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Turning region into narrative: English storytelling in the Waterberg.

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Towards the middle of 1899, an eighteen-year-old English woman, Mary Fawssett, set sail for South Africa. Embarking at Durban, Mary, or Mollie as she was known met her aunt and guardian, Edith Fawssett, and together they made their way to Pretoria and then to Blaauwbank, a farm about 30 kms north of present day Vaalwater in the Waterberg district. Here they joined Edith's sister Katherine and her husband Arthur Peacock, a manager for the Transvaal Consolidated Land and Exploration Company.[1]

This bushveld farm world must have been somewhat strange to Mollie, not least because a war was soon to break out. When it did, Mollie felt herself to be living in a 'little world' behind 'a thick curtain dropped'.[2] To overcome her sense of isolation, she described her new experiences to an English school friend in letters which never got posted since the already tenuous postal system disappeared entirely during the war. The world that Mollie documented was one rooted in the universe of the farm divided into smaller areas of homestead, garden and stadt around which she arranged an ordered social hierarchy.

Beyond the farm however events were not at all clear. Apart from the Boer Commandos, there were groups of 'Masibi kaffirs' who occasionally attacked the people in the stadt. To Mollie these various hostilities meant constant treks between the farm and Warmbaths to avoid either belligerent Boers, English or 'Masibis'. Mollie had little way of understanding the events beyond the farm which were dominated by the logic and pattern of local

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1 Paragraph and subsequent story of Mary Fawssett (later Davidson) based on Elizabeth Clarke, Waterberg Valley, Johannesburg, 1955; Mary Davidson, Merci Ma Tante mimeo; interviews with Lois and Charles Baber, Boschdraai, Vaalwater district, August 1986 and letters entitled 'Mary Davidson's (Fawssett's) letters to her school friends in England - written during the Anglo-Boer War and never posted', in possession of Lois Baber. Hereafter referred to as Letters.

2 Letters, 'Sunday after Epiphany Jan 7 1900' and 'July 15th 1900'

politics which turned the war into a pretext for certain groups to pursue their own local objectives with more vigour.

The Waterberg Commando for example under the less than spectacular leadership of Frederick Albertus Grobler, kommandant for the region, were reluctant participants to begin with and shambled about the region spawning military chaos as they went. Frequent calls for men to be sent to the fronts in the south or to the fever-ridden Limpopo border in the north went unheeded or were tardily implemented. Instead 'weglopers', 'huisblywers' and 'wegskuilers' congregated on high farms were they suffered not from fever but from 'verlofsiekte'. Away from military and health hazards they could increase their labour demands on the black population, while their leaders, all noted northern Transvaal figures continued to pursue their local and divisive politicking that invariably promoted 'persoonlike oorwegings' above 'landsake'.[3]

Not far from this draft dodging and not entirely unconnected to it, another two men used the war to pursue their long-standing fight for the leadership of the Langa section of the Transvaal Ndebele, a position left vacant by the suicide of Masibi, the father of the two feuding brothers, 'Hans' and 'Bakeberg' Masibi. The story of this 'unfraternal brawl' had as its most visible participants the spiteful and drunken Masibi brothers, Grobler and various other corrupt Boer officials, a fastidious missionary Sonntag and subsequently a dithering Native Commissioner, Scholefield. Together they and their confusing maze of supporters acted out a set of complex and overlapping local interests involving issues of land and labour pressure, relationships of clientage between Boer and African leaders, ethnic conflict and internal

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[3] Paragraph drawn from Eppo Broos, Die Noordelike Hooflaer in die Distrikte Zoutpansberg, Waterberg en Rustenburg vanaf die begin van die Twede Vryheidsoorlog tot die besetting van Pretoria, M A, Univ. of Pretoria, 1943, pp. 18-21, pp. 34-44, pp. 59-67, quoted phrases from pp. 63 and 18.

division within the Ndebele community. In fact one of the reasons that brought 'Masibi' warriors to Blaauwbank was that the people there had fled their location with its chiefly tribute demands for the comparative quiet of company land.[4]

However if Mollie was not in a position to appreciate the intricacies of local Waterberg politics, she had her own frameworks of complexity for interpreting the world that provided ways to 'return to a close by exoticism via far-off detours'.[5] Some of these conventions are predictable and have to do with notions of 'Englishness', so powerful they could accommodate her uncle's (admittedly unwilling) membership of the Waterberg Boer commando. Her sense of time was also 'English' deriving as it did from the Anglican Church calendar.[6]

Mollie also spent a lot of time writing, reading and gardening and from these activities, she generated patterns through which she could imagine her new world and make it familiar. One way to do this was by gardening, a cultural process of remaking the landscape to render it familiar. A largely 'female place', dominated by 'the aunts', Katherine and Edith, the garden represented an area of female community, craft and skill that continued to form an important theme in the lives of the women descendants of this family.[7]

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[4] Paragraph based on Transvaal Archives, (hereafter TA), SNA 95; for evidence of clientage see letter to Capt. de Bertodano from J H Craig, 4th June 1901; letter from Chas Maggs to de Bertodano 4th June 1901; see 'The War between the Native Chiefs Hans Masebe and Bakeberg Masebe, 1899 - 1901', report by Ch Sonntag for evidence of land and labour pressure, ethnic and internal division; see affidavits, 135/01 for attacks on tenants on company land.

[5] Phrase from Michael de Certeau, 'Practices of Space', On Signs, Eds, Marshall and Blonsky, Oxford, 1985. My thanks to Michael du Plessis for this reference.

[6] All the letters written on a Sunday evening were dated by the Anglican Church calendar. I am indebted to Rosalind King for pointing this out.

[7] Mollie's oldest daughter Elizabeth (Clarke) worked as a florist for a time

Writing was another central activity and postal problems notwithstanding, Mollie resolved to 'write the war through'. Writing made the world familiar as she explained to her friend in words whose faint biblical cadence reminds us that the act of writing could carry a meaning almost as significant as religion : 'Sundays seems strange now without these few words to you. It always does me good. It seems so nice to think that I have this to make you seem close to me, although the dark curtain is so very thick that it makes things seem very far away'.[8]

A few years earlier another colonial woman not very far away from Blaauwbank expressed similar ideas about writing.

> I use to pass my days in writing a story, without which amusement I should have collapsed under the combined heat, dullness and anxiety of that time at Rustenburg. But it is wonderful how one can forget oneself and one's own troubles in inventing the joys and woes of creature's of one's imagination.[9]

Reading and books also occupied a central place and provided a medium through which the bushveld world could be imagined. It is principally their absence which illustrates this point : '...can't imagine how funny it feels without a single almanack...and can you imagine how strange it feels without letters, like a thick curtain dropped'. 'Poor Aunt E. she has read every single book,

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and also used her landscape skills to become a watercolourist of some note. The idea of the garden also formed an important theme in the religious life of the family and was seen as a point of outreach to black women. See letter to Mrs Davidson from Charlotte Parker, Jan 8 1941, recommending an article 'Gardening with God' for use with the Mother's Union. In possession of Lois Baber, Boschdraai, Vaalwater.

