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# NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONCERNS IN AFRIKAANS DRAMA IN THE PERIOD 1930-1940

JOHAN VAN WYK

## INTRODUCTION

Afrikaner nationalism is increasingly coming to be seen as a diverse phenomenon. Its diversity is possibly most evident in the many-sided and contradictory nature of its literature which formed an essential part of the nationalist struggle since the inception of the first language movement, the GRA (Association of Real Afrikaners), in 1875. In this paper I want to point out some of the complexities which relate specifically to Afrikaans drama in the period 1930-1940; a period in which the nationalism which would become the foundations of the Apartheid society was first systemised. I will look at the following:

1. Aesthetics in literature and politics: Van Wyk Louw and Diederichs;
2. Poor Whiteism;
3. The family; and
4. Race.

## AESTHETICS IN LITERATURE AND POLITICS

In literature and in politics two related ruptures with the past occurred. In literature this rupture is represented by the Dertigers. Their work is characterised by a "more subtle use of the word and a concentration on the inner life of the individual" (Kannemeyer 1978:360). They introduced a cult of beauty into Afrikaans literature. With the word "beauty" Van Wyk Louw - the leader of the Dertigers - meant exploring areas which threaten the security of the middle class readers and audiences; the middle class who for him is the downfall of all art and spiritual life; they are the people who laugh in the wrong places during

drama productions:

> ...they must laugh so that they can immediately neutralise all beauty and verve with their own banality. (1970:24)

Only the discontented, those who yearn and know sorrow can appreciate art (1970:24). Inner life, subjective life becomes the yardstick - the measure of pain, suffering, sorrow, desire and therefore beauty.

In politics the rupture occurred with the break away of the Purified National Party under D. F. Malan from the Hertzog and Smuts fusion (the United Party) in 1934. The Malan group radically emphasised Afrikaner dominance in South Africa which meant mobilising Afrikaners economically in order for them to become owners of the means of production.

Within the Purified National Party - as in the literature of the Dertigers - there was a particular trend which tended to aestheticise politics. It led to interesting parallels between N.P. van Wyk Louw's philosophical tracts in Lojale Verset (Loyal Resistance) (1939) and Diederichs's sympathetic review of the fascist state philosophy (Die Fascistiese Staatsfilosofie") in the Huisgenoot of 3 November 1933.

As a student Diederichs was sent by the Broederbond to Nazi Germany where he "qualified as a quisling in the Nazi's Anti-Komintern training school" (Wilkins & Strydom 1979:76). Diederichs became a leading intellectual and theoretician in the Purified National Party. His treatise on Nationalism as a world-view (published in 1936) laid the foundations of Afrikaner nationalism as it was instituted after the nationalist election victory in 1948.

To Diederichs fascism is a l'art pour l'art on the terrain of politics

and accordingly N. P. van Wyk Louw pleads for a new aesthetic intellectual attitude in culture and science emphasising hierarchical differentiation:

> to recognise and investigate the different levels of reality (matter, life, psyche, spirit) each in its own right...It is not only a more advanced intellectual development when compared to the earlier denial of differences, but also one which is more true to the natural and aesthetic attitudes of man. Common man sees the world exactly as unreducibly rich and diverse, and he refuses emotionally - even when he intellectually seems to agree - to accept the abstraction that materialism presents him of the world he knows and in which he lives; in his immediate aesthetic experience of that world he recovers everything that was reasoned away: sound and colour, beauty, even pain, and the complete marvellous hierarchies of values and people...(1970:21)

Both Diederichs and Van Wyk Louw in their aesthetic world-view seem to be anti-bourgeois. Diederichs sees fascism "in its being (as) a romantic and anti-bourgeois impulse" (Huisgenoot 3 November 1933:17)

The word "bourgeois" as used by them is not defined primarily as an economically-based category referring to the owners of production, but rather as an attitude of conformism and contentment which is the product of material wealth. The term for them implies subjective qualities.

