusted tin and rotted bricks spewed along the curve of the Jukskei River as it chews its way through the brown earth of the Transvaal highveld. It's a living mess ... dreary, colourless and bloody frightening (de Ridder, 1983, p. 52).

In Serote's (1981, p. 54) words also, Alexandra is a "mess", a harsh environment plagued by pass regulations, police, torn streets, frightening crowded houses, rubbish, neglected animals and brutal gangs (Serote, 1981, pp. 30 and 54).

Yet, for all its glaring material deficiencies, Alexandra was prized by many of its occupants as a haven, free of many regulations applicable to locations. Once again, it is the poets and novelists who have delved beneath the putrid surface to uncover a unique atmosphere and ironically, a profound sense of security and belonging which the township gave its inhabitants. Through large parts of such writing, residents voice vigorous opposition to the demolition of Alexandra and displacement of her people.

Alexandra's redeeming atmosphere is captured in a manner common to that of much township writing. As in the cases of Sophiatown and to a lesser extent Vrededorp, Doornfontein, District Six and even Soweto and Marabastad, it is people and their peculiar adaptation to and transcendence of physical deprivation that make up the personality of a place. Alexandra is accordingly likened to a stew bubbling from the variety and exuberance of her inhabitants. Similar to other black urban

areas it is during the street scenes, the week-end and the nights that the township parades its best face:

Alex makes its peculiar Sunday mornings, afternoons and nights. The sun, the smell of food, music; the women in their brand new Sunday skirts - something about the way they walk, they smile. They are loud when they talk or laugh - the women ... hug the sun ... in their gestures ... There is a Sunday noise in Alexandra. It purrs and buzzes ... (Serote, 1981, pp. 25 - 26)

Even the danger of Alexandra's streets which were prowled by petty criminals, ferocious gangs and ever-present officials can take on a positive light. Speaking endearingly of his "home", one poet/novelist relates the personal security the township offered despite its "danger", "darkness" and "hooligans" (Dikobe, 1982, p. 39). Serote (1981, p. 71) proceeds even further acknowledging his gratefulness for the "animal agility, a kind of tiger alertness" and self-defence he was taught in Alexandra's streets.

In Gordimer's (1958) *A World of Strangers* (the first novel by a white writer to penetrate the reality of township existence), the leading character is drawn towards and deeply enriched by life in Alexandra. The experience of living in the townships (notably Alexandra and Sophiatown) sheds light on a brittle existence in affluent suburbs of white Johannesburg. In his evocation of the two distant, quite separate and isolated worlds, the narrator of *A World of Strangers* makes no bones about where his preferences lie. The celebration of life in impoverished townships such as Alexandra does not arouse moral or intellectual outrage, but is affirmed as ministering to an emotional nourishment.

As will be discussed shortly, a flood of poetry which grappled with the threat of Alexandra's removal emerged in the late 1970s. As illustrated

in the third chapter of this dissertation, re-awakening of the poetic mode of expression began with the black consciousness movement. Although initially still 'protest' in nature, literature was directed away from liberal white readership towards the black community with the intent of stimulating awareness and rejection of black subordination.

Permeating the more contemporary writing of Alexandra is the meaning with which the township is imbued and the sense of loss brought about by its partial clearance. An impressive number of poems focusing upon Alexandra flowed from the work of Serote who currently exiled in Botswana, knew, loved and was separated from the township. His intense, pain-wracked verse reveals a remarkable affinity with the dying township. Another established writer and forerunner of black consciousness poetry communicated, through verse, his anger at Alexandra's impending doom. In keeping with the tradition set by the new black poetry, Gwala (1982) writes with unconcealed bitterness and contempt about the white avarice, authority and manipulation confronted during Alexandra's struggle.

A striking phenomenon of the Alexandra poetry is its personification of place. Alexandra is endowed with human qualities suggestive of the rare kinship present between township and resident. In Serote's writings, for example, the place is addressed and symbolised as a mother:

Were it possible to say,
Mother, I have seen more beautiful mothers,
A most loving mother,
And tell her there I will go,
Alexandra, I would have long gone from you.
(*'Alexandra'*, Serote, 1972, p. 22)

As such 'she' is part of his being, representing and embodying the pain, anguish, unshakable endurance and humility of black urban living:

And Alexandra
 My beginning was knotted to you,
 Just like you knot my destiny.
 You throb in my inside silences...
 Alexandra, I love you;
 I know
 When all these worlds became funny to me,
 I silently waded back to you
 And amid the rubble I lay,
 Simple and black

('Alexandra', Serote, 1972, pp. 22-23)

It is difficult to elaborate on the deep sense of belonging and place shown by the poet. Alexandra's filth and decay ("your breasts are the dirty waters of your dengas") and her violence ("you frighten me, Mama / You wear expressions like you would be nasty to me"), cannot loosen or unfasten his tie to her:

I lie flat while others walk on me to far places.
 I have gone from you, many times,
 I come back

('Alexandra', Serote, 1972, p. 22)

In his second poetry collection (1974), Serote's despair of Alexandra's predicament continues to pervade his writing. Heartfelt images of tears, blood, mute screams, and death coexist with the roar of the bulldozer, heaps of rubble, dazed men and women, confused children and desolate streets (poems: 'Another Alexandra', pp. 59-60 and 'Amen! Alexandra', p. 14). Rather than promising to return to Alexandra to be amid the rubble, Serote seems to mourn yet accept the township's passing, preserving it as a memory:

Alexandra you are a thunder clap,
 that froze in our hearts
 like a moment which becomes a cruel memory
 ('Amen! Alexandra', Serote, 1974, p. 14)