[8] Letter dated January 14 (1900)

[9] Sarah Heckford, A Lady Traveller in the Transvaal, London, 1882, pp. 64-65. I am grateful to Peter Delius for pointing out that this book deals with the Waterberg.

I think in the house...It does seem hard for she loves reading so and to wait till war is over seems a long time if you want a nice book'.[10]

It is also through the 'texts' of her old world that the people of the new get placed : 'I do love looking at them (the people of the stadt), of course we can't talk except by signs or unless a Dutch-speaking kaffir can translate...I think it is so nice that the women are always called "maids" and the children "piccanins". Do you remember singing "Good night, my little piccanin". I often think of it, it was so nice'.[11]

In many ways Mollie's letters may seem unremarkable; lesser colonial documents from an obscure frontier. However as 'everyday testimony' from a region about which very little is know, they are of considerable interest, not least because they reveal the consciousness of a young colonial women, its 'structures of feeling' and the lines of identity by which her new place and world are imagined. In addition, as documents of a specific locality they illustrate something of the complex and crowded world world that any region always is.

The world that Mollie principally describes - a farm in the Waterberg - was a place that many others both before and after her were to document in diaries, memoirs, travel accounts, articles and books. Together these documents remember, reconstruct and imaginatively 'reinvent' the same region from the preconceptions of a particular group - English-speaking settlers.

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[10] Letter dated Jan 7, Sunday after Epiphany and Jan 14, Second Sunday after Epiphany, respectively.

[11] Letter dated '24 Sunday after Trinity'.

In broad terms,the ways in which these people write about region are similar to Mollie's since all these texts like colonial writing in general follow the pattern of 'return(ing) to a close by exoticism via far off detours'.[12]

However there are more specific things to say about this body of writing which after all details a particular rather than a general part of the world. This paper will attempt some preliminary observations about this literature - written mostly in the first half of this century - and the way it remembers and constructs a region. The investigation will involve two broad questions : what kind of world do these stories come from and how do they imagine this world textually? In what sense, if any, can these stories be classified as 'regional' or in a slightly different way : can they be said to embody a defined 'sense of place' ? How in other words is region turned into narrative?

These are of course exceedingly difficult questions both to conceptualise and to answer. A bewilderingly large interdisciplinary body of scholarship tells us that the idea of region is a slippery, elusive business that ultimately requires a saturated social history that can 'fix' the region from the outside by specifying its relationships to a broader economic and political world, while suggesting its more intimate, inside meanings which give shape to the meandering 'life paths' of its various inhabitants.[13]

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[12] It is interesting to note here some of the debates on everyday narrative which hold that everyday storytelling exhibits a 'narrative competence' since the conventions they use are in fact the same set used in more elaborate sophisticated narratives. In exactly the same way a particular set of textual procedures for constructing place in Mollie's everyday narrative, are reproduced in more elaborate texts. See articles in Poetics, Vol. 15, 1986, particularly W-D Stempel, 'Everyday Narrative as a Prototype' pp. 203-216 and Charlotte Linde, 'Private Stories in Public Discourse' pp. 183-202.

[13] I have relied on Allan Pred, 'Structuration and Place : On the Becoming of Sense of Place and Structure of Feeling', Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, Vol 13 (1) 1983, pp. 45-73; D W Meinig, 'Geography as an art', Transcripts of the Institute of British Geographers N S 8 : 1983

Furthermore the Northern Transvaal as one of its few social and historical researchers has said 'is an area seldom visited by academic research'.[14] Within this neglected terrain the Waterberg is an extreme example : its most documented feature is its geology. Against this background, this paper can only be tentative and exploratory. It can offer no saturated social and cultural history but can merely provide a broad taxonomy of the literature and history of the region and some of their major themes.

A place, as Williams has pointed out is neither automatic nor self-evident.[15] Places have to be made both imaginatively and materially. They require in other words certain preconditions. Perhaps the most obvious of these is that for a bit of the earth to be seen as a region, it must have a shape, economically, physically and imaginatively, not all of course strictly co-terminous.

The area of the North-western Transvaal which Boer settlers were to call the Waterberg, has a very distinctive shape. While in some senses the term Waterberg refers to the magisterial district whose boundaries have shifted

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pp. 314-328; and D C Pocock, 'Place and the Novelist' in ibid, 6 : 1981, pp. 337-347; M E Eliot Hurst, 'A Sense of Place' in I Came to the City... Boston, n.d.; D N Jeans, 'Some Literary Examples of Humanistic Descriptions of Place' in Australian Geographer, Vol 14 (4) 1979; E V Walter, 'The Places of Experience', The Philosophical Forum Vol, XII, No. 2, 1980-81, pp. 159-81. (I am indebted to Gordon Pirie for these articles.) Raymond Williams, The Country and the City, London 1973, Regionalism and the Female Imagination ed Emily Toth, Pennsylvania and New York, 1985; F W Morgan, 'Three Aspects of Regional Consciousness', Sociological Review, xxxi, No. 1., Jan. 1939 pp. 68-88; E W Gilbert, 'The Idea of a Region', Geography, 1960, 45, pp. 157-175.

[14] R Wagner, 'The Zoutpansberg : The Dynamics of a Hunting Frontier , 1848 - 1867' in Economy and Society... eds. S Marks and A Atmore, London, 1980.

[15] Raymond Williams, The Country and the City, p. 124

over time,[16] physically the area is dominated by a mountain range which rises suddenly to the north-west of the the Springbok Flats. Comprising several smaller ranges, the whole series is known as the Waterberg (or sometimes just Waterberg) and forms part of an almost continuous mountain barrier stretching to the east that marks the beginnings of the lowveld. 'Behind' or west of the mountains lies an uneven plateau, known variously as the Palala or Waterberg plateau or Limpopo Highlands, that declines to the west and then drops suddenly to the Limpopo valley.[17] When people speak about the Waterberg they often refer generally to the magisterial district, but there is as well a more specific meaning which refers to the mountain/plateau region or as one resident put it describing her perceptions of the area : 'The mountains on that side and the Limpopo this side'.[18] This is often considered the 'true Waterberg', or as some people call it, the north Waterberg.[19]

Imaginatively the shape of the area derives as well from the mountains which divide the magisterial district into 'this side' and 'that side'. The following testimony from a resident describing how one approaches the area from Nylstroom, illustrates this imaginative organisation of space :

> The plain, and the seven sisters and then the Nek is over the hill and then this side you're in the Waterberg proper. I think the Waterberg does extend to Nylstroom but our Waterberg as such is the north Waterberg, you know, it comes from those hills. As everyone used to say, if you live north of the nek, you're mad. A man went in to get his driver's licence and they said : "I'm not going to risk my life with you, you come from north of the nek".[20]

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[16] TA, D J Pieterse, 'Inleiding', Argief Waterberg, Landroste, Waterberg - Zoutpansberg, Johannesburg

[17] Drawn from J H Wellington, Southern Africa A Geographical Study, Cambridge, 1955, p. 85 and interview with Lex Rodger, Louwskraal, Hanglip, August 1986, and Monica Cole, South Africa, London, New York, 1966, pp. 653-660.