Van Wyk Louw's anti-bourgeois attitude is made clear in his negative description of Afrikaans audiences at a Cape drama production ("'n Toneelopvoering in Kaapstad", Lojale Verset 1970:23-25). In the mid-thirties he acted in some Afrikaans plays like J. F. W. Grosskopf's As die

tuig skawe (Neethling-Pohl 1974:93). He describes the "miserable" audiences as the well-to-do, the important state officials, the cultural managers or culturocrats (1970:23); an audience selected according to "wealth, class or education" (1970:23); therefore all those that are content in their lives. For him the production should have been attended by:

> All those who know sorrow, who are restless, empty and hungry; who are unfulfilled in sexual matters: the youth who are not yet taken up by the joy...they are the ones that could appreciate beauty. (1970:23)

Diederichs places the same emphasis on the youth but also accentuates "will", "power", "action":

> The spontaneous unity of will power, youth, movement and action for the sake of action. (Huisgenoot 3 November 1933:17)

The "deed" is also central:

> reason is rejected for the sake of the deed, theory for the sake of practice. (Huisgenoot 3 November 1933:17)

The "deed" found its most pure expression in Van Wyk Louw's Voortrekker Centenary play of 1938: Die dieper reg (The profound right). This play, consisting of chorusses and individual voices, represents the judgement over the Voortrekkers in the Court of Eternal Right; they are charged because they rose up against and broke all bonds with the law; they appropriated land and became rich; lawlessness and selfrighteousness motivated them. But they also paid the highest price for these transgressions and liberties, they sacrificed their own lives.

They are then redempted by the Voice of Eternal Right because it was

power and simplicity, the deed, which motivated them and as such they were an expression of God himself who is the "mysterious Source/of restlessness, deed and life itself" (1938:16). Because of the deed their place is secured in the land South Africa. God in this play is the unreasoning, motivating force of history that transcends intellectuality, that is outside human law. This play - unlike the countless other centenary plays which also probed the meaning of Afrikanerhood via the Voortrekkers - is the most profound exploration of the "birth of a nation" in lawlessness.

Aesthetics meant elevating the subjective above the objective. The subjective versus the objective was a motive in practically all of the many comparisons between bolshevism and facism which appeared in the popular Afrikaans press at the time. Without fail, every Huisgenoot of the early 1930's contained an article on Soviet Russia. In Diederichs' article on the state philosophy of fascism which starts off with a comparison between fascism and bolshevism he notes that they represent idealism and materialism respectively and therefore the difference between a subjective and an objective world-view. Van Wyk Louw accordingly rejects the objective world-view of the materialists, La Mettrie, Moleschott and Haeckel (1970:20).

POOR WHITEISM

How did the concern with aesthetics affect the attitude towards the depiction of the materially deprived social reality of the mainly Afrikaans-speaking "poor whites"?

By 1930 there were about 300 000 "poor whites" out of a population of about one million Afrikaners. They were defined as whites who made their living from farming; economically they form a class of mainly

poor "bywoners" (tenants), hired farm labourers, owners of small pieces of land, settlers and unskilled labourers. They consist further of roaming trek farmers, tenants, hunters, woodcutters, the poor of the towns, diggers, manual labourers on the railways and relief works (Touleier 1938:4-5). The "poor white" is then a person whose income doesn't enable him/her to maintain a standard of living in accordance with general norms of respectability (Touleier 1938:5). They sunk to such a degree that it was difficult to differentiate between their standard of living and that of the black people of the time (Touleier 1938:6).

By the 1930's the "poor white" in literature already constituted an established literary category: poor whiteism as theme abounded. As in the many social studies on the topic, the poor whites were seen as the direct descendants of the Voortrekkers: they represented the last of the people living according to the Voortrekker ethic:

> Is it not true that he (Louis Trichardt, a Voortrekker leader) was possibly just as poor, if not poorer, than your father is today? Your mother and father still live like the real Voortrekkers of the olden days. And what right do we have to reproach them for still living in the same way? They are still Voortrekkers, just like their parents were. (Character Jan in Schumann's play Hantie kom huis-toe 1933:94).