At the risk of detracting from the poignant recollections of Alexandra in Serote's poetry, the glaring contrast between these writings and those of his later novel *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981) demands attention. Whereas the former are saturated with a strong sense of place, the latter conveys almost exclusively a meaningless environment: a sense of placelessness. Passages such as the following are representative:

But what is this shit, what is this thing called Alexandra? Seven streets. Twenty-two avenues. Houses. Tin Houses. Brick houses. Torr Streets. Small. Dongas. Dirty water in street. Dark City. The devil's kitchen. Township Alex. What is this mess? ... Permits. Passes. Police ... What is Alexandra? (Serote, 1981, p. 41)

Explanations for the contrasting styles can only be guessed. Considering the backgrounds of the passages, the most noticeable difference occurs in the moment of their writing. The poetry was written during the period of the Alexandra removals and demolition. Readers tend to regard the literature as protest writing aimed at a sympathetic, potentially influential white liberal readership. Yet Serote's writing is allegedly not overtly political (Levumo, 1982). Critics have proceeded further to assert that by virtue of its highly personal nature, Serote's writing is neither designed for any particular readership, nor intended to incite reaction by whites. Apart from these considerations, the poetry may have been conceived and started before the confirmation of Alexandra's survival. Whatever the real explanation, the contrast between Serote's poetry and his novel are a splendid illustration of an awkward problem confronting use of literature as a tool of geographical enquiry.

The last poems about Alexandra to be cited here mirror the themes evident in Serote's poetry. Once again the township is attributed human qualities and, as before, it symbolises endless suffering and gallant

struggle. In a poem effectively titled 'Alexandra (Trudged on)', Moloto states:

I remember your flesh, bullet-riddled.
Waddish soaking clothes
Dripping like a blanket on a line
Drops shrinking soil below.
Mzansi's reign

Your wound deepened when friends
Divorced you to marry Thembisa and Soweto ...

I remember your people
Winking you to stay.
Leaders drunk with fatigue
Dragging you from a whispering death.
Although hurt you trudged on.

('Alexandra (Trudged on)' Moloto, 1980, p. 20)

The concluding verse captures beautifully the unflinching communal spirit of a people determined to save a dying home. Courageous collaboration between resolute inhabitants and exhausted leaders willed the township to survive. Those who left were branded traitors, the new areas they inhabited, "diseases". Moloto's lines: "our wound deepened when friends / Divorced you to marry Thembisa and Soweto" are an echo of Lengwati's

... Dear late Aler ...

I remember the diseases you
suffered from, Diepkloof
Meadowlands, Thembisa, Klipspruit".

('Alexandra', Lengwati, 1978, p. 32)

and Gwala's

... Alexandra

your sons are exiled
to boxhouses
of diepkloof
meadowlands
thembisa

but always
they return
to your guttered streets
to your squeezed yards...

('Alexandra', Gwala, 1977, p. 46)

Only in Gwala's poetry is the white person not spared the blame for Alexandra's fate. Gwala goes beyond expressing his affection for Alexandra to attack the neighbouring cause of its deterioration. Materialist greed (embodied in elite white Sandton suburb) operating through foul laws is the target of Gwala's disgust:

Alexandra ...
The enriching monster that is GOLD
pierces electric eyes into you,
Threatens everything black
- Sandton seems to float upon a sea
of sand
In which is deeped the arena blood
of your sons
By greedy landgrabbers you are made
to be a pair of scissors
to cut through the dirty cloth
of Group Areas inhibition.
(Exit Alexandra - 23:5:74', Gwala, 1982, pp. 27-28)

These words, as indeed much of the writing about Alexandra, were inspired by the black consciousness movement outlined in the previous chapter. Whereas the literature examined shares themes identified in the protest writing about Sophiatown, the urgency of its message is more characteristic of contemporary Sowetan poetry. The poetic mode of much of the literature further contrasts with the dominantly prose form of Sophiatown and slumyard writing. In meaning and intent, however, Alexandra's literature deviates little from the literature observed in the Sophiatown example. This is so in spite of the fifteen to twenty years which lapsed between proliferation of the two literatures. On a physical plane, Alexandra and Sophiatown shared rundown appearances and lifestyles reminiscent of slum existence. Balanced against these tangible characteristics was their spontaneity, chaos and warmth as brought out in the observations of creative writers. In the Alexandra case too, this information is absent or withheld from official information sources. Finally, the demolition of parts of Alexandra and displacement

of her inhabitants to Soweto kindled a spate of smouldering poetry which was not dissimilar to the embittered prose provoked by the slumyard and Sophiatown removals. This literature affirms the sense of place and belonging which the township afforded its occupants.

Apart from age and era, the single greatest difference between the reality of black settlement which germinated the literature considered so far, and that of Soweto, is that unlike Alexandra, Sophiatown and the slumyards, Soweto's permanence has never yet been at risk. Consequences for her own literature are explored below.

Soweto

Many victims of repeated 'slum clearance' in the Johannesburg area live in Soweto, which in a rising tide of black consciousness and white shame has become the subject of extensive literary scrutiny. Housing close on one and half million people, the township has acquired the status of a ghetto symbolic of dehumanisation, oppression and institutionalised violence. This home of but a fraction of South Africa's dispossessed, is described by a journalist as "... a vibrating, pulsating, and complex world where violence, poverty, injustice, crime and despair coexist with the laughter of children, companionship, compassion and determination ..." (Lee, 1978, p. 1). Its literary representation, although mirror of most of these aspects, fails (or deliberately avoids) to evoke the sense of place characteristic of the township literature just examined. The overwhelming emphasis by black and white writer alike is upon relating the appalling conditions in an austere and hostile environment.