[18] Interview Lois Baber, Boschdraai, Vaalwater district, August 1986

[19] See, Leon Rousseau, The Dark Stream, Johannesburg, 1982, p. 217; also interview with Lois Baber, Boschdraai, August 1986.

[20] Interview, Lois Baber, op cit

This perception of a zone 'behind the mountain' has a history going back to the 1850s when early Boer settlers began trickling into the south of the region. At that time its northern parts must have seemed both alluring and dangerous. Its fevers and flies made it one of the last areas in the Transvaal to be colonized, but its vast game resources and later its rumoured mineral deposits made it a place of legend into which many hunters went in the middle decades of the century in search primarily of ivory.

At this time and from a European point of view, it was an unknown region at the very edge of the familiar world. But as a place of legendary riches, it generated its own wealth of stories, tales and mythologies which gave it a powerful imaginative reality that was to influence many people, one of whom was Eugene Marais. As a young boy in Pretoria, the tales of hunters returning from the Waterberg captivated his attention :

> From that wonderland, the hunters' wagons used to come to Pretoria to unload their ivory and skins at the trading stores : Giraffe-skin whips ; sjamboks of rhinoceros and hippopotamus hides ; cured until they were quite translucent, the sheen and colour of clear amber ; rhinoceros horns and dried hides of all the big animals of the wild bushveld - blue wildebeeste, sable and roan antelopes, hartebeeste, giraffes and numbers of others we boys of the civilized south could only guess at.[21]

Not surprisingly the hunters also had tales to tell : 'hair-raising stories of midnight attacks and hair-breadth escapes ... In all their tales loomed large Mapela "the black eagle" sitting on his insurmountable crags and holding the Waterberg in continual fear'.[22] To at least some further south, the Waterberg then was a region constituted by narrative, a faraway place which produced not only game but storytellers, traditionally people from afar as

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[21] Eugene Marais, 'The Road to the Waterberg' in Versamelde Werke, Ed Leon Rousseau, Pretoria, 1984, p. 1203.

[22] Ibid.

Benjamin has pointed out.[23] So powerful were these stories that Marais later spent a decade of his life in the Waterberg and in turn became one of its most noted storytellers.

Like Marais, other white settlers were to be attracted by its 'fictions' of being 'the ideal theatre of manly adventure, of great endeavours and the possibility of princely wealth'.[24] The area was also to provide material from which a group of colonial storytellers like Vere Stent, Stuart Cloete, Gustav Preller and possibly Haggard and Buchan were to become famous.[25]

Another writer Cyril Prance translated the Waterberg into a literary convention which he called 'Skranderberg' , 'a sort of Transvaal parallel to Hardy's Wessex'.[26] Using the convention of the Afrikaner storyteller, called Tante Rebella, Prance documents the social morphology of the region in stories which look back to Gibbon and Blackburn and most probably acted as models for Bosman. In addition to this fiction, the Waterberg has generated documentary and travel writing for since Sarah Heckford travelled into the Waterberg as a trader in the 1870s, there have been other travellers like Lolus Leipoldt for example who have recorded their impressions of the region.[27] As opposed

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[23] Walter, Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in Illuminations, Glasgow, 1977, pp. 84-85

[24] Marais, op. cit, p. 1203

[25] See S and B Stent, The Forthright Man, Johannesburg, 1972; Stuart Cloete, The Gambler An Autobiography 1920-1939, London, 1973; Preller based much of his prolific writing for magazines like Huisgenoot and Brandwag on his experiences in the Waterberg. For Buchan and Haggard see Lex Rodger, Vintage Waterberg, unnumbered typescript.

[26] Cyril Prance, Tante Rebella's Sagas, London, 1937, p. 17, hereafter TRS; his other books include Under the Blue Roof, Bloemfontein, 1944, (hereafter UBR); Dead Yesterdays, Port St Johns, 1943, (hereafter DY); The Riddle of the Veld, Durban, 1941, (hereafter RV) and A Socialist Scrap Book, Durban, 1945.

[27] C Louis Leipoldt, Bushveld Doctor, Cape Town, 1983.

to those passing through, there is as well a body of testimony, both published and unpublished from those who have lived in the region.[28]

It is primarily this literature with which this paper is concerned. But first we must pause to look briefly at the historical context from which it came and 'about' which it shaped itself.

This reality was of course not all magical tales and legendary experiences for by the 1880s the entire region was from a European point of view still considered a 'remote and pestilent corner of Africa'[29] that mostly harboured fractious chiefs, foolhardy hunters, desperate criminals on the run from the law[30] and unfortunate officials who from the 1860s had to contend with a region that was an administrative nightmare. Tax from both black and white was mostly a theoretical issue from which the authorities in Pretoria constantly demanded practical results. And even if one should track down a tax offender, the administration of justice was extremely patchy since many cases - mostly for stocktheft, poaching and illegal liquor selling - never happened : the witness 'nergens te vinden' or the accused 'gevlucht en kan

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[28] This material includes Elizabeth Clarke, op cit, and also her Transvaal Poems, Johannesburg, n.d.; Mary Davidson, op cit, and letters, diaries and papers of this family in possession of Lois Baber and Rosalind King; Anna Havenga, Life in the Wilds of the Northern Transvaal, London, 1913; Amy J Baker, "I Too Have Known", London, 1911; sections of Francis Bancroft, The Veldtdwellers, London, 1913, and Thane Brandon, London, 1913; A G Bee, Rolling Home, London, 1936 and A Man Should Rejoice, London, 1938; Nancy Courtney-Acutt, Bushveld, Durban, 1942; W Saunders, ed, The Reminiscences of a Rand Pioneer, Johannesburg, 1977; Lex Rodger, Vintage Waterberg and The Stockwhip, unpublished typescripts.