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

From this perspective the term "poor whites" seems to be a misnomer. Indeed the "poor white" characters in many plays seem to emphasise that the tag refers more to an invention of discourse than to their experience of their reality:

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

The seemingly untameability of the "poor whites" was more often than not an embarrassment for the nationalist-minded petit bourgeoisie whose main concern in life seemed to have been propriety. Their interest in the "poor whites" was mainly in channeling the energies of the "poor whites" into their own nationalist struggles. For Van Wyk Louw the "poor whites" were no longer the aristocrats that their farming ancestors were because of the uprooting that went hand-in-hand with the trek to the cities, losing their individualism and becoming part of the faceless masses (1970:16).

The depiction of the "poor white" in literature was more than just social fact of the time. The protrayal of the "poor white" carried modernism into Afrikaans literature: particularly the naturalist school of modernism.

Naturalism forms part of the materialist tradition which Diederichs and Van Wyk Louw rejected: it sees the individual not as an expression of an inner life, but as a product of the environment and of heredity. In so far as a person is alienated by these factors an elaborate and repressed inner life develops which would constitute the literary "charac-

ter".

Naturalism - because of the many petit-bourgeois family dramas it gave rise to - was in vogue in Afrikaans theatre in the 1930's. Many overseas naturalist plays were performed at the expense of local texts. Among them was Ibsen's A doll's house which Paul de Groot and his tratravelling players produced. Before every performance Paul de Groot would give a talk - which few seem to have understood - on the importance of naturalism to Western literature and during the performance:

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

On the other hand naturalist melodramas also implied a crude realism: an exact but superficial imitation of reality that the audiences - unaccustomed to the artifices of theatre - seemed to have loved:

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

One of the most interesting experiments with this extreme realism seems

to have been Hendrik Hanekom's production of the historic and symbolical play Oom Paul by D. C. Postma in 1934. This play based on the Transvaal President, Paul Kruger, was an attempt at being historically as correct as possible: Paul Kruger's house, the wall paper, the uniforms from the Republican time, the gestures as recorded from the memories of people who knew the president, his drinking of coffee from a saucer and his being addressed by the black servants as "Uncle" were portrayed in the greatest of detail. (Binge 1969:175)

Naturalism in Afrikaans literature dates much further back to before the 1930's. Possibly its point of emergence is Ou' Daniel (Old Daniel) (1906) by Harm Oost. This is also the first play in which the "poor white" is depicted. Old Daniel, the main character, is seen as the "first truly living character in the Afrikaans drama" (Bosman 1951:11). This play is the first psychological and sociological study in Afrikaans literature: Old Daniel is the "personification of the clash between the old and the new in the changed Afrikaans society after the Anglo-Boer war and he becomes the distant precursor of the social problem drama" (Bosman 1951:11). The "poor white" enabled writers to depict the "Afrikander as a human being instead of as a patriot, or simply man as man" (Bosman 1951:12).

The plays with poor whiteism as theme in the 1930's are Hantie kom huistoe (1933) by P. W. S. Schumann, Die skeidsmuur (1938) by A. J. Hanekom, Drankwet (1933) by E. A. Venter and Die Stad Sodom by F. W. Boonzaier. In these plays the nationalist political stance and message are explicitly inscribed in the texts themselves. The "poor white" is seen from the outside (that is from a concerned petit-bourgeois class perspective) as a Difference that must be returned to the Same of the nation. One of the main charges by directors of plays against Afrikaans dramas was the

fact that:

