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Willemsdorp by Herman Charles Bosman: The small-town locale as fictional vehicle for commentary on social and moral issues in the South African historical context

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Herman Charles Bosman's short stories are stylistically and thematically different from his novels. With the exception of "A Bekkersdal marathon" and "Sold down the river" all Bosman's short stories, numbering more than one hundred, take the South African farm as their setting. Bosman's first novel, *Jacaranda in the Night*, of which his second novel *Willemsdorp* is a reworking, followed his sojourn (1942–43) as a journalist in the country town of Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal region of South Africa. It appears that Bosman's light-hearted, if tragicomic, lampooning of the South African farm and its inhabitants (in his short stories) was replaced in his small-town novels by a dark satire of South African society during the Union period. In *Willemsdorp* Bosman holds up a mirror to the small town microcosm in order to reveal a (rather unpleasant) picture of the national macrocosm. *Willemsdorp* had been subjected to censorship at the time of first publication (1977) because of the writer's response to the mechanisms of prevailing racist ideology such as the Immorality Act, which resulted in his representation in the novel of police sadism towards people participating in interracial sexual acts. The reassessment of *Willemsdorp* that emerged with the publication of the full, uncensored text in 1998 has made it possible to establish its significance as a precursor of politically engaged protest literature in apartheid South Africa. It is perhaps for this reason that biographer and editor Stephen Gray in an introduction to the 1998 edition dubs it "the most important single item among the Bosman Texas papers". **Keywords:** Afrikaner nationalism, Herman Charles Bosman, immorality legislation, satire, small-town novel.

Introduction

Herman Charles Bosman, one of South Africa's most popular writers, became famous for capturing the rhythms of backveld Afrikaans speech, even though he wrote mostly in English. Bosman is best known for his short stories, in particular his Oom Schalk Lourens stories.¹ The inspiration for these stories was his experience as a schoolteacher in the Groot Marico district of the Western Transvaal in 1926. His sojourn in the Marico was abruptly terminated after six months when he was arrested and imprisoned for the murder of his stepbrother. It happened while he was spending the July school holidays with his mother and her second husband in Johannesburg. A tussle broke out between Pierre Bosman, Herman's young brother, and their stepbrother, David Russell. Bosman shot the latter with a hunting rifle that he had acquired from a farmer in the Marico.

After his release from prison three years later, Bosman published some sixty Oom Schalk Lourens stories in which the unsophisticated inhabitants of the Groot Marico backwater came alive in the most vivid, humorous and often moving manner. *Mafeking Road*, the best-known volume of Oom Schalk stories, carries the singular distinction of never having been out of print since its first publication in 1947.

Bosman's first novel, *Jacaranda in the Night*, of which his second novel *Willemsdorp* is a reworking, followed his sojourn (1942–43) as a journalist in the platteland town of Pietersburg in the Northern Transvaal region of South Africa.² Bosman's fictional dorp (or 'small-town') milieu constitutes more than a mere backveld village: he makes it a microcosm of South African society. In fact, his scathing satirical treatment of the goings on in a typical South African town prior to the fateful 1948 elections when the National Party came to power led to a drastic censoring of the *Willemsdorp* text when it was posthumously published as late as 1977.

The complete manuscript version of the novel was eventually published in 1998 by Human & Rousseau as part of their Herman Charles Bosman Anniversary Series. It made possible a renewed appreciation of Bosman's creative powers and the visionary manner in which he treated his material. Small-town society was for Bosman the ideal vehicle for commentary on social and moral issues in an era of political turmoil in South Africa.

The anniversary edition of *Willemsdorp* received glowing reviews. *Volksblad* reviewer, Wilhelm Grütter (8) who attended school in Pietersburg in the 1950s, suggested that the novel's evocation of the dorp's atmosphere is "almost tangible". More important, he says, is the novel's "revelation of the *nation's consciousness*" (my emphasis).

An article written by Irmgard Schopen (15) under the title "Herman Charles Bosman's Reading of Landscape in *Willemsdorp*", suggests an interesting shift in the depiction of the South African scene, from a romantic vision of the white man in Africa—as rendered in the Oom Schalk Lourens short story sequence—to a much darker vision. She proposes: "The landscape [in *Willemsdorp*] has become a terrifying and inescapable symbol of his [the white man's] inability to confront the uneasy paradox of his presence in Africa". For Bosman—in contrast to many of his contemporaries (particularly in the Afrikaans literary canon)—the South African small town does not represent the pastoral domesticity of colonial settlement, but rather an ideological blight on the surrounding landscape. In a discussion of the anti-pastoralism in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, J. M. Coetzee (3) touches on similar aspects of "the alienness of European culture in Africa". Coetzee refers to the unnatural domestication of the African landscape as "*smallness in the midst of vastness*" (2).