[29] Phrase from Wagner, op. cit, p. 336

[30] See details in Prance, 'A Sign-post "in the blue"', UBR, p. 16, and 'A "Hydro" in the Bush', p. 169 and 'The Old Adam in the Veld', p. 75, both in TRS

nich weer gevonde worden'. It was in all a rather grim frontier from which officials sent whining and self-pitying letters telling of chaotic office conditions aggravated by aggressive white ants.[31]

However where this administrative confusion failed, the Boer settlers resorted to more violent means particularly when it came to extending their control over the people with whom they shared their world. In their forms of conquest, the Boers were in many ways similar to Mzilikazi's raiding state that had effected the region in the 1820s and 30s. From the 1850s and particularly in the 1860s, when the settler population was strengthened by people retreating from concerted African resistance in the Zoutpansberg, the Boer kommandos waged various campaigns against the African communities of the area, particularly the Langa Ndebele in the north and the Bakgatla of Mosetla in the south.[32] While the power of these communities was considerably eroded and in addition many families, particularly from Bakgatla communities[33] were scattered on Boer farms, they remained nonetheless semi-independent communities for some time, largely because effective white settlement was so long in coming.

However despite the realities of <u>de facto</u> occupation, from an early date settlers imaginatively shaped the region as they wished it to be. Hence one finds many 'counter-factual narratives' of prophecy that in essence suggest

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[31] Paragraph based on documents from TA, Argief Waterberg, (AW); for ants see vol. 1, Landros, Korrespondensie, Inkomende Stukke, 15/5/80 and 13/81; for tax see vol. 2, 175/86, Vol. 109, Landroshof, Circular No. 36, 1st Nov. 1879; for courtcases see vol. 93, Landros - Kriminele Sake, 1880-1900, Case vs Kaiser for liquor selling, Aug. 1895, case vs G E Engelbrecht for poaching July 1895.

[32] See Wagner, <u>op cit</u> p. 316, 322-23; Transvaal Native Affairs Department, <u>Short History of Transvaal Native Tribes</u>, Pretoria, 1905, pp. 15 and 18 and TA, SN 67, 335/1902, Report upon the District Waterberg and the various native races and their circumstances.

[33] See <u>Short History of Native Tribes</u>, <u>op cit</u>, p. 28

how the Waterberg world could, should or might be. The outlines of this world are perhaps best seen in maps which like stories project or imply a desired world.

In the case of the Waterberg, turn of the century maps often represented the area as predominantly blue and pink in a ratio of roughly two to one.

> Blue showed the land held by Land Companies and Corporations domiciled in Johannesburg, and pink marked the "dud" remainder which had been left on the hands of Paul Kruger's government - till conquest transferred it to Queen Victoria and her "heirs, successors and assigns".[34]

For an area considered so remote and pestilential, the map would have had an imperceptible smattering of white denoting private European ownership. Equally small were brown areas symbolising regions of black tenure.

> Except where exiguous areas as were marked in brown to indicate ownership by "black stuff" which had learned its place in white South Africa, the northerly wilderness had largely been torn piece meal from Bantu kings offenders against the majesty of an exotic law[35]

In the official imagination of the map, black residence existed chiefly in the four state established locations mainly in the north of the district.[36] The general European attitude to the area was best captured in another map convention which named much of the North-Western Transvaal 'DBU' , 'Dense, Bushy, Unsurveyed'.[37] Such maps, reflecting only de jure ownership, wished

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[34] Prance, 'The Tragi-comedy of "Little Egypt" ' in DY, p. 105. Land figures from Transvaal Administration Report for 1904, Surveyor General, p. D 8, 'Tables of Areas...' states that of the 15,503 square miles that make up the Waterberg, 4,747 or about a third were Crown Land. Almost the entire remaining two-thirds was company land, The Agricultural Journal of South Africa, vol. 11, No. 7, 1915, p. 118.

[35] Prance, DY, pp. 105-6. Figures of white ownership deduced from company and crown land figures above.

[36] TA, SN 67, 338/1902, Report..., op cit. and Linda Chisholm, 'Proletarianization and Resistance in the Northern Transvaal, 1901-1906'. M A Area Studies (Africa), University of London, 1979, p. 23.

[37] Prance, 'In the "D.B.U"', in DY

away the untidy realities of de facto occupation. The 'fiction' represented in this map is one shared by many other stories. They too suppress black life, removing people imaginatively beyond the borders of the farm, there to merge with the landscape and its wild life.[38]

In the 1880s the Kruger state attempted to make a white presence in the Waterberg more real through a series of occupation laws aimed to encourage settlement and 'pacification' particularly 'behind the mountain'.[39] But burghers mostly sold their allotted lands to speculators and land companies since agriculture 'over the hills' offered no great incentive. The most arable land lay in the valleys of the three major rivers of the region. These areas however were particularly fever ridden, while higher, healthier ground was either too mountainous or had thin, sandy infertile soil. Running cattle, if a slightly better proposition was still hazardous.[40] By 1902, settlement was still largely 'this side' of the hills and there were said to be 1500 white households virtually all settled within a 35 mile radius of Nylstroom where they mostly ran cattle and farmed small amounts of wheat, tobacco and mealies.[41]

While this figure may reflect some demographic distortion as a result of the Anglo-Boer war, white settlement did in fact come late to the region. When more white settlers began arriving, they did so partly through initiatives tied up with British settlement schemes and partly through patterns of internal Afrikaner migration, that for a time at the beginning of the century

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[38] See A G Bee, 1936, op cit. for such descriptions

[39] TA, SNA 176, 2430/1903, Precis of correspondence relative to the enquiries of the Zoutpansberg Land Tenure (Occupation) Commission

[40] Extrapolated from Wellington and Cole, op cit

[41] TA, GOV 631, Report on Waterberg, Robert French, 1903.

filled up area where land was cheap when other regions were emptying.[42] During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the number of British settlers increased markedly.[43] Like the Peacocks and Edith Fawssett who arrived in the 1880s, a few of these settlers made their way to the Waterberg. However the majority of English-speaking settlers who arrived in the Waterberg did so as part of post-Anglo-Boer war land settlement schemes.

Propagated not only by the state, these schemes were also energetically promoted by a phalanx of organisations that generated a euphoric gospel of land settlement and anglisication.[44] While these schemes were mostly unworkable, 'one gross scandal' as one put it, by 1902 some 700 men saw fit to settle in the Transvaal under various programmes.[45] As the Waterberg was an area of almost entirely crown and company land which its owners were keen to offload, somewhere between 100 and 200 of these men ended up in that region, mainly on the Springbok Flats. Their numbers however soon diminished rapidly due to drought and inexperience of local farming conditions.[46]

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[42] The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Part I Economic Report : Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus, J F W Grosskopf, Stellenbosch, 1932, pp. 66 and 76. I am indebted to Andrea van Niekerk for this point.