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

Underlying most of the texts with the "poor whites" as subject-matter is an ideological critique of the better-off Afrikaner's negative preconceptions of "poor whites". The class differentiation which came to be implied by "poor whiteism" was experienced as an immense problem to the nationalists' conception of the nation as an unity. In fact, the nationalist concern with "poor whiteism" involved in some plays an even oblique critique of uninspired nationalist strategies:

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

Because of the explicit petit-bourgeois perspective in these texts Van Wyk Louw criticises the traditional genre of poor white literature (epitomised by Jochem van Bruggen's Ampie - 1922). He writes:

> Realism that confronts the raw wonder of reality we still do not encounter here; it is the complacent idealisation of an erstwhile happy rural life in which the tenant and the landlord still knew their respective places. We do not know Ampie as he is directly before God, but as he, with all sympathy, is seen through the eyes of Booysen (the landlord) and his class. It is not Ampie as he is to himself, but as he is seen through the convictions of a particular class's point of

view. (1971:10).

But, Van Wyk Louw is not pleading for a literature written by "poor whites" themselves. Hardly any examples exist except for a few garment-worker plays: Broers and Hester Cornelius's Die Offerhande (Callinicos 1987:220). Instead, Van Wyk Louw is pleading for a poor white literature in which one is not aware of the petit-bourgeois author: a literature where the petit-bourgeois writer writes as if he is writing from from the inside, the subjectivity of the "poor white" him/herself. From this point of view the "poor white" had tremendous possibilities which the creative writer could exploit for romantic and aesthetic portrayal; the "poor white" being outlawed by "capitalism", forced outside the boundaries of respectable society and made economically destitute. The "poor white" could be the ideal modern romantic hero or heroine: the prostitute, the murderer, the criminal, the rebel who says no to society and the domestic servant who seduces the son in the wealthy family. Of course it is in exactly these roles that one meets the "poor whites" in the different plays: in Katrina the "poor whites" are the rebellious strikers, in Drankwet the one brother is the illegal liquor vendor (euphemised as selling medicine to a black in need) while the other avenges the imprisonment of his brother by murdering the "trap-boy"; in Die Stad Sodom prostitution is implied and in Die Skeidsmuur the seductive domestic servant.

The most extreme portrayal of the raw reality of the "poor whites" is found in P. W. S. Schumann's Hantie kom huis-toe (1933). This play was produced in Cape Town by Anna Neethling-Pohl, assisted by Van Wyk Louw. Neethling-Pohl felt that the H. A. Fagan pieces which were usually produced in Cape Town "were too civilised" for her "rebellious taste, and not relevant enough" (1974:93). In contrast, Hantie kom huis-toe (1933)

represented "a piece of realism, crude and raw, saying things as directly as possible" (Neethling-Pohl 1974:93). Anna Neethling-Pohl would later be confronted with the reality of the "poor whites" as represented in Hantie kom huis-toe (1933) when she became the secretary of Schumann's wife who was a social worker in the Krugersdorp area.

Politically poor whiteism - "poor whiteism that factory of idiotic monstrosities" (Jan in Hantie kom huis-toe 1933:76) - is of interest because it points to an emerging class differentiation which undermines the conception of the unity of the nation. ("JAN:...I do not believe in classes for white people" Schumann 1933:56). As a class that may come to define its interests in opposition to that of the nationalists they posed a major threat to the nationalists. Johanna Cornelius - the famous garment worker - was already seeing the Afrikaans trade unions sponsored by the FAK - a front organisation of the nationalists - as:

> a plot of capitalists and employers to keep workers backward and fomenting race hatred. (Du Toit 1978:42)

Bettie du Toit wrote:

> The middle-class Afrikaners had always supported such organisations as FAK, and they recognised the threat to their established way of living and political thought if the Afrikaner workers did not remain tied to the Nationalist Party and the Dutch Reformed Church. (1978:42)

The increasing assimilation of the "poor whites" into a racially integrated South African society was also a threat to the nationalists. This is portrayed in the racially integrated Lappiesdorp where the "poor whites" of Hantie kom huis-toe (1933) live: "There they live with Greek, Syrian, Coloured and Malay" (73). In the same play, evidence that the

"poor whites" were outgrowing their racial prejudices is also seen in the friendly relations between them and Abdoel, the Indian shopowner, called "Oupa" by some children.