The isolation of the small-town locale is linked to the history of the Afrikaner and to the aspirations of pioneers in the Great Trek to settle out of reach of the British colonial government. In the first chapter of *Willemsdorp* the omniscient narrator describes the small settlement and what he dubs the Boers' schizophrenia "of trying

to adapt the rigid tenets of their Calvinistic creed to the spacious demands made by life on the African veld" (14). He goes on: "But through it all there is still the tawny grass of the Highveld. And there is Willemsdorp, a small town in the Northern Transvaal, almost a hundred years old. *It is bleak in character*" (15, my emphasis). In other words, the bleakness of Willemsdorp's character is linked to its bleak history.

A gruelling drama about the psychological consequences of the white man's relationship with the African landscape unfolds in *Willemsdorp*. The novel may be regarded as an example of writing against traditional African adventure novels such as Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. These narratives focus on, as Michael Chapman (130–31) suggests, "[T]he chivalric quest, in which Victorian gentlemen, some with Nordic features, accomplish their heroic deeds in an Africa that remains a laboratory for the proving of British manhood rather than a real place." Chapman goes on to say that the conventions of behaviour in these stories are rarely open to serious investigation in terms of class, race, or gender.

Willemsdorp reveals that Bosman does not baulk at serious investigation into societal foibles and idiosyncrasies. For him the isolated South African dorp setting is the ideal focal point on which to train his satirical eye in order to dissect the society that it represents. Although *Willemsdorp* contains many humorous gems, the tone is dark. Bosman exposes the South African town as a repository of moral perversion—a mirror of everything that is wrong with the Union period South African society on the eve of apartheid. Willemsdorp is depicted as a microcosmic space whose confined physical dimensions represent the ideological imprisonment—from which there appears to be no escape (flight is a central theme in the story)—of the mind of the nation.

The reassessment of *Willemsdorp* that emerged with the publication of the full, uncensored text in 1998 has made it possible to establish its significance as a precursor of politically engaged protest literature in apartheid South Africa. In this regard Neil Pendock (15) remarks: "The casual brutality and sadism of [the police] are now restored to the story and, in a terrifying way, it is almost as if *Willemsdorp* foreshadows the truth commission report or one of the handful of recent books which deal with the barbarity of apartheid, like Antjie Krog's *Country of my Skull*."

Willemsdorp as a mirror of society

In his 1947 essay "Dorps of South Africa", Bosman comments:

[A] dorp is unquestionably the best place in which to study life at close hand. Because it is all in slow motion you don't miss the significant details. And you get a complete picture, circumscribed by that frame which cuts off the village from the rest of the world. What is more important though is the deception of village life that calls for closer inspection: All that restfulness is only on the surface. Underneath, there is ferment.

Few of Bosman's contemporaries referred to dorp society in such harsh terms as "deception" and "ferment". Bosman, however, was drawn to the undercurrents in the typical South African small town. For him the closed-off physical aspect of the typical South African *platteland* village makes for the perfect allegorical setting in which to unmask the deception and moral ferment of the broader social picture. In *Willemsdorp* Bosman's satirical critique targets the ills associated with narrow Calvinism and rising Afrikaner nationalism during the Union period. It is no coincidence that Bosman's fictional town in *Willemsdorp's* prequel, *Jacaranda in the Night*, is named Kalvyn. This novel deals with—as the blurb on the cover of the 1947 edition states—"the stress and emotional compulsions pervading the inner lives of the inhabitants of a small Transvaal town". *Willemsdorp* focuses on the same thematic aspects, i.e. the psychological pressures on characters, who, as a result of mental imprisonment and ideological repression (symbolised by the small-town frame), make the wrong choices in life.