In the ensuing presentation the image of Soweto revealed in black and white South African literature is illuminated. Descriptions of the physical conditions in the township are laid out and such pervasive images as darkness, dirt and death, and themes of violence, fear, alienation and placelessness are identified in the writing.

Those writers to have expressed their impressions of Soweto in literature consistently reveal the alienation which they experienced from the township. To one authoress, the place is one where definitions are persistently challenged. In her own words:

... houses (are) the outhouses of white suburbs, two-windows-one-door, multiplied in institutional rows, the hovels with tin lean-tos sheltering huge old American cars blowzy with gadgets; the fanny suburban burglar bars on mean windows of tiny cabins; the roaming children, wolverine dogs, hobbled donkeys, fat naked babies, vagabond chickens and drunks weaving, old men staring, authoritative women shouting, boys in rags, tarts in finery, the smell of offal cooking, the neat patches of mealies between shebeen yards stinking of beer and urine, the litter of twice-discarded possessions, first thrown out by the white man and then picked over by the black (Gordimer, 1979, p. 149).

The combination of sights, sounds and smells is repellant. Whereas the authoress in question had found an intangible appeal, an indefinable vitality, beneath the squalor of Alexandra and particularly Sophiatown, Soweto seems not to have a single redeeming attribute. Children roam rather than play and giggle; women shout rather than gossip and laugh. The inability of the white outsider to identify with the township environment is spelled out by another authoress. On a journey through Soweto, she was horrified by the squalid houses, rutted roads, litter and staring people. She felt herself "ripped out of time, hurled into that squalid and picturesque past conjured up by nineteenth century illustrators - the world of Charles Dickens' London or Hogarth - not my world at all" (Marquard, 1977, p. 56).

White discomfort and alienation in Soweto is shockingly captured in Lionel Abrahams' 'Soweto Funeral' (1979, pp. 14-16). The Johannesburg poet had travelled through the township "Unwillingly intent / to reach one Sunday suburb more / of mortal knowledge". Rather than focusing upon the funeral activities to which he is spectator, he is mesmerised by the surroundings where a

... dormitory world of low new huts
in ranked battalions, uniform by blocks
quilts the tilting hugeness of the veld

House patterns A,B,C,D
in turn insist their order to our eyes
(*'Soweto Funeral'*, Abrahams *et al*, 1975, pp. 14-16)

As white city dweller he is estranged by the "ruled", "tabulated", flat township laid out in "rigid rows" which dare not "interrupt the sky / or curtail distances". He is reduced to the status of "tourist" who strays "the nameless revelled streets of / ... live ignorance".

For the most part, black South African literature chronicles the adverse physical conditions in various suburbs of Soweto and the dehumanised, anti-social violence and bloodshed they breed. Writing does little to conceal an existence of "only chaos and despair in the jumbled shattered existence of the Soweto Ghetto" (Tlali, 1981, p. 13).

Among the Soweton 'suburbs' treated in literature is Orlando and its "ulcer" (Mphahlele, 1959, p. 203), the adjoining squatter settlement known as Shanty Town. The world of Orlando was "a pit of darkness, darkness charged with screams, groans, yells, cries, laughter and singing ... humanity gasping for air ... life thrown into a barbed-wire tangle" (Mphahlele, 1959, p. 204). In Mphahlele's opinion the township was a glorified version of Pretoria's Marabastad (Mphahlele, 1959, p. 203). The

only tarred roads led to authority in the form of the white superintendent. There was no water-borne sewerage or electricity. The irony of the absence of the latter in the immediate vicinity of the Orlando Power Station which lights the Golden City is transparent.

The power station looms loud
It stands clear against the sky
This source of city light
High above
The sob sacking shanty plights ...
The power station
Is not for their glory,
Ever or ever in the unswitchable night
(Orlando: A Wintertime', Lipkin, 1957 p. 99)

If the cramped three-roomed sub-economic houses of the township epitomised bleak living, conditions in the "sob sacking shanty plights" in the valley between Orlando East and Orlando West were infinitely more dismal. Shanty Town first received literary attention in Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The spontaneous squatter settlement was a survival response to the chronic housing shortage following the tremendous influx of blacks to Johannesburg in the early 1940s, itself a movement stimulated by labour opportunities in wartime industry. Paton's apparently accurate documentation of the housing crisis (Pinchuk, 1963) was undoubtedly meant to raise outcry among influential white liberals. He tells of the painstaking search for accommodation and of the bribery and corruption it occasioned (echoed later in Matshoba's writing). The climactic outcome of the crisis was the emergence overnight of Shanty Town, a conglomeration of "tragic habitations" comprising an amazing variety of ingredients: sacking, corrugated iron, wood, hessian, grass ... (Paton, 1948, pp. 49 and 57). The improvised rickety structures, poverty and squalor of the settlement together with the astonishing resilience among its people is poignantly captured by both Paton and Mphahlele.

Housing in Pinville, another of the original sections of Soweto was equally bizarre and desperate. It was a "village of half-tanks used as houses" (Paton, 1948, p.61). Jabavu (1963, p. 206) notes with horror the "purgatoria" conditions in the township. Allegedly a temporary settlement, *amaTankini* survived for over half a century.

The newer 'suburbs' of contemporary Soweto are portrayed with gloom and despair not dissimilar to accounts already cited. Curiously named 'White City Jabavu' features in one of Mtshali's poems:

I don't see
anything white
in this White City -
just the blackness
of a widow's garments
of mourning.

