

**INVESTIGATING AND DEVELOPING AN APPROACH TO CRITICAL  
LITERACY BY USING THE SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT STORY**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Ruveena Singh declare that this dissertation,

“Investigating and Developing an Approach to Critical Literacy by Using the South African Short Story”.

is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the possibility of transforming teaching/learning practices within the English (primary language) classroom at secondary school level by using a Critical Literacy approach to classroom practice using the South African short story. It acknowledges the limitations associated with the current classroom practice as regards English primary language at most former House of Delegates' schools (HOD) where the researcher is employed as a teacher. This practice is informed largely by a Cultural Heritage approach to the teaching of text and therefore sets out to examine Critical Literacy as an alternative and, arguably a more relevant set of literacy practices. To enable this, an overview of Critical Literacy is presented. In this literacy approach poststructuralist insights are used to investigate relations of power that underpin texts. The study is theoretically located as poststructural and argues that texts have ideological purposes and investigates how the subject is constructed through the discourses that are conveyed by the language (semiotics) of texts.

Further the research examines how the current classroom practice at former HOD schools incorporates the use of commercial study guides, which inscribe a simplistic and often crude version of the Cultural Heritage approach, which teacher-colleagues refer to as the 'content-thematic' approach to the teaching of texts.

As three South African short stories (part of the repertoire of prescribed literature for

matriculation English in the province KwaZulu-Natal) are selected to explore how poststructuralist insights can be deployed within a Critical Literacy framework, the research first contextualises them in terms of their postcolonial framework, narrative structure and the discourses that underpin them. The postcolonial framework directs attention to the postcolonial discourses that underwrite these three stories. The narratives and discourses inscribed thereby engage with the effects of colonial practices and powers within a Southern African context.

By drawing on insights derived from narrative theory, the research undertakes a critical discourse analysis of three short stories which incorporates a focus on the construction of the narratives of the short stories and the reader or subject positioning they intend. In this way the critical analysis of three short stories examines which readings and subjectivities are privileged through these discourses and which are marginalised by the text.

In conclusion this research argues for the inclusion of a *Critical Literacy* approach to classroom practice within the outcomes based national curriculum for education, also known as Curriculum 2005 (Department of Education, 2002). It argues that the curriculum provides a space for the undertaking of a critical approach to textual practice in a more rigorous and concerted manner. It is proposed that **Critical Literacy** is an integral aspect of a progressive educational initiative – one that is consonant with the goals of a society undergoing political, social and economic transformation and with social justice.

## INTRODUCTION

In many classrooms, literacy is still viewed as a neutral, natural activity, with 'taken for granted' contents, universal forms and practices. ...[A] literacy curriculum still based around the content of nineteenth and twentieth century British and commonwealth literature studies and on principles of industrial-era American child-centered education is fundamentally unable to address the social facts of hybridity and difference, inequity and power (Luke et al, 1995, 34).

As a classroom-based educator teaching English Primary Language at a former House of Delegates' (HOD) school in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), South Africa, I find myself constrained by an approach to teaching that can be identified as largely Cultural Heritage. This orientation to literacy practice is text-based and was associated with F.R. Leavis in the nineteen thirties in England and continues to inform much of English teaching globally. Within this approach texts are viewed as neutral spaces that are value-free and are taught as entities separated from their socio-cultural and historical contexts. Any consideration of questions of relations of power and identities that are implicit in the text is absent in this approach. It 'assumes that the text is a dense one, or that certain proclaimed worthy literary texts are rich and complex texts...worthy of intense scrutiny or close reading' (Prinsloo, 1998, 136).

This study will argue that such an approach to literacy practice is limited as it fails to engage with relations of power, issues of production and reception of texts and the subjectivities that texts propose for the reader. In addition classroom practice responds to the demands of the Senior Certificate Examination with its backwash effect (Prinsloo, 2002). As such, classroom practice is modeled along the lines of this examination and



many educators tend to engage with texts by using, what is commonly described by educator-colleagues for subject English as the 'content-thematic' approach. Learners are taught to orientate themselves towards 'expected' responses that would best suit the attainment of good results. This is also compounded by the emphasis placed on the attainment of a high pass-rate in grade twelve by the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and national ministries of education.

Further, it has become common practice for educators and learners to use commercial materials in preparation for class work and examinations. These commercial materials inscribe a simplistic version of the Cultural Heritage approach, and this impels both educators and learners to repeat this approach for classroom and exam purposes.