A most interesting description of the process of emerging class differentiation is found in the articles "Nogeens die bediendevraagstuk" ("The question of domestic servants yet again") and "Die wit meisie in huisdiens" ("The white girl doing domestic service") in the Huisgenoot (21 August and 18 September 1931 respectively.) The problems that the Huisgenoot identified with white domestic servants were:

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

The Huisgenoot (21 August 1931) then gives the following advice:

> Make such a domestic servant understand for her own sake that although she is not of the same class as the coloured servant, she also does not belong to the class of the employer, just like children cannot be the equals of parents. She is the servant and must therefore serve at the table, but at the same time it must be seen to that she eats in respectable conditions. (67)

Class differentiation and the question of white domestic servants are themes in A. J. Hanekom's play Die Skeidsmuur (The Dividing Wall) (1938). This play attempts to show that poverty itself does not define poor whiteism: the poor white is rather the person that has lost his/her self-respect and is no longer of any use to the Afrikaner people. This

is shown by contrasting the poor but respectable railway family of Johan Terblanche with the half-drunk neighbour, Gert.

Gert's loss of self-respect is evident in his language usage:

1. in the form of address: he addresses Mrs Terblanche as "Miesies" instead of "Mevrou". "Miesies" was the form of address used by black workers when speaking to white women. It was indicative of a class and racial difference. Compare also Hantie kom huis-toe (1933) where Mrs van Niekerk reproaches Aunt Grieta for calling her "Miesies": ..."you must stop calling me "miesies", you are also white." (26)
2. In the "carnavalesque" (Bakhtin 1984) aspects of his discourse. He uses the words "poor whites" between quotation marks, thereby huhumouring learned society. The quotation marks denote that he puts on the mask of society when he utters the words "poor whites".
3. In his changing of English words into Afrikaans: This can be seen as a banalisation of the self: "paartie" (party), "fektrie" (factory) and "wiekend" (weekend).
4. In his use of idiomatic expressions like "erfgeld is swerfgeld" (easy come easy go) with which he invokes the folkish wisdom of the forefathers.
5. In his use of homespun forms of standard Afrikaans words: "kenners" instead of "kinders", "eergeester" instead of "eergister".

Through his particular use of language he wants to emphasise the class equality between the two families; he wants to make the Terblanche's feel at home in their "poor white" environment. By calling Mrs Terblanche "Nig Maria" (Cousin Mary) he accentuates the tie of kinship between them. He elaborates on this by saying "like our grandfathers and grandmothers spoke" (1938:4).

Terblanche, on the other hand resists his assimilation into "poor white" status by maintaining his family's dignity (his family's difference from poor whiteism) at all costs. Gert, as a typical carnavalesque character, transforms everything into the lowest common denominator; namely the body. The carnavalesque language of the working class which finds expression in the character of Gert is typified by its ability to assimilate and to generate a rich and lively diversity of expression. The carnavalesque is indicative of "poor whiteism".

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

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

Van Zeelen's son, Albert, comes into conflict with the stereotypical image of the "poor whites" that his father clings to. He sees that the wealthy, instead of helping the Church and the State in the struggle against "poor whiteism", is strengthening the dividing wall between rich and poor. According to him the wealthy should rather encourage the "poor whites" to maintain and develop their self-respect. The "poor whites" have to be taught to realise that the people's history also be-

longs to them, that they are fellow Afrikaners and equally part of the nation. He gives effect to his words by falling in love with Aletha and marrying her against the wishes of his father.

Like the nationalists of the time the character Albert emphasises the unity of the Volk and the need to fight against developing class divisions; in this way he is verbalising the author's own nationalist views on the subject.