Maybe the only
whiteness is
of a waif's teeth that chatter
in the hungry mouth.

Or the
white eye-ball
of a plundered corpse,
lying in the gutter.

Around me
is the gloomy
street corner
where dark figures
dart to deal
a deadly blow
on passersby.

I hear
women scream
in sorrow and despair
drying the gay rivers
of carousers

I stop
to ponder
but what is white
in White City Jabavu?

('White City Jabavu', Mtshali, 1971, p. 70)

Other than the poet's indignation at the irony of the suburb's inappropriate name, notice the abundant use of images of death, darkness and violence. The portrait of White City Jabavu is both representative of the larger Soweto and an overriding theme in Soweto literature. Images of dust, dirt and rubbish point to a choking environment under which aspirations and ambitions are buried. Extracts from poems preoccupied with the stifling township include the following contribution by one who claims

i have seen rubbish bins
but Soweto is the best one
she contains the garbage
of all ages
('Vuka', Mankwa, 1980, p. 42)

A second poet implores us to:

Look deep into the ghetto
And see modernised graves
Where only the living dead exist
Manacled by chains
So as not to resist

Look the ghetto over
You will see smog hover
And dust choking
The lifeless-living-dead
('The Ghetto', Maponya, 1980, p. 9)

Several lines of yet another poem point further to this experiential landscape of placelessness:

these streets are bloody dirty
these streets go nowhere
they've woven the children of this town into their dust
they've woven to nowhere
these streets are dirty and dusty
they've made the children of this town gasp in their dongas
('No Baby Must Weep', Serote, 1975, p. 46)

In keeping with its origins, Soweto remains little more than a labour entrepôt, a place which has never been allowed to evolve into a city with

an infrastructure and facilities befitting the size of its population. One glaring symbol of Soweto's role as a labour camp are the hostels which house mainly those men separated from their families by the influx control laws. These 'single' quarters are among the most pernicious facets of Sowetan living to receive literary attention. Matshoba's (1981) provocatively titled 'To Kill a Man's Pride' probes deeply the evil of hostel life. The opening lines to his story read:

Every man is born with a certain amount of pride in his humanity. But I have come to believe that pride is only a mortal thing, and that there are many ways to destroy it. One sure way is to take a man and place him in a Soweto hostel (Matshoba, 1981, p. 104).

Matshoba lashes out at Mzimhlope hostel, home of some twenty thousand migrant labourers, as a "shameful place", Soweto's own "Auschwitz", a rotting, neglected unhygienic pigsty of deprived men living in "the lowest state of dereliction". Forty-eight men occupied each "fifty pace long" dormitory:

There is absolutely no privacy there. You sleep in your corner of the closet, or the door-like lid of a brick kist in which you are supposed to keep your possessions, a metre from the man next to you and the men below you (Matshoba, 1981, p. 117).

In this debasing, inhumane environment in particular and in Soweto in general, murder and violence is rife. This is not to suggest that it is an exclusive feature of Soweto. Sophiatown and Alexandra also had their share of gangsterism and danger. Nowhere, however, is the literary treatment of violence as preoccupying as it is in the Soweto example. Two leading black South African poets, namely, Sepamla and Mtshali have written extensively of brutality in Soweto. One critic has noted the astonishing number of words in Sepamla's poet / that embrace the concept of fear. They include terror, fleeing, cowed, scared, alarm, frantic, cowardly, hounded, panic, scurry, scuttle and tremble (February, 1982).

Sepemla's collection, ironically titled *The Soweto I Love* (1977), reflects the terror of one South African landscape in which life is a nightmare.

The world and the existence presented in Mtshali's disturbingly vivid poetry about black urban life is equally distorted and tilted. Many of his subjects are the victims of violently self-destructive and anti-social behaviour (Ndebele, 1982). For instance, a newly born baby is abandoned on a rubbish heap and attacked by scavenging dogs. The horrific event reveals the everyday almost matter-of-fact reality of township poverty, infant mortality and family disintegration. In yet another poem, a man having paused to watch a senseless murder on his way to church, saunters home with "heart as light as an angel's kiss" ('Just a passerby', Mtshali, 1971, p. 74). Life is so precarious that even the dignity of dying is belittled. It is reduced to

the mistress
with whom we
brazenly carry on
an ill - it love affair
that ends only
in the grave
(*'Death - the tart'*, Mtshali, 1971, p. 80)

In Soweto

Nightfall comes like
a dreadful disease
seeping through the pores
of a healthy body
and ravaging it beyond repair

A murderer's hand
lurking in the shadows
clasp the dagger
strikes down the helpless victim...

Man has ceased to be man
Man has become beast
Man has become prey ...
(*'Nightfall in Soweto'*, Mtshali, 1971, pp. 58-59)

Both striker and victim are dehumanised in the brutal township environment. Life is so warped that natural processes are likened to ghastly sickness. The casualty ward of Soweto's largest hospital is likened to a battlefield:

... victims of war
waged in the dark alley
flocked in cars, taxis, ambulances and trucks ...