In *Willemsdorp* Bosman emphasises similar effects on the human psyche of unnatural ideological strictures as his contemporary Alan Paton in his small-town novel *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953). Both novels are concerned with the personal psychological effects of ideologically inspired societal norms, which, during the Union period (1910–61) in South Africa, were entrenched in racially discriminatory laws such as the Immorality Act (Act 5 of 1927), which proscribed interracial sexual congress.³ Almost all the characters in *Willemsdorp* are portrayed as victims of their unnaturally repressed social environment. Their deviant behaviour, Bosman suggests, is a direct consequence of not being able to live as free individuals in the ideological pressure chamber of the dorp. Bosman exposes like no South African author before him the small town as an allegorical cesspool of all that is wrong with society as a whole.

Willemsdorp is set in a small town in the Northern Transvaal just before the fateful 1948 election which carried Dr D. F. Malan's National Party with its apartheid policy to power. Bosman's main protagonist, Charlie Hendricks (who is a fictional representation of Bosman, the journalist)⁴ arrives in Willemsdorp to take up the position of editor of the *Northern Transvaal News*, which is, according to the narrator, "the most influential newspaper in the Transvaal outside of Johannesburg and Pretoria" (15). The newspaper promotes the interests of the Union Party (read: the United Party, which was in power under the leadership of General J. C. Smuts at the time.) This organ, however, should not be confused with *Die Noordelike Transvaal Nuus*, the vehicle of the Volksparty (read: National Party), which claims to be the most influential Northern Transvaal organ of public opinion. The Willemsdorpers are preparing for a by-election in which the Union Party representative, Robert E. Constable and the Volksparty candidate, Dap van Zyl, contest the parliamentary seat.

The Volksparty fights the election on racial lines. This is evident from the questions with which Constable is bombarded during a political meeting in the Town Hall.

Volksparty hecklers protest against the “liberal” Union Party policy, which favours giving non-whites the vote. Constable, however, finds himself in a somewhat weak position because his nomination for the Willemsdorp vacancy was accomplished through “string-pulling at the Pretoria headquarters of the Union Party” as a result of which “a good few loyal Union Party supporters in Willemsdorp who had themselves hoped to receive the nomination were, understandably, sore” (18). This type of corruption is revealed to be common practice in the dorp where hypocritical attitudes and behaviour on the part of so-called stalwarts of society appears to be the order of the day. *Willemsdorp*’s narrator comments with heavy irony on the townspeople at the meeting: “You could sense a certain degree of poise about them and, *almost breeding*” (19). Breeding, for the majority of Willemsdorpers, however, appears to translate not to poise or manners or anything abstract, but rather literally to racial purity and dominance.

A man who strongly supports notions of racial exclusivity is Johannes Erasmus, principal of the Willemsdorp Afrikaans-medium primary school.⁵ As Erasmus and his wife, Malie, walk home from the political meeting, he suggests that the coloured children playing in the street are the result of “having an RAF camp in the area during the war” (22). Malie points out, “We had some half-castes before the English air force came though” (22). Erasmus’s comments are emblematic of the demoralised Afrikaner psyche after the Boer War (1899–1902). They suggest that racially superior attitudes were for some Afrikaners a means of compensating for the humiliation suffered during the war.

However, when it comes to possible ‘racial tainting’ of Willemsdorp’s image, Erasmus need not fret. Police detective Sergeant Brits keeps a close watch on the enforcement of the race laws of the Union Government. It is indeed through the character of Sergeant Brits that Bosman delivers his most trenchant satire. After the political meeting in the town hall, the newspaper editor, Charlie Hendricks, encounters the inimitable Sergeant Brits on the pavement outside. The latter enlightens Hendricks as to the reasons for his flashing his torch over “suspicious” footprints. The so-called evidence he puts forward against white men who consort with a coloured prostitute is scathingly satirical:⁶

Yus, it’s a white man, I’m sure, [...] walking there with that kaffir woman, side by side. The nigger woman’s footprints I’ll know anywhere in Africa. She’s one of the nigger women in this town as I suspects of sleeping with white men. She’s got three pairs of shoes. [...] That shoe there might perhaps not be a white man’s shoe. You doesn’t always know. Although I gets a feeling it’s not a kaffir’s shoe. I don’t mean yus because it’s new and it isn’t fixed up underneath with a piece of motor car tyre. You got some kaffirs today wearing smart shoes, smarter’n any shoes I got to wear. And you also gets white men with their toes sticking out of their boots (32).