FAMILY

In most plays of the period the conflict between parents (especicially the father) and children is developed on the plot structure of the biblical parable of the prodigal son. A conflict which denotes the tension between the modern and the traditional, the rural and the urban, and the past and the future. Sometimes as in Die Skeidsmuur (1938) it is a struggle of the son against the stereotypical preconceptions of the father. In Agterstevoor Boerdery (Upside down farming) (1932) by David J. Coetzee, the son wants to apply scientific methods of farming against his father's wishes. In the foreword to Die Stad Sodom (The City Sodom) (1931) F. W. Boonzaier says that his play should serve as a warning to the daughters who want to settle in the city. This play illustrates how the urbanisation of the daughter leads her to degeneration and prostitution. Her father disowns her and unlike the father of the Prodigal Son he does not welcome her back when she returns, dying of TB.

Another example of the generational conflict is Fritz Steyn's Grond (Land) (1938) which is about the duty of the unwilling son towards the dead ancestors to keep up the inherited family farm. He is a qualified teacher and does not enjoy farming. He keeps his negative feelings to-

wards the farm secret from his children who in their turn also rebel against the farm and the rural millieu. He forces them not to abandon the farm but to be part of his promise to the dead. Various circumstances, such as a bond that has to be repaid and an unexpected hailstorm, forces them off the farm. The loss of the farm leads to the reunification of the family and enables the children to go to university and pursue professional careers.

Loss of the farm was traumatic for most Afrikaners because it meant the loss of a means of production; the inability to reproduce independent life itself; it meant alienation; the fact that the independent person is forced to become a wage labourer. This is made clear by Terblanche in Die Skeidsmuur (1938) when he says:

> How can I forget that once we were also independent farmers, that we looked other people in the eyes and talked to them as equals. (2)

The duty to the ancestors in Land (1938) expresses the duty to "the dream image of the glorious fatherland" (Diederichs 1933:17) which is so central in nationalist ideology.

In the psychoanalytically interesting play Hantie kom huis-toe (1933) the symbiosis of the father and God appears unconsiously. Hantie - who never knew her father and was alienated from her "poor white" family at the age of five - is represented as having mystical conversations with God. Gertjie, her "poor white" little brother also has moments of clairvoyancy. Hantie says about her mystical conversations:

> It's not so strange...at least I am used to it now...He has been everywhere with me since my childhood...I see him often ...always...I don't know how to say it. (16)

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

> I do not know much about Father. Do not ask me about Father, because...Aunt never talks about Father. Sometimes I feel so scared. (20)

That her mystical conversations with God compensate for the absence of parents becomes clear when she says:

> don't ask me about my mother, I do not want to think about her anymore. When I was younger I often had conversations like that with her. (21)

When Hantie meets her real father unknowingly, he stirs irrational revulsion in her. He is a most violent "poor white". She says to her "poor white" mother: "he has the most abhorrent face I have ever seen" (65). She doesn't ever want to see him again not knowing that he is her real father. She becomes completely irrational in his presence:

> if only I never have to see him again - the devil placed his mark on him...I feel like that day when I slipped on the mountain slope, when I had to hold onto some shrubs to prevent my fall. (70)

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

> He? - Then I've got his blood in my veins? My body is from him, and my nerves and my constitution and my spirit descended from him? Not a part of my body, or of my soul where his stamp is not! My Creator, One-That-Formed-Me, that saw me before I existed, that knew me before my birth - was it really your aim with me? - Then the night is my part, and I em-

brace the darkness like a bride...(100)

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

The father's power in Hantie kom huis-toe (1933) and the other Afrikaans plays of the period rest in his social position, and also in the unconscious and transcendental importance he seems to take on because of this position.