Doctors darting
from place to place
with harried nurses at their side
So! it's Friday night!
Everybody's enjoying
in Soweto
('Intake night - Baragwanath Hospital', Mtshali, 1971, p. 56)

The world of Soweto is one where violence is an integral part of existence reducible even to entertainment. This obsession with violence is not confined to the works of established writers. Less well-known poets are equally resolute in their view of Soweto as harbour "of crime and forced excitement / Enslaved by ailments and darkness" ('Soweto Is ...', Rabeetha, 1978, p. 33). Letlago's short, chilling poem reads

I hear
Faint little voices
The folk-songs are subsiding
The black slumbering giant
Is going to sleep
And deathly fear grips my heart
('Soweto Village', Letlago, 1980, p. '1)

Soweto is presented across time and in a wide range of works, as a brutal environment; one which negates normal living. The stark difference in literary treatment of Soweto as compared to that of the townships examined previously is traceable to the black conscious movement of the 1970s and its associated heightened awareness of racial prejudice and oppression. Writers may deliberately fail to reveal the colour and life

in the township so as to side-stre accusations of submitting to subordination. Paradoxically, however, the black consciousness literature of Alexandra township dwells upon the community, vitality and sense of place with which the township obliged its inhabitants. It may also have been that reaction to the imminent destruction of Sophiatown, the slumyards and Alexandra that incited nostalgic writers to amplify the assets of those places.

Indicative of unfailing perception of Soweto as an alienating environment, even the most elite area of the township, Selection Park, has "something unsettled about it." "The houses, the laws, bricks and mortar, the neighbours - everything is new or so it feels. The streets are tarred and there are pavements of sorts in this part of Soweto ... No. 5444 is where I live" (Manganyi, writing of Mphahlele, 1983, p. 10). The latter sentence is pregnant with implication. Mphahlele's house is defined not by its appearance or street name, for example, but by number. It is furthermore not described as his *home* but where 'he lives'. The impression created is one of placelessness. Soweto's alienating effects seem to extend across social strata, across individual suburbs, across time and across race. This notwithstanding, there are scattered literary references to some kind of security and belonging that the sprawling ghetto has failed to muzzle.

On her return visit to South Africa Jabavu (1963) is struck by the life and harmony in a spectacle of men, women and children laughing, living and playing oblivious of and in contrast to their squalid surroundings. Matshoba (1979, pp. 92-106) refers to his "dear old Mzimhlope township": "to me it is home, and no place is better than home". As Soweto sprawls "to the horizons like a reposing giant" he "could not help feeling

something like awe, a clutch at the heart of my being." Having been away
some weeks he has missed "the quicksand of location life" in which
there is "never a dull moment". The ambivalence in Matshoba's "beloved
kennel", in his "unbearably vibrant ... labour camp" cannot be overlooked.
His juxtaposition of endearment and laudatory adjectives with demeaning
metaphors is deeply ironic. So too is Sepamla's statement:

I love you Soweto
I've done so long before
the summer swallow deserted you
I have bemoaned the smell of death
hanging on your neck like an albatross
I have hated the stench of your blood
blood made to flow in every street

but I have taken courage
in the thought that
those who mother your back
will carry on with the job
of building anew
a body of being
from the ashes in the ground

(*Soweto*, Sepamla, 1977, pp. 43-24)

The poem stands out in a volume in which the mood is one of utter
pessimism. Sepamla's love is for Soweto's people and the undaunted
perseverance they symbolise. His words hold intonations of courage,
strength, challenge and unbreakable determination in the will to survive
and transcend suffering.

As much as any place, Soweto is complex, and the essence of life there
resists easy classification and description. To the extent possible
Sepamla (1976) has perhaps been better able than most to illuminate the
diversity of the township where definitions fail where authority and hope
are ever present; where images are distorted and analogies warped:

The blues is the shadow of a cop
dancing the Immorality Act jitterbug
the blues is the Group Areas Act and all its jive
the blues is the Bantu Education Act and its improvisations
the blues is those many words said to repair

yesterdays filled again and again by today's promises...
(*'The blues is you in me'*, Sepamla, 1976, p. 7)

The austerity of Soweto's artificial environment and the predatory lifestyle and privations it breeds are dramatically spelled out in literature. Once again the subjective world observed by poets and novelists almost contradicts the impression conveyed by conventional information sources. Contrary to the official documentations of Sophiatown which dwells upon the township's slumminess, government reports emphasise the racial purity and neat orderliness of Soweto. Whereas literary sources highlighted the emotional affinity with Sophiatown, many reveal an emotional alienation from Soweto. In tandem with the contrived establishment of the township, the experiential landscape of Soweto which emerges in literature is one of placelessness. The consistency with which writers of literature evoke the wretchedness of life in Soweto together with the absence of scholarly penetration into the subjective realm of the township adds weight to the case for a literary geography there.

Dominant Themes in Township Literature

The question which arises from the preceding examination of the physical conditions, daily activities and personal experiences in Johannesburg's slumyards, Sophiatown, Alexandra and Soweto is whether there are recurrent themes and topics which thread through the literature. In the following section, several dominant threads in the literature cited are drawn together for discussion. They include contrast between black township and white city, monotony versus variety, location versus freehold area, physical deprivation and poverty, police and official intervention, violence and demolition, and loss.

The first significant theme demanding elucidation concerns the striking difference observed in literature between black and white worlds; between black townships/suburbs and white cities/towns. Serote (1981, p. 28) asserts that although Alexandra is only nine miles from the Golden City centre, "the difference between the two is like night and day". In Johannesburg itself "the white and black worlds which jostle one another on the same pavement are yet farther apart than the stars themselves" (Huddleston, 1956, p. 14). The great gulf between city and township is felt by white and black writer alike. Contrasting Sophiatown with Johannesburg, Fugard notes "A few blocks away ... was the 'real' city, the illuminated, glittering arcade of the white man's world. It might just as well have been on the other side of the earth" (1980, p. 57). Seen from Orlando, Soweto, the Johannesburg lights "... are so far away, too far for you to reach. Between you and them is a pit of darkness" (Mphahlele, 1957, p. 204). The contrast between Vrededorp and the Johannesburg suburbs, too, was "so great, I might as well have stepped into another world, on another planet" (Abrahams, 1950, p. 103).