When Detective Sergeant Brits reports to his superior, Commandant Roelf Kolyn, Bosman's lampooning of the dorp's law bearers is in full sway. Kolyn reiterates a previous order to "clean up" the town because, "we don't want Willemsdorp to get a bad name. Remember that Cape senator that got arrested some years ago for sleeping with a nigger woman?⁷ Well, the village where that happened never heard the end of it. [...] We don't want that sort of thing to happen here" (41).

Although the police officer is the butt of Bosman's ridicule, the humour, whilst it deconstructs the evils of the establishment that Brits represents, ominously foregrounds it. Kolyn's instructions are to watch the white men in the community and if anyone is suspected of consorting with black women, he should be "fixed". The narrator sarcastically clarifies the innuendo: "They both knew what Brits meant without his having had to use the ugly word 'frame-up'" (43).⁸ Brits diligently sets off to carry out his instruction to issue warnings to the white men in Willemsdorp.

In addition to highlighting the absurdity of policing the equally absurd Immorality Act, Bosman demonstrates how the "cat-among-the-pigeons" effect of Brits's visits plays out. The reader is made aware of the full extent of the dark undercurrents in the dorp and how repressive social dynamics impact on the minds of townsmen such as the main protagonist, Charlie Hendricks (the newspaper editor), Cyril Stein (the school board secretary), Dap van Zyl (the Volksparty candidate), Johannes Erasmus (the headmaster) and his brother Krisjan. Bosman underlines the irony that, from a moral point of view, much worse than the contravention of the Immorality Act is going on under the smooth patina of small-town society.

Jack Brummer, mining commissioner and one-time rugby star, is the first on Sergeant Brits's list. When Brummer's secretary announces Brits, Brummer breaks into a sweat of panic. He knows he has much to hide from the long arm of the law. However, it turns out that Sergeant Brits is completely oblivious of the shenanigans of Willemsdorp's 'real' criminals. Bosman's ironic-satirical treatment of Brits's character actually exposes *him*—the representative of the Union Government's police force—as the worst type of criminal: corrupt and rotten to the core! Brits's rounds yield an unexpected number of bribes. His visit to the butcher is concluded rather swiftly because "rather than waste unnecessary words in a language that was strange to [the butcher], he made the detective a small present. It was something you could understand in any language" (72).

As Brits proceeds with his witch hunt it becomes increasingly ridiculous. The scene, describing his visit to the Anglican priest, the Reverend Thorwell Macey, glaringly shows up Brits and the system that he represents. There is a complete communication breakdown between the stiff-upper-lip English clergyman and the Afrikaans-speaking officer. Bosman cleverly plays on mispronunciations and misunderstandings of words such as "dirty", "filthy" and "stink". When Detective Sergeant Brits announces: "I just come here to do my dutty (sic.)", the priest responds:

“You can be as dirty as you like, my good man, [...] But please not here. [...] So I’ll be grateful if you’ll—er—go and do your dirty somewhere else” (73). When Brits calls a contravention of the Tielman Roos Act (the Immorality Act) “filthy”, Macey understands him to denigrate the law itself. He says: “Yes, it is truly disgusting, [...] It is in one word, vile. [...] It’s a beastly disgrace [...] to any country’s statutes, a law like that. It’s about the most iniquitous Act I’ve ever heard of. [...] I think it—it stinks” (74).

Cyril Stein, the eccentric Jewish director of the school board is sorely aware that he will never measure up to the unflinching demands of the community. He takes solace in smoking dagga (cannabis). His infatuation with the teacher, Lena Cordier, appears to be the only reason why he steers clear of the temptation provided by the coloured prostitute, Marjorie Jones, in the block of flats where he and Charlie Hendricks reside. (Unbeknown to Cyril, Charlie has already succumbed to Marjorie’s charms.) When Stein encounters Marjorie on the stairs, her physical beauty strikes him. His mood is philosophical. He remarks:

The African woman’s backside, Cyril Stein was thinking to himself. It was like the shape of the African continent on the map. From the loins of the negro woman would spring all the future generations that would people the African continent. The white man would come and go. His brief sojourn and his passing would leave behind few traces. In the loins of the black woman the history and destiny of Africa were wrapped up. The white man would come and go and be forgotten. Africa, wombed in the negro woman’s pelvis, was secure. Africa would go on forever. (95)

This is an important observation in the context of one of *Willemsdorp’s* major themes i.e. the white man’s relationship with the African landscape and its indigenes. Stephen Gray (*Southern African Literature* 38) proposes that all of South African literature is to some extent explained in terms of the pressures at work within a polymorphous frontier myth. In a chapter titled, “The Frontier Myth and the Hottentot Eve” in *Southern African Literature*, he explains that the seventeenth-century Khoi woman, Krotoa—re-named Eva by the first settlers—an actual, historical figure, was the source of the legend. He says: “Her (the Hottentot Eve’s) presence on the frontier lends the myth a quality of potential interchange, since she, as pastoral ambassadress, temptress, mediator and, ultimately miscegenator, comes to symbolize both the attractions and intractabilities of inland, that unknown terrain across the ever-shifting frontier.”