[43] Putting A Plough to the Ground Eds Beinart et al., Johannesburg, 1986, p. 28.

[44] M Streak, Lord Milner's Immigration Policy for South Africa, 1897- 1905, M A, R A U, 1969; S Marks and S Trapido, 'Lord Milner and the South African State' in Working Papers in Southern African Studies Vol 2, ed P Bonner, Johannesburg, 1981

[45] Figures from Transvaal Administration Report for 1904, Land Department, p. AA 1-AA 2, gives the Transvaal figures as 323 men under squatter settlement schemes while the same report for 1905, p. A 13, lists 309 under Settlers Ordinance and 139 under Crown Land Disposal. Quote from TA, GOV 1059, 17/53/1907, letter from W M Mountjoy complaining about the conditions of the settlement schemes.

[46] Streak, op cit, p. 37; interview with Charles Baber op cit and Lex Rodger, op cit. Figures (which are very approximate) based on TAD Report for 1904, ibid, which lists 78 people as settling in the Waterberg under Settlers Ordinance Provisions. For the 323 under squatter settlement provision, there are no regional figures but they were dispersed to

This failure did not deter the land settlement agencies and their members. One of their number, William MacDonald from the Transvaal Land Board was still zealously and actively advocating land settlement when the second major wave of settlers were being recruited after the First World War. As editor of The South African Agricultural Journal, he continued to urge 'big-boned' men to take to the plough to convince 'the faint-hearted sceptics and the do nothing critics of the farming potentialities of South Africa'.[47] A forceful and prolific writer, MacDonald worked with the almost magical sets of associations and meanings that words like farmer, farm, land and agriculture could generate - associations so powerful that a full understanding of them would go a long way towards explaining why eminent British colonial officials could readily embark on disastrous land schemes, not once but several times.

In MacDonald's idiom farming almost ceased to become a craft or profession but was instead portrayed as an inherited condition of gentility, ('I could not help myself. I was born a good farmers son')[48] that did not necessarily require experience or capital. Instead this cluster of ideas stressed alternative qualifications one of which was soldiering.[49] In addition this ensemble of concepts elevated farming to the status of a secular religion that could heal social wounds and restore social balance : 'Give the miner a comfortable home and a piece of freehold land which he may call his own and

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various areas of the Transvaal one of which was the Springbok Flats remembered as having a lot of soldier-settlers.

[47] Phrase from W MacDonald, Facts from Fifty Farmers, Johannesburg, 1914, p. 10. His other works include The Immortal Struggle, Johannesburg, 1918; Makers of Modern Agriculture, London, 1913

[48] MacDonald, 1914, ibid, p. 10

[49] See MacDonald, ibid., Introduction, for farming on 'indomitable perseverance' alone. For a range of perceptions of what constituted qualifications for settler-farmers, see Report of the Land Settlement Commission, South Africa, Part II, Documents and Evidence, (Cd. 627), in which people variously advanced nationality, energy, military experience, having immediate family as farmers, age and strength as reasons for applying for land.

you will immediately remove the cancerous sore of continual unrest. Have you ever thought of the healing power of land - the great sympathetic, silent, Mother of Mankind?'[50] Most of these ideas were of course fictions but like the hunters' tales before them they played some part in attracting settlers. By the 1920s there were several hundred of them who had come to the Waterberg many like Stuart Cloete from the trenches of the Great War. Shattered by his First World war experience he reverted 'to the simplest things in life, to woman... - and the land. To dig, to sow, to plant and watch things grow....It was a Garden of Eden existence.'[51] By 1920 he was employed by a land company as manager. He lived on various farms on the Springbok Flats and then moved to a farm near Hammanskraal. In many ways, the 'ideal-type' settler, Cloete's life was deeply shaped by colonial literature - Haggard, Livingstone, and Selous -[28] and his experience in the bushveld was in turn processed into further colonial stories. As he explained, the Waterberg was 'the place where I saw the Africa about which, later I was to spend my life writing'.[53]

Like Cloete, very few of these English settler farmers stayed. Most moved away to towns and not a few killed themselves, worn out by the endless battle of undercapitalized farming.[54] The few who were better capitalized stayed bringing with them new methods of agriculture and 'new cultural directions'.[55] Later the beneficiaries of increased state involvement in white agriculture, these English families who remained were to witness over the first thirty years of this century a transition in the area. Beginning

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[50] MacDonald writing in The Agricultural Journal of South Africa, of which he was editor, Vol. 11, No. 7, 1915, p. 23.

[51] Stuart Cloete, op cit, p. 9

[52] Ibid., p. 72

[53] Ibid., p. 107

[54] Prance, 'The Riddle Posed' in RV, p. 4

[55] Beinart et al, op cit., p. 29

with energetic post-Anglo-Boer war plans for reconstructing agriculture, the remote world of the Waterberg began to change, but only very slowly imperceptibly. Some of the symbols of this change were things like the surveyor, the Model T Ford and the railway. The first of these appeared in the Waterberg after 1902; the second after the 1914-18 war and the third amidst great celebration when the railhead advanced to Vaalwater in 1928.

These forces along with things like primary education, the spread of communication and easy travel are as one has said, 'the great solvents of local culture', and under their impact some of the rougher 'localisms of remoteness' began to disappear.[56]

One of these 'localisms' was an essentially regional economy, originally shaped around hunting which as Wagner shows, drew behind it the smous from whence came access to consumer goods and the coercive power of the gun.[57] However as the ivory frontier disappeared, these veins of commerce grew fainter. Traders and merchants did of course enter the area and agricultural produce did leave the area but only in small quantities since the Waterberg was consistently the poorest agricultural producing region of the Transvaal.[58] Transport riders often carrying yellow wood for the Rand also left the district.[59] When it could be collected, tax from crown and company land was sent out and helped to support the upkeep of these institutions' agents, while after 1906 tin mining provided something of a regional economic focus. For the rest people mainly lived off subsistence farming, poaching

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[56] F W Morgan, op cit, p. 74 and 80. While this of course is often the case, these forces can equally promote the 'reinvention' of a local culture as a political response to change.

[57] Wagner, op cit., p. 336

[58] See Chisholm, op cit, for figures of the relative agricultural produce of the regions of the Transvaal, p. 35

[59] Rodger interview, op cit, and Carnegie/Grosskopf. op cit., p. 142

and brewing for the Waterberg was a region flowing with peach-brandy. Perhaps the clearest indication of the region's 'enclosure' was the fact that it was noted as an area in which those on the run from the law frequently took refuge.