In Bloom's (1956, pp. 10-13) piece which dwells upon a 'fictional', typical Transvaal location, the shocking contrast between the clean, tidy, pretty, sheltered town and its "submerged half, an ominous counterpart that lives within its shadow" (Bloom, 1956, p. 10) is dramatically spelled out. Reminiscent of Serote's passage which metaphorically portrays the relationship of Alexandra township and Johannesburg as the relationship between night and day, contrasting and yet inextricable, Bloom writes of the two worlds that are "like captor and captive chained together ... never free from one another" (Bloom, 1956, p. 10). Regardless of whether the black urban area in question is a suburb of Johannesburg, freehold township or location, and irrespective of the

author's race, black and white worlds, although 'chained together' cannot be reconciled. So it is that the white outsider is a 'tourist' in the township (Lionel Abrahams, 1975, p. 16) and the black men and women alienated or rejected by the city:

Jo'burg City, Johannesburg
Listen when I tell you,
There is no fun, nothing, in it
When you leave the women and men with such
frozen expressions...
Jo'burg City, you are dry like death ...
('Jo'burg City', Serote, 1982, pp. 22-23).

In addition to the contrast between white and black worlds inspiring comment, several writers have pinpointed substantial dissimilarity between a location (or modern 'township') and a freehold area (early 'township'). Huddleston (1956) for one, draws attention to the way in which the word 'location' functioned to endorse a sense of absorption, unbelonging and impermanence. His words can be coupled effectively with those of Bloom (1956, p. 10) who argues that the concept of 'location' denotes "not a place where people live, but one where something 'is to be found'". A common feature of the literature examined has been consistent rejection by residents of stringently controlled townships which imbued them with feelings of dislocation and placelessness. Preference was unanimously shown for the *spirit* of place offered by less rigidly supervised freehold areas.

Writers seem to have dwelled at length upon the physical differences between freehold areas and formal locations/townships. The regularity of the housing layout in Soweto is bitterly condemned. The monotony of endless matchbox homes "patched in similarity on the ground" (Rabothatha, 1978, p. 33), "without love or propriety" (Modisane, 1963, p. 105), the "mushrooms" (Modisane, 1963, p. 105), "boxhouses" (Gwala, 1977, p. 46),

"kennels" (Matshoba, 1979, p. 92), is consistently spelled out. In many instances strong preference was voiced for the *variety* of housing structures (even if considerably less sound) in freehold areas. Some writers proceed so far as to celebrate the richness of slum life (see for example, Sepamla's poem cited earlier) over more clinical, regulated existence in drab, stereotyped municipal townships.

Their *liquidity* means that squalor, poverty and deprivation are inevitable concerns in township literature. The smoke filled atmosphere, rusted corrugated iron structures, rusted sand roads and bleak township appearance are treated in the writings of each area examined above, albeit to varying degrees. A particular significance is the tendency of certain authors to do environmental elements in favour of noting a vibrant township life. This is especially the case in the writing of Sophiatown. In some instances authors create an atmosphere through their characters (see for example, Matshikiza, 1961; Motloatse, 1982; Ndebele, 1982; Matthews, 1983). In that literature no explicit reference is made to either township appearance or characteristics and detailed description is reserved for individual people. These stories usually have as central theme the ability of township dwellers to survive and sometimes even thrive in spite and/or because of their oppressive environments. In most literature, however, it is people, their resilience, energy and communal spirit that colours the township, helping obliterate its rotting physical fabric and helping fashion a sense of place. As such, a theme threading through literature is that of the township as paradox: as place of contrasts where harshness and despair coexist with spirit and even beauty. For this reason too, the township is often likened to the city as portrayed by Dickens (Modisano, 1963; Themba, 1972; Manganyi, writing of Mphahlele, 1983).

Control and supervision over territory, life and labour is a further theme weaving through township literature. "The inhabitants of the location live like a captured people" writes Bloom (1956, p. 12). Prohibitive laws, raids, police harassment and white officials are prominent trappings of most townships and are grist for authors. Closely tied to police harassment is the practice of shebeening and illegal beer brewing. The shebeen is yet another paradox in the literature. On the one hand it is celebrated as a unique and fulfilling form of recreation amidst township deprivation. It serves also as a valuable means of eking out an existence through self-employment. On the other hand, as Mphahlele, Modisane and Jabavu show in their autobiographies, the practice is fraught with risk and danger.

The ghetto nature of the townships in respect of the labour and lives of its youths and adults is revealed without exception. Children's games are typically those of the streets. Youths are presented as spending their time in gambling activities (fah-fee) and adults pursue livelihoods in the informal sector of the economy. Activities of hawkers, shebeen 'queens' and 'kings', and washerwomen are ever present in the township literature. As a further phenomenon typical of slum underworlds, violence, usually initiated by a lumpenproletarian element is a phenomenon explored by several township writers. Gangsterism and the terror it evokes, lurks in the literature. At times, fear of criminals and murderers is accorded obsessive treatment. In writing about Soweto especially, the looming presence of death taints and warps everyday living.