The challenge of unknown frontiers, however, is ambivalent. In this respect Irmgard Schopen (9) notes: “ [The challenge] is one of mutual threat and attempted domination—the land is perceived as a *tabula rasa* to be manipulated, subjugated and accorded meaning, but simultaneously it challenges and resists these attempts. It goes without saying that the same applies to the land’s indigenous population.”

Like Jack Brummer and Cyril Stein, Charlie Hendricks, the newspaperman, receives a visit from the ubiquitous Sergeant Brits. Hendricks knows that he must conceal his

secret from Sergeant Brits and the community. It is ironic that Hendricks, an Afrikaner, is the editor of the English newspaper, the *Northern Transvaal News*, official organ of the Union Party. This incongruity appears to be emblematic of Hendricks's situation in the dorp—he is a square peg in a round hole. In this regard Jones, the newspaper's compositor, articulates a premonition regarding his boss's future: "I've seen 'em come and I've see 'em go. And I somehow don't give this Hendricks bloke too long here, either. Don't ask me why—I don't know. But it's just a feeling I've got. It's a feeling I've got in my waters" (53). Anticipatory scenes such as the latter form an interesting part of the novel's structure. In this manner Bosman stresses the inevitable fate of characters that feel uncomfortable with—yet cannot escape—the narrow psychological context of the town milieu. Bosman suggests that the emotional pressures that such characters experience in an ideologically repressive atmosphere confuse their minds and compel them to make the wrong choices in life.⁹

Charlie Hendricks, although he prides himself on being a liberal, comes to realise that he is "far from being free of prejudice" (84). In fact, Hendricks confesses to himself that he is at heart a Boer. In a pivotal passage in the novel, the authorial voice interjects as follows:

He knew, of course. It wasn't that there was anything wrong per se with his relations with Marjorie [the mixed race prostitute]. At least, it was rotten, and all that. Stinking, and all that. But it wasn't just *that*. He was, in spite of all kinds of liberal and even egalitarian views that he might hold, still, at heart, a Boer and a Calvinist. Charlie Hendricks knew that about himself. He was the editor of a Union Party newspaper. And intellectually he recoiled from the Volksparty tenets. But in his blood he was a Boer. And he was sleeping with a kaffir woman. The generations of Boer ancestry were stronger than he was. He felt a lost soul (135).

The last sentence encapsulates the degree of hopelessness in the heart of an individual who realises that he is a victim of something that holds him captive. Charlie Hendricks wishes to break out of the ideological bonds that imprison him, but he knows that he is powerless. He despises himself for acquiescing to the small-town mindset. This causes his self-image to be eroded: he becomes paranoid, makes wrong decisions, and then tries to run away from his conscience.

Flight, as mentioned, is a key thematic element in the novel. Bosman powerfully foregrounds the Afrikaner's mental schizophrenia in the poignant scenes that relate to this theme. Hendricks in his mental anguish attempts to find solace in nature. He drives outside town, beyond all the structures that, as Schopen (12) states, signify man's attempted control of the landscape—the "new concrete bridge", "a barbed-wire fence" and "a deep cutting [where] the road to Kleinberg had been *hacked* through dense bush and *blasted* down a mountainside". The use of the italicised words evoke a violent invasion of the natural environment. They are charged with a strong sense

of ambivalence in terms of the agency that man has imprinted on the natural world. On the one hand he has created a safe haven—on farmsteads and in villages—for himself against the elements and the perils of the natural world. On the other hand, he has imprisoned himself in an unnatural milieu governed by restrictive moral barriers from which he desires to escape.

Bosman's juxtaposition of the open veld on the one hand and man-made settlement on the other and his exploration of the tensions symbolised by this dichotomy, is skilfully achieved in *Willemsdorp*. He offsets all that is represented by the limited town frame against the alluring, yet unfathomable, enigma represented by nature. Lengthy descriptions of unspoilt nature surrounding the town serve as a backdrop, which throws into stark relief the inconsequential human activities of the repressed little town.