RACE

Race in the 1930's still referred mainly to the "differences" between Afrikaners and the English. When Mrs van Niekerk says "There are so many mixed marriages these days" (1933:56) in Hantie kom huis-toe she is referring to marriages between Afrikaners and English people. The problems concerning the black population were referred to as the "Native question". In the early thirties - although seen as a "matter of the utmost gravity calling for a meticulously thought-out long term policy" (Pirow nd:193) no coherent thinking on the political future of black people in South Africa seems to have existed. The "Native question" went hand in hand with the concern for what was called the "survival of White Civilisation" and the fear that whites would become "swamped politically" (Pirow nd:195) when a "black skin would no longer be a test of civilisation" (Pirow nd:195).

Hertzog in the late twenties differentiated between the future of the coloureds on one hand and that of the black population on the other. His view of the coloureds was that ultimately they should be integrated

"into the White Man's world industrially, economically and politically but not socially" (Pirow nd:127). On the other hand his "native policy was based on the principle of segregation and has at its ideal the development of the native along his own lines in his own territory" (Pirow nd:128).

Hertzog according to Pirow was not a protagonist of Baasskap, but of differentiation with "benevolent guardianship" (Pirow nd:193). The determinative factor for eventual self-government by blacks was not "the acquisition of the white man's booklearning but of his ethical conceptions" (Pirow nd.:193). There seems to have been a general fear among whites about the possible political consequenses of education for blacks. This fear underlies the following coarse statement by the character Van Riet in the play Van Riet, van Rietfontein (1930):

> The Kaffir is here to work. Make it compulsory. Close down that mission school. There the blacks only get spoiled. Why must they learn to read and write? A Kaffir that can read and write is worthless. And if he can speak English I'll kick him from my yard. (Van Niekerk 28)

Central to the propagation of the white man's ethical conceptions was the spread of religion amongst black people: "The paramount position of the European population vis-a-vis the native is accepted in a spirit of Christian guardianship" (Pirow nd:198; a position that the new National Party shared with the old). The play Jim (1935) by J. C. Oosthuysen, which could be performed by anybody or any society as long as they would send ten shillings of the yield to be used for missionary work in the Eastern Province and the Transkei, had the aim of making white children on the farms aware of their duty to spread the gospel amongst the "heathen" children of the black farm labourers.

By 1933 the Broederbond, the secret organisation behind the then not yet founded Purified National Party, began systematically to formulate its ideas on black and white relations. In a secret circular it spelt out its policy. The main points of this circular are:

1. that total segregation should be put into practice
2. the compulsory removal of black people from white areas to separate areas provided for the different tribes and "purchased by the natives from the State through a form of taxation such as hut tax, or occupied in freehold from the State" (Wilkins and Strydom 1978:193). The "detribalised native" (Wilkins and Strydom 1978:193) in urban areas would be seen as "temporary occupants" of locations in white areas and living there "of their own choice and for gain" (Wilkins and Strydom 1978:193). In contrast to the policy of the old National Party the same segregation had to apply to the coloured people who would get their own homeland (Wilkins and Strydom 1978:197).

In Hantie kom huis-toe (1933) one sees the integration between the "poor whites" and other people of South Africa. They were the inhabitants of Lappiesdorp where they lived happily with a mixture of other people. Their educated and wealthier fellow Afrikaners looked at this with horror: it was the most direct assault on their sense of propriety.

A concern with what is proper seems to have been one of the main obsessions of the university educated Afrikaners of the time. It is manifested in a concern with the minutest detail of decor in the theatre. Compare for instance M.E.R.'s shock during a performance of Langenhoven's Petronella at the torn and tattered red velvet curtains and the consistent laughing of the town's people who saw all drama as comedy (Huisgenoot 29 May 1931:67). She calls it "cultural disorder" in which order

must be created. The concern with what is proper is part of Hantie's dismay at her mother wearing a night gown in the streets in Hantie kom huis-toe (1933:67).