A final topic meriting attention is that of the threat and aftermath of demolition. The imminent destruction of Sophiatown, Vrededorp,

Doornfontein and Alexandra stimulated and influenced the derivative literature. Heartfelt, embittered accounts of the insensitive bureaucratic wrecking and the hurt and confusion it engendered are common. A number of poems dealing solely with demolition (that is, with reference to a specific township) have emerged particularly with the rise of black consciousness writing. Furthermore, much writing although not dealing with demolition *per se*, is influenced by its imminence, and partial or total completion.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The subject of this dissertation is set against a background of the partiality of positivist research, increasing interest in the notion of place and in the sub-discipline of literary geography, and an enthusiastic quest for better knowledge of conditions, lifestyles and experiences in the black townships of South Africa. Research commenced with an overview of the literary geography field (chapter two). This was undertaken so as to provide a point of intellectual reference for the substantive enquiry. It was particularly intended to introduce key analytical issues such as the meaning of place, its individuality and manner of portrayal.

In response to calls for a literary geography more concerned with extrinsic relations of texts, the third chapter sought to define the wider historical, social and political contexts of the works considered in the study. The development of South African literature between 1820 and the present was traced with emphasis given to distinct trends in the writing. Changes in author class, ideology, intent, style, publishing outlet, literary form selected and audience were noted. The primary aim of the chapter was to elaborate on the need for such background information in more meaningful literary geographic analysis. This is especially the case when taking into consideration the overtly political writings of persons differing widely in terms of ideology, class and culture.

In the fourth chapter, attention turned to the development of certain black South African townships and their treatment in literature.

In the analysis of Johannesburg's townships of different origin and organisation, no uniform procedure was adopted. Where the writing of one particular place lent itself to detailed description of violence and danger and another to portrayal of vibrant informal economic activities and a further to evocative physical description, these became the major analytical categories for the specific place concerned. Examination of such author choice of emphasis, whether in the form of a certain writing technique (for example, emphasis/de-emphasis on depicting physical characteristics) or through heavily laboured themes and issues (such as the senses of fear, belonging and opportunity) aided the task of uncovering the meaning(s) of each township. Consultation of the township literatures makes it possible not only to capture the physical impression and personality of the places, but also to learn something of the human experiential dialogue with various environments. Evidence of placelessness, alienation, and sense of place, whether consistent or contradictory, was noted and discussed in the case of each township.

Of all the areas studied, Sophiatown stands as unique in its consistent perception by white and black writer as a place of exceptional warmth and spirit. Without attempting to conceal the greyneass and hardship there, authors have conveyed through vivid prose the enigma of a slum where intangible quality transcends surface poverty and suffering. The literary images of Alexandra township and the slum areas of inner Johannesburg city, whilst sharing aspects of the diverse and vibrant Sophiatown atmosphere, are tainted by sometimes blatant contradictions. These were traced to differences in reaction among writers (see for example Essop and Abrahams regarding Vrededorp), or to inconsistencies within different writings of the same individual (as in the case of Saroto). Soweto, the final township area considered, is overridingly

portrayed as a violent, alienating place in which everyday living is warped and human needs denied. The township is seen to epitomise controlled, isolated, monotonous black urban living. Neither the experience of the place nor its personality seem to detract from the harsh and austere lifestyle it breeds.

Several themes and ideas were found to pervade most if not all township literatures considered, among them the contrast between black township and white city, stress on squalor, poverty and deprivation, police and supervisor interference, crime and danger and the sense of loss brought about by demolition. Certain ideas emerged strongly in connection with one or two places and a steady difference was noted in literature about less stringently managed freehold suburbs against that of more rigidly controlled townships.

One particularly interesting observation arises out of the study of Johannesburg's townships and their meaning. As the dissertation has suggested, the options and experiences of place by blacks in Johannesburg have and/or are slumyards, Alexandra, Sophiatown and Soweto. It is unclear that place has such significance in their lives; it is at once everything and nothing.

In the course of examining the sociology of South African literature, three trends in local creative writing were identified, namely, liberal, protest and black consciousness writing. Each has placed its mark on several of the works consulted during the course of this study. Liberal, protest and black consciousness writing have determined the writing mode adopted (black consciousness writing for example is usually in the poetic form), the audience to which it reaches (protest writing to white liberals

and black consciousness writing to readers in the townships), literary style (traditional Western literary techniques of the liberal writers and negation of these conventions in contemporary black literature), and publishing outlet (international publishers for autobiographies and liberal or protest writing, and increasingly, popular magazines for contemporary literature). The ideology propounded by each critical trend has, not least, influenced what is said and possibly left unsaid about townships and township living. Although the precise effects of censorship on South African literature and especially the treatment of townships and urbanism in that literature are impossible to track down, reminder of the reality of such prohibitive legislation enhances sensitivity to the strain under which so many writers and poets create.

Of course, certain writers sharing a common background, era, literary mode, literary form and audience do themselves actually experience a place in significantly different ways. Such cases demand that the literary geographer delves into the biographies of the individual writers concerned to explain the discrepancies. More often than not, though, the conclusion drawn will be speculative. After all, literary creation, whilst tied to social background and constraints, is also an intensely personal exercise. If translated truthfully into words, personal thoughts will produce inconsistencies and these will always abound and perhaps never be reconcilable to an 'objective' or even subjectively shared statement about the meaning of place.

The questions of subjectivity and particularly of the reliability of evidently fictional writing have been raised by several critics of literary geography. Through the course of this dissertation the value of highly emotional and perhaps exaggerated accounts has been recognised.