When—after the murder of Marjorie Jones—Charlie Hendricks flees into the open veld surrounding the town hoping to find solace for his troubled mind, he finds fear instead. A sort of surreal, phantasmagoric nightmare besets him. Bosman's powerful description of the bout of primal fear that Charlie Hendricks experiences in the veld is spine chilling:

And suddenly Charlie Hendricks grew frightened. In the air he breathed there seemed to be the smell of blood. But what frightened him was not the veld's blood smell. It seemed like a very ancient fear, something he could not define. The leaves of the prickly pear seemed ancestral. The fragments of weathered cowdung were timeless. The anthill had always been there, and always it had the same shade of grey. (92)

Hendricks's bout of fear is significant in the context of the coloniser's relationship with the African landscape. It suggests that the veld is not an edenic haven where man may find peace and calm. Hendricks finds that, instead of finding solace in nature, he is confronted by an inexplicable primal 'resistance' to his presence. In the open veld there is nowhere to hide—not even from his conscience.

Conclusion

Willemsdorp illustrates how small-town culture represents the ideological structures and strictures associated with narrow Calvinism during the Union period in South Africa. It appears that this ideologically repressive milieu is at once the Afrikaner's undoing and refuge. He attempts to take flight from the existential tensions that confuse him. However, in the veld away from human intervention, he comes face to face with—and discovers that he cannot face—his bare soul. So, the threat of the landscape relates to man's inability to confront the conflict within him, and the town ultimately represents, a comforting moral barrier against and a place to hide from his conscience.

Willemsdorp is an important text in a relatively small body of politically engaged literature of the Union period in South Africa. Although *Willemsdorp* represents the severest, most artistically achieved, critique of the South African dorp microcosm that was produced during the time, other small-town novels are no less interesting. They are *The Dorp* (1920) by Bosman's mentor and fellow journalist, Stephen Black; *The Mask* (written between 1929 and 1930 and posthumously published in 2001) by C. Louis Leipoldt, set in a fictional town, the Village, that is recognizable as the writer's birthplace, Clanwilliam, and *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) by Alan Paton, set in the imaginary town, Venterspan in the Transvaal Province of the Union.

It is a fair prediction that *Willemsdorp*—as it becomes more widely read and studied—will take its rightful place as a key text in South African literature.

Acknowledgement

The article is based on my dissertation "The Small-town Novel in South African English literature (1910–1948)" completed at the University of Pretoria, South Africa in 2009.

Notes

1. Most of Bosman's short stories are set in the farm milieu of the Groot (Great) Marico region of the Western Transvaal. Bosman's other novels remain unfinished. His protégé, Lionel Abrahams, who collected and edited many of the posthumously published volumes of Oom Schalk stories, found fragments of Herman Charles Bosman's two unfinished novels among the latter's literary estate. One of these was "Johannesburg Christmas Eve", published for the first time in 2003 as part of the Anniversary Edition *Young Bosman* volume. The other was later referred to as "Louis Wassenaar". Although these fragments presumably are opening sections of would-be novels, both stand well on their own. They have nonetheless received very little attention from Bosman's commentators and editors. Bosman presumably began writing "Louis Wassenaar" in the early 1930s but for unknown reasons never finished it. Stephen Gray published it for the first time in *Bosman's Johannesburg* (1986). "Louis Wassenaar" was also included in Stephen Gray and Craig MacKenzie's Anniversary Edition of Bosman's *Old Transvaal Stories* (2000).
2. Wisely, Bosman replaced the original version B draft (below) with a more lyrical, though cynical, suggestive description of the town. A close inspection of the two undated *Willemsdorp* manuscripts at the archives of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, reveals that the manuscript marked "B" is indeed the first, less sophisticated, draft of the novel. It does not matter, Bosman appears to say, who the town was named after or what the particulars of the settlers' activities comprised. *Willemsdorp* is, after all, meant to be a microcosmic, universal space. The introduction to the version B passage reads: "Charlie Hendricks felt that that little street had changed hardly at all since the time when the wagons of Willem Steyn's party had come to a stop by a stream amid thorn-trees, and their leader had announced that he would here found his village, his dorp that was to serve as the religious and administrative and social and commercial—in that order of importance—centre for the members of his trek, and of the treks that were coming after them, who would take up vast tracts of farming land, and till the soil, and breed cattle, and dispossess the kaffirs, and exterminate Africa's Midas-wealth of fauna, and become poor whites." (10)
3. In *Willemsdorp* Act 5 of 1927 is referred to as the Tielman Roos Act. Tielman Roos was the Minister of Justice in the Union parliament at the time. He had considerable influence on the process of piloting the Immorality Act through parliament. In this regard Roux (203) remarks: "[Tielman Roos] had gone into opposition in 1914 because he disapproved of Smuts's pro-war policy. His liberal ideas did not, however, extend beyond the colour bar, as witness the following extract from a speech he made in Johannesburg in 1928: 'There is a Native menace in South Africa, and the whites will be driven into a big united white party to create a bigger and more potent weapon to