Much of the English literature of the Waterberg concerns itself with this period of passing, suddenly glimpsing in that which is vanishing something of significance. Or as one writer expressed these changes via the symbol of the automobile : through 'the mass production of Messrs. Ford and Dodge', one could observe 'the passing of huge cars crowded with sportsmen or with tourists intent on exploration in "the blue" in the hope of inflicting their experiences and observations on some London publisher or editor'.[60] In many ways then, this fiction from this small but significant group of English settlers constitutes a literature of remembering. But in the structure of that memory itself one can detect the historical traces of their experience which manifests itself in certain recurrent designs in these narratives. The overarching pattern takes shape around the idea of the mountain range as a barrier-frontier which becomes the subject/pretext for narratives of difficult journeys into a remote world. This world beyond the mountains is in turn recreated by a series of stories focusing on the social format of the settler world rooted in the universe of the farm. Let us consider each of these stages in more detail.

Like most people Eugene Marais first entered the Waterberg from Nylstroom. Travelling with a man Dolf Erasmus, they headed for the Waterberg which lay before them 'like a gapless wall'. Fortunately their journey went smoothly. Had it been raining, things would have been different for then the black turf or 'cotton soil' of the Springbok flats 'became frightful to pull

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[60] Prance, 'A Sign-Post "in the Blue" ', UBR, p. 166

[61] Quotes from Marais 'The Road to the Waterberg', op cit, p. 1204 and Heckford, op cit, p. 331

through'.[61] This specifically regional feature often becomes something which triggers stories which in turn become part of the repertoire of a 'Waterberg tale'.[62] It was a tale that carried on over the mountains. There the thin, sandy soil made a journey an experience which was often translated into narrative.[63]

As Erasmus and Marais continued their journey, there 'loomed before (them) the massive front of a range which quite clearly had no break'. With no gorge or pass, they 'toiled up (the zig-zag road) with frequent rests'.[64] The point they had reached is knowns as Sandrivierspoort or the Nek, one of the major entrances to the Waterberg. As a place of entry and exit, it was from an early date a node of commerce with a store and hotel.[65] It was also a repository of narrative since it was a place in which stories were told. Today it is no longer a point of commercial consequence, yet it remains nonetheless a place about which stories get told and through which stories get recalled. It is in other words a type of historical mnemonic in which narrative gets 'stored'. One documenter of the region describes it as 'a country store and inn, and many a story could that rambling, white washed building tell, for after the perils of the nek every trekker would relax there and restore his nerves with liquid refreshment'.[66] While the store's function has largely disappeared, it remains a narrative landmark for many white residents. As one informant explained : 'As you go down you go over a steep hill and there's a bend and there's a shop ... It's an antique shop now that was a hotel years ago. The big thing was to get past that hotel, that was the big challenge

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[62] For examples see Heckford, ibid, Lex Rodger, Vintage Waterberg op cit p. 3 and Cyril Prance, 'Discoverer's Right' in UBR

[63] See Heckford and interview with Lois Baber op cit

[64] Marais, op cit p. 1205

[65] Interview, Mary Chaney, Vaalwater, August 1986.

[66] Elizabeth Clarke, 1955, op cit, p. 2

to all'. These remarked in turned triggered a story about his grandfather and his exploits at the Nek.[67] While in general terms these stories are variants of colonial romances which posit a frontier across which experience will be different, they have a specificity that derives from a very precise landscape which gives these 'narratives of entry and exit' an identifiable regional feel.

The pattern of these journey narrative have as well other regional variations. Take for example the stories of seasonal movement arranged around the winter movement of people down to bushveld territory used as hunting ground and winter pasture.[68] There are as well stories revolving around the introduction of mechanized transport and communications. These include a vein of narrative whose protagonist is the Model T Ford or 'Tin Lizzie', and the steam engine whose arrival in Vaalwater in 1928 old residents recall in tremendously precise detail.[69] The Model T stories often lampoon outsiders attempting to enter the district on roads which existed only in the fiction of a map. Faced with these conditions, the driver has to accommodate himself to the region sometimes by reconverting the car to a donkey wagon, or as Leipoldt has to do, by stuffing grass into repeatedly punctured tyres.[70]

Once inside the region or behind the mountains, the specific vegetation and ecology form another morpheme of the Waterberg story.[71] In addition

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[67] Interview with Charles Baber, op cit

[68] Prance, 'The Earthly Hope Man Set Their Hearts Upon' in TRS

[69] For Model T stories see much of Prance and Rodger, for railway stories see Lois Baber interview, op cit

[70] Leipoldt, op cit and Baber interview.

[71] See for example Elizabeth Clarke, Transvaal Poems, op cit, based largely on the trees and landscape of the region; A G Bee, 1938, op cit, p. 290 and Prance, 'Liberty Hall', in UBR

storytellers also divide the area into sub-regions also sometimes based on vegetation like for example 'the moepel'.[72]

However the overriding form into which experience is cast is the classic settler narrative - the farm story.[73] Like Mollie Fawssett, most settlers imagined and organized their world through the farm and most narratives too share this pattern. While narratologically these tales may appear merely as variants of the farm story, they, like the narrative of the colonial journey have a specific regional core. Take for example the settler's perception of the black world. In a pattern common in much colonial writing, the farm boundary is the line of exclusion beyond which lies the wilderness as in the following passage where a father imagines his son on a Waterberg farm :

> veld stretches to the skyline from the bush-clad kopjes on the borders of the farm ... We shall buy you a gun ... and when you have been taught how properly to handle it, you can guard the chickens from the wild cats, and the eggs from the leguvaan ... and you might catch a jackal sneaking along just after sundown ... or you may prevent a kaffir from stealing your uncle's crops and taking his oxen for meat, but you will have to be careful because the magistrate will fine you twenty-five pounds. For stray dogs remove the bullets and fill the cartridge with salt. It stings but does not injure, and they will never return.[74]

The farm in this passage becomes the unit whose borders are threatened by vermin, a category into which Africans have been translated. The prophecy in the passage becomes self-fulfilling. When the boy, James Bredfield, grows up, he turns into the presaged hunter of people not outside but inside the farm boundaries.

> James Bredfield had a battle-royal one day, for he was mobbed by the population of the native <u>stad</u> ... which was in the farm. John was

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[72] See for example Mary Chaney interview, Vaalwater August 1986.

[73] Jean Marquard, 'The Farm : A Concept in the Writing of Olive Schreiner, Pauline Smith, Doris Lessing, Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head', <u>Dalhousie Review</u>, 1979, vol 59, No. 2, pp. 293-307.