Consequently, the current classroom practice is deemed inadequate by this educator, as it does not incorporate an engagement with texts that validates critical reflection or critical responses advocated by a Critical Literacy approach. As a set of literacy practices,

Critical Literacy acknowledges that knowledge and therefore texts is never neutral or objective but are ordered and structured in particular ways. It argues that knowledge is socially constructed and therefore implicates relations of power which are attained through mutual consensus as, 'the world we live in is constructed symbolically by the mind through social interaction with others and is heavily dependent on culture, context, custom and historical specificity' (McLaren, 1989, 169).

What  
Define

Critical Literacy employs a critical pedagogy which questions how knowledge gets constructed the way it does and why certain constructions of reality have more legitimacy

and power than others. To this end, critical pedagogy is concerned with a cultural and political analysis of texts by foregrounding the 'social and economic conditions of production and conditions of interpretation' (Fairclough (in Luke et al) 1995, 35). In doing so, Critical Literacy teaching begins by 'problematizing the cultures and knowledge of the text, putting them up for grabs, for critical debate, for weighing, judging, critiquing' (Luke et al, 1995, 36). Critical Literacy therefore contrasts with the current classroom practice informed by a Cultural Heritage approach, which embraces a Leavisite approach<sup>1</sup> to the teaching of texts.

One of the concerns of this researcher is that educators do not possess sufficient theoretical and conceptual knowledge to implement Critical Literacy and transformative education even though the range of texts has expanded. This study also acknowledges that educators will experience a sense of trepidation about departing from the security offered by the Cultural Heritage approach, and therefore is motivated by the desire to offer educators an alternative approach to literacy practice. This study sets out to investigate an approach to Critical Literacy by using the South African short story. It will provide a theoretical overview of Critical Literacy and explore poststructuralist insights. These insights will be used to interrogate the short story, which is the focus of the critical analysis proposed in this work. This will include analyzing the short stories as a sub-genre and the postcolonial discourses that inform them and will further investigate discourses such as patriarchy, class, ethnicity and race conveyed by these stories.

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<sup>1</sup> The Leavisite position holds a reverential attitude to literary texts whereby selected texts from the great canon of English literature are considered worthy of study. It does acknowledge popular culture but discriminates against it. More recently however, there has been a shift to expand the narrow canon to include African and Asian writers therefore widening the range of texts, but still excludes texts from popular culture and in this way remains elitist.

In doing so this study adopts the following chapter structure:

Chapter one first examines the insights provided by Gee about literacy practices as semiotic domains and the kind of apprenticeship of learners any semiotic domain recruits. The chapter focuses in particular on the current classroom practice as regards English Primary Language (informed by the Cultural Heritage approach) and the type of semiotic domain it employs. It thereafter proposes Critical Literacy as an alternate set of literacy practices and this approach is investigated as a semiotic domain, which proposes other textual practices. It also examines how Critical Literacy uses poststructuralist insights, which explore relations of power, conveyed by the discourses that underpin texts, the ideological purposes they fulfill and the subjectivity they intend for the reader or the receiver.

A practice that has become commonplace in classrooms at most former HOD schools is the use of Commercial Guides, and chapter two focuses specifically on the approach to literacy practice fostered by the Commercial Guide. It argues that this practice results in a simplified version of the Cultural Heritage approach to texts as it is limited to a 'content-thematic' understanding of texts and neglects to deal with issues of power conveyed by the discourses that undergird texts.

This study sets out to provide an approach to textual practice with specific reference to the short story within a Critical Literacy framework using poststructuralist insights and chapter three explores the short story as a sub-genre. The anthology of short stories used is a South African production entitled "Being Here" and falls into the broad category of

postcolonial writing. As such this chapter is concerned with postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses that are conveyed by the stories selected. It also examines the generic elements or conventions that these stories employ to convey particular relations of power.

Thereafter chapter four explores the three stories by undertaking a critical discourse analysis. It deploys particular analytical tools and elements of narrative theory are applied to the analysis of the stories. This includes using insights from the Proppian model (in Turner, 1988 and Prinsloo and Criticos, 1991), and examines the “character functions” in narratives. The analysis in this chapter also identifies the use of binary oppositions by drawing on insights provided by Levi-Strauss (in Turner, 1988), and examines the equilibrium, the disequilibrium and the re-equilibrium in narratives by drawing on Todorov’s model (in Turner, 1988 and Prinsloo and Criticos, 1991), in order to show how the characters and their functions move the narrative forward. This analysis thus attempts to show how particular discourses are hegemonic and others marginalised in these stories thereby engaging with relations of power conveyed by texts.