- fight for what we believe in [...] we will rule the Natives [...] Every white man in South Africa is an aristocrat and people who are rulers and governors cannot be proletarians.”
4. There are many similarities between Bosman’s own persona and that of his main protagonist, Charlie Hendricks, for example their journalistic careers in the English press. Bosman’s family background (the Bosmans were Afrikaners with imperial sympathies) harboured in him a certain cultural ambivalence. Only after his third wife, Helena Stegman, an Afrikaans schoolteacher had encouraged him to rediscover his Afrikaner roots and embrace his mother tongue, he started publishing his Afrikaans pieces.
 5. Charles Darwin supported notions of racial superiority. His publication, *The Origin of Species* (1859) was the handbook for Social Darwinism. Darwin’s thesis that biological destiny of a species depends on the survival of the fittest was popular with the founders of National Socialism in Germany before World War II. Many Afrikaners in South Africa supported Hitler’s *Herrenvolk*-idea that “higher” (white) races have the right to dominate “lower” (black) ones in order to maintain pure, strong bloodlines. In this respect J. M. Coetzee (137) proposes: “[I]n South Africa, [...] a party with Nazi sympathisers in high positions was elected to office in 1948 and set about a program of racial legislation whose precursor if not model was the legislation of Nazi Germany”.
 6. It is also reminiscent of a piece titled “Simian Civilisation” that Bosman wrote for *The South African Opinion* in 1947. It is a tongue-in cheek commentary on the results of scientific studies carried out on baboon behaviour (in Bosman *A Cask of Jerepigo* 151–54).
 7. In a newspaper article Gray (“American Bosman” 32) relates the interesting history of the *Willemsdorp* manuscript, which was written for the American market. Hence the appearance of Americanisms such as “nigger” for “black” and “green grass” for “dagga” (cannabis) in the text: “At the end of 1947 Alan Paton commended [Bosman’s short story volume *Mafeking Road* (1947)] in *The New York Times Book Review*. A talent-scout at Harper and Bros headhunted Bosman in Johannesburg, but by June 1949 had rejected the book together with *Cold Stone Jug* and *Jacaranda in the Night*. Bosman’s next move was to acquire a US agent Margaret Macpherson, who had links with Harcourt Brace [Publishers]. By October 10 1951, she had agreed to lead their attempt on the US market with the promised new novel. Her author never received her letter; he had died in Edenvale Hospital on October 14. He left no will, so [his wife], Helena could not proceed until she had bought back his papers at a public auction. Joseph Jones, [a scout from the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin], acquired them from her [...] and by 1975 an American doctoral student Vivienne Mawson had sorted them. That was when it became clear that *Willemsdorp* had indeed been completed.” The HRC collection paper which was drawn up upon receipt of the Bosman papers states that the *Willemsdorp* manuscripts are both incomplete. It may be presumed that it appeared so because of the pages being out of sequence at the time.
 8. The passages later in the novel where the two policemen graphically embroider on the details of police “frame-ups”, were deleted from the 1977 edition of the text.
 9. In this regard Bosman’s examination of the “unnatural” character of the physical and ideological structures that society imposes on nature—symbolised by the South African dorp—takes Alan Paton’s evocation thereof in *Too Late the Phalarope* a step further. Bosman eschews Paton’s rather simplistic view, which juxtaposes the edenic allegorical meaning of nature to the human imprint, symbolised by dorp settlement, on it. Bosman’s view of the white coloniser’s relationship to the landscape is more complicated. It is mainly through the main character, Charlie Hendricks that Bosman dramatizes the complexities inherent in this uneasy relationship.

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