[74] A G Bee, 1936, <u>op cit</u>, p. 3

> anxious when he heard it, for his son had walked into the angry crowd and seized a herd-boy whom he suspected of stealing cattle for meat.[75]

While this type of perception could no doubt be found in many farm narratives, there is an element of regional particularity in these stories which if not precisely Waterberg is at least bushveld or Northern Transvaal specific. This particularism has to do with the way tenants are perceived through the frame of labour relations, a category often regionally decided through local struggles in the area. In Waterberg stories most black characters are seen through the 'three month' or '90 day system' which operated on most farms.[76] In addition in the character of the indentured or apprenticed worker one sees the traces of earlier more coercive labour systems.[77]

As a settler literature we get almost no glimpses from the tenants' side. Where we do it constitutes an interesting perspective on the farm. On his travels, Leipoldt approached a man with legendary clairvoyant ability. The man promised to demonstrate his skill : ' "But not here. Not on the farm. The farm (is) not the proper place to call the spirits to" '.[78]

Another variant of the farm story are narratives of beacons, boundaries, and the whole paraphenalia of surveying and land transactions, one of the cultural forms through which the land is structured and possessed. Again these stories have a regional shape since the issue they deal with constitutes a major theme of the Northern Transvaal generally and the Waterberg and Zoutpansberg specifically. Here by the end of the nineteeenth century land title and

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[75] A G Bee, 1938, op cit, p. 291

[76] Elizabeth Clarke, 1955, op cit, p. 19; Carnegie/Grosskopf, op cit, p. 167 and interviews with Lois Baber, Nancy Davidson and Enoch Magwaza, Blackhill, Witbank district, September 1986.

[77] Prance, 'Father's Folly', TRS, p. 136

[78] Loius Leipoldt, op cit., p. 291

tenure was as one commission put it 'bordering on chaos' given the practices of land grants to burgers; the pattern of land speculation and the lack of surveyors.[79] Part of Milner's reconstruction plan involved imposing a British and surveyed order on the Transvaal landscape. This however was not always an easy task in remote difficult terrain where Boer farmers could use their local knowledge to vernuek 'Milner experts' and other 'khaki' officials who said things like 'Hah-de-doo' and 'my good man'.[80]

Yet another regional concern of the farm story derives from the agricultural limitations of the Waterberg. As one farmer said : 'Do not put thy faith in mealies - not in the Waterberg'.[81] Probably until at least the 1920s much white farming was generally theoretical and most white settlers were transitory. The most permanent and productive farmers were mainly black tenants and peasants. This was of course hardly the situation to foster the heroic 'plaasroman' in which farms 'become the seat to which ... lineages are mystically bound, so that the loss of a farm assumes the scale of the fall of an ancient house, and the end of a dynasty'.[82] It would in fact have been very difficult for any storyteller to monumentalise farming in the Waterberg and instead many narratives generate a sly humour by playing off heroic notions of farming against the everyday realities of farm practice involving as they did 'bilious' days

> when a farmer's life seemed but a turgid grind of worry with egg-eating hens and dog ; hen-eating hawks and cats; calves that will not suck; cows that refuse to allow suction; fence-jumping oxen; ticks, tampans,

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[79] TA, SNA 176, 2430/03, Precis of Correspondence relative to the enquiries of the Zoutpansberg Land Tenure (Occupation) Committee

[80] Prance, 'Cursed Be He' in TRS

[81] A G Bee, 1938, op cit, p. 293.

[82] J M Coetzee, 'Lineal Consciousness in the Farm Novels of C M van den Heever', paper presented to the AUETSA Conference, Cape Town, 1985 pp. 2-3

> locusts, army-worm, bag-worm and cut-worm; spons-siekte, gal-siekte, nieu-siekte, vuur-siekte...[83]

In addition Waterberg stories often comically invert the symbolic hierarchies of farming. Hence the hallowed occupation of ploughing and reaping often believed to be superior to animal husbandry was referred to by at least one as 'twakboerdery'. For this man, Hans van Heerden of Nooitgedacht, only cattle farmers were truly 'people' and 'farmers'.[84]

In many instances the gap between the symbolic 'reality' of farming and the practical world was enormous particularly since most white 'farmers' in the Waterberg hardly worked the land at all, preferring instead to 'farm' biltong and peach-brandy. While this was not a cultural tradition followed by English-speaking settlers, many of them too did little farming preferring instead by all satirical accounts to play tennis most of the time.[85] Despite this reality, the notion of 'being a farmer' was an extremely powerful one and writers like Prance exploit the humour implicit in the gap particularly in the case of English settlers caught up as they were in the massive fiction of land settlement. From this situation issues forth a range of stories of the 'tennis mad' English, the 'stoep ornament' farmer, and those attempting to reconstruct a 'lady novelists' perfect ranch' in 'poison plant veld at a hundred miles from rail'.[86]

Since few Europeans lived by farming alone, people cultivated a wide range of skills. Brewing, hunting , poaching and selling animals both dead and

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[83] Prance, 'A Desert Place Apart' in UBR, p. 79

[84] Eugene Marais, 'Die Mielies van Nooitgedacht', in Rousseau, 1984 op cit, vol 1, p. 399.

[85] Rodger interview and Prance, 'The "Tennis Klub" at Edenhoek, in TRS pp. 188-191

[86] Prance, 'Strange Birds in the Bush' in TRS

alive were the main ones. Others included trading, smousing, transport riding, 'doctoring', photography, teaching, charcoal production, tin mine work, black smith work, state and land company posts and labour agencies.[87]

In the literature these crafts translate themselves into a range of strongly typological figures like the smous, the wandering teacher the state official and so on. Some of the stories too probe the format of social relationships that grow around the patterns of power and profession in any community. Take the case of Oom Stoffel who has enriched himself through trading and cattle grabbing during the 'English war'. He becomes a prestigious man to whom many in the region are indebted. Hence he feels he can move a beacon to enlarge his farm with impunity since any jury would be composed of people under his patronage. He is in the end given away by a 'Zulu policeman', a double outsider not bound by the invisible contracts of the Afrikaner community.[88] Particular crafts as well seem to attract clusters of stories. In some instances these have to do with a vanishing social type like for example the blacksmith.[89] In other instances stories cohere around the 'hidden crafts' of the region particularly brandy distilling. As with the farm stories, these ones also humourously exploit the distance between the legislated reality and the regional practice. In a situation where brandewyn-ketels were common, attempts to outlaw distilling were of course half-hearted not least because the law enforcers themselves were often part of the community which bound them by its codes of power and patronage.[90]

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[87] Based on information drawn from Heckford, Marais, Havenga, Rodger interview and Courtney-Acutt all cited above.