The concern with order and what is proper underlies much of the nationalist's racism. But this racism has economic motives. The obsession of the wealthy Mrs van Niekerk with the Indian shopowners and the friendly relations between them and the "poor whites" points to her fear of the growing economic power of the Indians:

> Yes my child, here you can see the bare truth about poor whiteism. And as you noticed, one is astonished by the big Indian shops. But the reason is: the Indians treat the poor as their equals. They feel at home with them. Do you see that shop? It is Abdoel's. The people call him oupa...
> (Schumann 1933:55)

In another passage Mrs van Niekerk scolds Aunt Grieta:

> Are you again at the Coolie's shop. You promised me last time you will not buy from the Coolie if you could be helped at other places. (Schumann 1933:55)

To this Aunt Grieta answers:

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

It is more than just the price of goods that makes Aunt Grieta buy from the Indian shop: there she does not feel discriminated against, she does not feel she is looked down upon by her own kind. When Mrs van Niekerk suggests she buy from Goodman because in spite of his being a Jew he is

still a white man, Aunt Grieta answers:

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

Another reason why they prefer to buy from old Abdoel is that he makes an exception for the poor when he sells to them on credit (Schumann 1933:57).

When with her educated daughter, Hantie, though, Aunt Grieta returns to a crude racism as when Abdoel addresses her as "you" and she replies:

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

The author's own negative feelings towards Indian goods become clear in the many scenes in which the quality of products which Abdoel sells come into question: the hat and night-gown are described as ghastly to everybody except Aunt Grieta. The stigmatisation of Abdoel's goods is part of the campaign for the proper. The underlying message being that one cannot buy "proper" things, things suitable for the white civilisation at an Indian shop.

In Hantie kom huis-toe (1933) black people are only marginally present. One senses in this presence an immense fear, aggression and irritation.

Possibly the "poor whites" sensed their own fate in the dehumanisation of the black people. This fear is present in the reactions of the women to the black man loitering around the veranda and asking for Hans. His presence forecasts the looming trouble: the arrest of Krisjan and Hans for selling liquor illegally.

The play which most consistantly and most interestingly explores the obsession with colour prejudice is J. C. B. van Niekerk's Van Riet, van Rietfontein (1930). Van Riet, the owner of the farm Rietfontein, upholds crude racist ideas: he gets upset about the prominence given to the native question in the newspapers and the fact that there are always new laws to define the relationship between master and servant. This means that he cannot "discipline" (assault) his labourers anymore without being challenged in court. He especially takes exception to the fact that the learned people always want to interfere with existing relationships: "You learned people always make a mountain of an antheap" (1930:28). To him this interference is unnecessary. The "native question" is a "question of experience and common sense" (1930:21). He fears the emergence of the "native question" in discourse.

In contrast, Prins, the university professor, is concerned with the "upliftment" (1930:29) of black people. To him "The Kaffir is no longer a barbarian. He is beginning to think. He refuses to be the property of the white man in the servile sense of the word" (1930:29). Further on he says "there is a possession nobody can deny their fellow human beings: freedom. Freedom of movement, freedom of thought, freedom to search for their own salvation" (1930:29) and "The time will come when the native will play a part in the government of the country. It is for us to decide whether we want to co-operate with them as friends or resist them as enemies" (1930:31)

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

The whole play is then an exposure of the father's unreasonableness: Malie says: "Your father condemned me for my descendance, before he knew me" (1930:52). His racism turns out to be extremely self-destructive. All his farm labourers desert him and he goes bankrupt. Klara, the faithful black housemaid, is prepared to sacrifice her savings of all the years in an attempt to postpone the due date for bond payment.

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

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

Although Van Riet's racism is shown to be irrational and unreasonable it is still victorious in the end. This play which is one of the most persistent in its rejection of the rationality of racism still saves racism in so far as it presupposes a transcendental rationality. Racism is

then right exactly because it is irrational. This links the racism depicted in this play with Van Wyk Louw and Diederichs's romanticisation of the "unthinking deed" as the ideological foundation of nationalism.

POSTSCRIPT

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