Writing suffused with images of blood, or intonations of fear and violence, may offer more insight into the study of a place than more objective, restrained accounts. The major weakness of literary geography for some is paradoxically its major strength for others. Humanistic literary geography is concerned with people, their beliefs, preferences and experiences. As such, it automatically confronts and even thrives on subjectivity and its implications. Both geographers and literary critics have pondered over the relationship between fact and fiction in literature. Consonant with the popular aphorism that 'there is more to truth than facts', Pocock (1981b, p. 11) has asserted that

... fictive reality may transcend or contain more truth than the physical, or even day reality. And herein lies the paradox of literature. Although different in essence, and therefore a poor documentary source for material on places, people or organisations, literature yet possesses a peculiar competence over the reporting of the social scientist ... Literary literature is a truth that is more humanly significant.

South African critics repeatedly tilt at the accuracy and factual nature of what is ostensibly fiction. Among black writers especially, the subject matter of novels and poetry invariably rises out of and is set against a context of real problems and events. Pass laws, detention, influx control, demonstrations, riots and removals form the backdrop to many a short story, poem or novel.

The journalistic nature of much black South African literature which is preoccupied with documentation of the issues identified above lends itself to an interesting and much debated question, namely, what is literature and how is the line drawn between literary and non-literary writing? Critics have usually defined literature on the basis of its distinguishing use of language (that is, 'literary' as opposed to 'everyday' or 'scientific' use of language) (Wellek and Warren, 1949).

Much of the work treated here would seem in conflict with this definition and the impression given is of an increasing representation of day-to-day existence in ordinary language. In this dissertation literature has been defined loosely as any creative, imaginative, subjective writing of personal experience. As such there has been an intentional overlap between journalistic and non-journalistic work. This study urges a widening of the range of sources used in contemporary literary geography. Not only is there a need to scrutinise regional novels in search for insights of use to geographers. Literary geographers should also be quick to absorb and tap the vast potential offered by more popular writing.

In taking this strictly literary approach to the study of townships, it is not implied that the black township is the only setting, or urbanism the central theme, in South African literature. Nor is it claimed that this avenue of enquiry has unearthed any complete statement about township histories, conditions and experiences. Literary geography is itself a partial approach, a start rather than an end to the task of blending material drawn from literature, statistical records, archives and oral interviews. Albeit tentative, the project embarked upon here has provided valuable insight into the experiences of black township residents which previous research has not succeeded in recovering. For this reason alone, the difficulties encountered in literary analysis should not bar further refining of and experimentation with the literary geographic approach.

Alleged problems concerning the representativeness of individual experience, or bias concealed in emotion-laden writing, and inconsistencies among writers and within the work of individual writers can be turned to advantage and used to gain vital insight into personal

perception. Alternatively, discrepancies may be clarified once the social conditions surrounding the creation, publication and readership of a literary text are taken into consideration. At least in the South African case, continued adoption and adaptation of the literary geographic approach offers considerable prospects of strengthening humanistic geography in the country.

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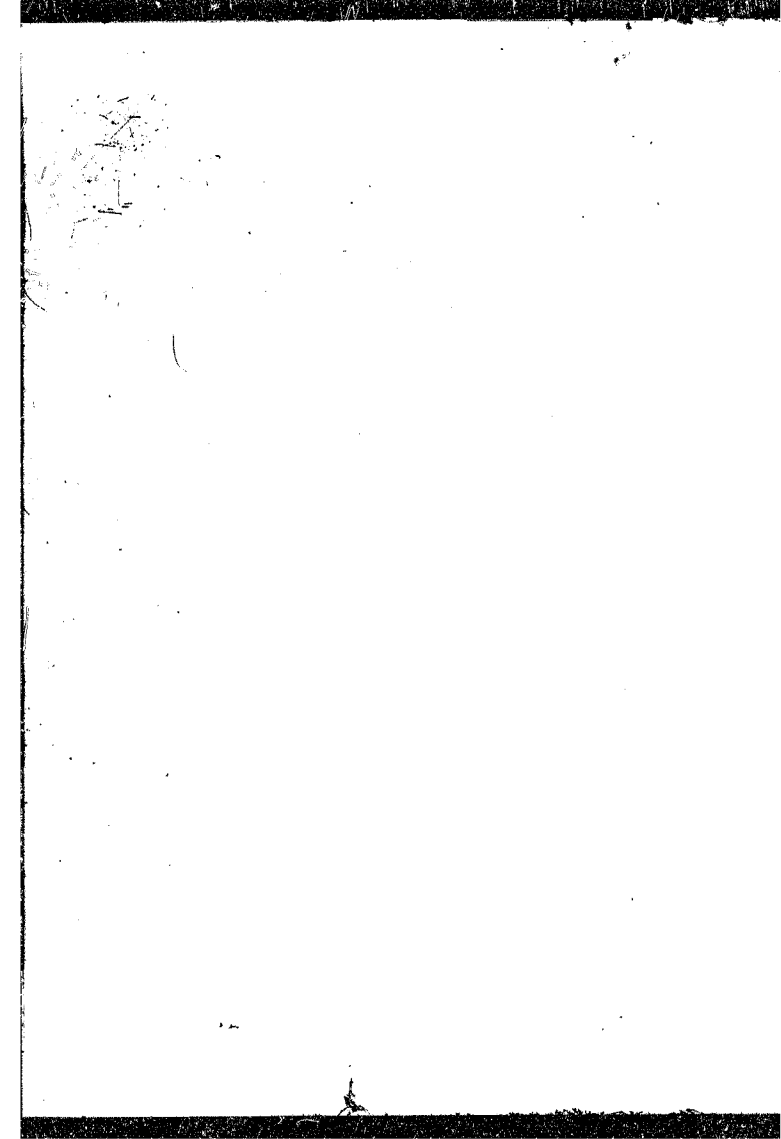
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Author Hart Deborah Mary

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