[88] Prance, 'Cursed Be He', TRS

[89] See Lex Rodger, 'The Blacksmith : from Civilisation to the Bushveld', The Star, April 14, 1948; Prance, 'In the "DBU" ', UBR; and Carnegie/Grosskopf, op cit, p. 145

[90] Prance, 'A Fly on Fortune's Wheel', RV, p. 30, 'Our "Boys" ', p. 204 and 'Dentistry in Dooidonkiesdorp', p. 192, both in RV; Rousseau, 1982, op cit, p. 214

Another type of skill also hidden but in ways very different from distilling was that rather diffuse category, 'local knowledge' which any number of stories explore. It is also something which any Waterberg protagonist is said to have and knows how to use to get ahead. The precise content of the knowledge varies but is generally tied up with the ability to maximize the repertoire of skills mentioned earlier. Hence for example the dithering Native Commissioner Scholefield whom we met earlier soon resigned and got a position with the Transvaal Land Owners' Association inspecting farms on the strength of his local knowledge which obviously increased with the job and put one in a judicious position to acquire land.[91] This Scholefield type is one that appears often in the fiction of the area and was of course a recognisable type of the bushveld where administrative remoteness promoted unorthodox methods. Delius's portrait of Abel Erasmus delineates the 'ideal-type' of this character.[92] In Waterberg fiction one gets fainter versions of this character of a similar fiefly bent but in these stories they are generally more comically inefficient and blusteringly incompetent than their counterpart in the Eastern Transvaal.[93]

Connected to the idea of local knowledge, is also the idea of storytelling. The storyteller is someone who stores this 'local knowledge' and can use it like other skills to get ahead. Consider the following example :

> Father and son arrived in Tronksdorp and put up at the hotel, where they met the agent who was handling the sale of the farm for its owners, a garrulous and plausible gentleman, who had served Her Late Majesty as a full private in several wars. Old John and young James thought that he was an excellent man, and, indeed, he was a cheerful fellow with a fund of anecdote which made you laugh as you signed in dangerous places upon

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[91] Johannesburg Public Library, Papers of the Transvaal Landowners' Association, Minute Book, Meeting, Sept. 14, 1904.

[92] Peter Delius, 'Abel Erasmus : Power and Profit in the Eastern Transvaal', Beinart et al, op cit

[93] Prance, 'A Fly on Fortune's Wheel' in RV

> which he had put his finger. He was a genius at turning away subsequent wrath with funny stories gliding from a smooth tongue.[94]

Stories in a sense then act as forms of social currency whereby identities were established and confirmed. However, a remote place like the Waterberg early this century was an ideal area for inventing identities as the many fugitives who hid in the area attested.[95] And around this theme of 'invented identities' a number of stories get told. One example is 'The Stockwhip' in which one man kills another and through 'making up stories' assumes his identity and inheritance. However it is through his skilful use of a larger sign of identity - his ability to wield a whip - that he gets caught.[96] Storytelling then would appear to be another of the crafts that people in the Waterberg practiced.[97] The sociology of the storytelling situation is of course an extremely complex one that cannot be explored here. Nonetheless this body of Waterberg literature opens some interesting insights into the ways in which storytelling both oral and written can function. To Mollie Fawssett for example writing was a crucial act of 'realigning' her identity in a new situation. Her aunt, Edith was also an accomplished storyteller whose skill is remembered to this day.[98] Cyril Prance in turn translated Edith and her household into a story of his own, while many of his other stories are clearly derived from major events in the region which in turn became the subject of orally circulated narrative, some of which still circulate today quite possibly having been given a new impetus by Prance's written

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[94] A G Bee, 1938, op cit p. 289

[95] See Rousseau. 1982, op cit p. 236

[96] Lex Rodger, 'The Stockwhip', typescript.

[97] This is a point that comes from conversation with Tim Couzens

[98] Interviews with Lois and Charles Baber, op cit, Nancy Davidson, Klipfontein, Vaalwater District, August 1986.

[99] The story based on 'the aunts' is 'Victorians on the Veld' in TRS; for an example of the latter category, see 'The Tragi-comedy of "Little

version.[99] Prance too attempted to probe some aspects of the meaning and status of a storyteller in a community through the figure of Tante Rebella, the 'stay-at-home' narrator, the exact opposite of the storyteller who brings experiences from afar.[100]

Stories get made then through an intricate web of experience, perception, interaction and circulation. And while the readership and circulation of stories like Prance's are difficult to gauge, it is perhaps important to note that they occupied a 'storytelling space' that no longer really exists today. Known sometimes as 'magazinery' these stories represented a modest craft practiced widely by people who depicted regional realities for local newspaper and magazines. Again not their major livelihood, it formed one of the repertoire of regional skills mentioned earlier.[101] Arguably one aspect of this storytelling craft in turn involved learning, mastering and co-ordinating another, smaller repertoire - the range of constituent parts found in Waterberg narratives. In some sense these narrative building blocks may derive from a reality similar to but wider than the Waterberg, notably that of the bushveld and Northern Transvaal. Nonetheless the skill of assembling these in dextrous combinations remains the same.

This skill of storytelling in white communities is something that also largely disappeared with the 'great solvents of local culture'. However in the Waterberg one can still see its traces and outlines : some of Edith's descendants for example are still good raconteurs. However while the performance of storytelling may have largely vanished, the memory of stories

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Egypt"' in DY, whose plot Lois Baber remembered as a narrative of her youth, interview, op cit

[100] Benjamin, op cit, pp. 84-85

[101] Phrase from TRS; Rodger, Courtney-Acutt, Prance, Edith Fawssett and Elizabeth Clarke worked as journalists or contributed to periodicals.

still remains and plays no small part in historical remembering since stories continually act as one of the two most common forms of recalling the past. If one can't remember a story in recalling times and events of which one has no direct experience, then one has to follow the second procedure that all historians use, namely deduction and speculation.[102]

Returning in conclusion to Williams's assertion that a sense of place is something made, something requiring pre-conditions, then one of these is that a region exist in narrative; that 'the places of experience' be remembered through story, and that the stories be 'about' the land, cohering around its social and physical shape. The design, texture and character of these stories are in turn structured by the region's economic and social shape which also ordains for example the places in which stories get made and the range of experience about which stories get told. In this web resides something that could arguably be called a Waterberg story whose grammar has been shaped by a particular regional history. A lot of theoretical narrative study goes the other way working towards a 'pure' grammar of narrative where specific historical and regional information is somehow incidental, a type of optional extra one can take or leave. Through this preliminary case study this paper has attempted to suggest the opposite : like 'a Waterberg tale' stories have regional and historical shapes that run deep.

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[102] These comments are of course quite simplified but are based on interviews done in the Waterberg where people often either tell stories or deduce a point by counter-factual argument. ('I can't remember exactly, or I wasn't born then, but if it's like this now then it must have been like that then' and so on)

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