This critical analysis therefore attempts to demonstrate how language and representation (semiotics) in texts validate particular subject positions. In doing so it demonstrates an approach to texts that translates such theory into practice in terms of ‘agency’ (that is, who produces the text and why), who receives the text and how, the gaps or absences in the text, and it poses the question of whose interest the discourses underpinning the text serves. These analytical tools offer an opportunity for educators to engage with ‘an

expanded sense of literacy, both in the nature of texts and the negotiation of meaning' (Prinsloo, 1998, 136). The theoretical underpinning is poststructuralist and proposes a critical pedagogy that works to denaturalise dominant discourses and explore those that are subverted through the processes of interrogation and critiques of discourses afforded by a critical analysis.

This study is also cognisant of outcomes based education (OBE), (Department of Education, 1997), which informs the new national curriculum, also referred to as Curriculum 2005, (Department of Education, 2002), and the possibilities it offers for Critical Literacy. As an alternative educational paradigm to the dominant transmission mode, outcomes based education contains a radical shift from the old dispensation and grants much more space for critical education. The critical analysis of the short stories that is undertaken in this study is outcomes based.

This study will ultimately argue that one of the fundamental premises of a Critical Literacy approach to classroom practice relates to social justice and therefore literacy practice, 'must be tied to a struggle for a qualitatively better life for all through the construction of a society based on non-exploitative relations and social justice' (McLaren, 1989, 167).

# CHAPTER ONE

## LITERACY PRACTICES

### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I establish that this research responds to the desire to develop alternative literacy practices to those that are current in my school because they are inadequate on a number of grounds. To do this insights provided by Gee (2001) are called upon to establish what is meant by a 'semiotic domain'<sup>2</sup> and his ideas are drawn on to explore both current literacy practices at former HOD schools in KwaZulu-Natal and Critical Literacy practices as different semiotic domains.

The current set of literacy practices, which draws on the Cultural Heritage approach to the teaching of texts, will be further explored as a semiotic domain in terms of the 'design grammar'<sup>3</sup> that characterizes it and the apprenticeship of learners that it fosters. As Critical Literacy provides an alternative set of literacy practices that engage with social justice concerns, the central concepts and the theoretical poststructuralist framework that inform Critical Literacy will be investigated as an alternative semiotic domain.

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<sup>2</sup> Gee defines a semiotic domain as recruiting one or more modalities, for example oral or written language, images, equations, symbols, artifacts etc. to communicate distinctive types of messages.

<sup>3</sup> The New London Group (1996) defines design grammar as a set of principles or patterns in terms of which materials in the domain are combined to communicate complex meanings.

This will be developed further in Chapters Two and Four, when the ‘Commercial Guide’<sup>4</sup> is scrutinized, and when I attempt to use these ideas about Critical Literacy to investigate the short story.

## 1.1 LITERACY PRACTICES AS SEMIOTIC DOMAINS

Informed by the idea of learning as a situated social practice (Gee, 2001), I attend to two sets of literacy practices within semiotic domains of the different versions of literacy practices. In the following discussion I draw on ideas provided by Gee, on learning in different semiotic domains.

Literacy practices are concerned with the acquisition of fluency or mastery, within semiotic domains by learners. This is obtained through learners mastering or becoming fluent with the design grammar of a particular semiotic domain. A semiotic domain can be described as one that contains a set of

patterns and principles which are combined to communicate complex messages and meanings. These elements must pattern together in a certain way to constitute a particular meaning or message. This is described as the design grammar of a semiotic domain (Gee, 2001, 1).

Learners acquire understanding within the semiotic domain from those who have gained mastery or fluency in that domain and are referred to as the affinity group<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> The Commercial Guide used in this study is known as Guidelines – The Blue Book Series, and it purports to offer support material based on a variety of books prescribed for study in KwaZulu-Natal.

<sup>5</sup> An affinity group refers to those people in the domain who have acquired mastery in the domain by sharing norms, values and knowledge in the domain.

I cite the following example of video games taken from Gee, to illustrate the working of a design grammar of that particular semiotic domain. All elements must pattern together in the domain of video games in a certain way to constitute the meaning of ‘ better to sneak here than shoot’ instruction in the video game (Gee, 2001). If for example, an individual finds the hunt provided by the game an interesting one, then entry into or understanding the working of the patterns and principles of the language in the domain is facilitated, but should the individual be affronted by the violence and perhaps masculine appeal that is conveyed by the game then successful entry into the domain of the video game may become a challenge.

In this regard, meaning is constructed through an understanding of the design grammar, which characterizes the semiotic domain. Entry into the domain is gained successfully, if the learner is able to acquire an understanding of the patterns and principles that characterize the design grammar of the domain.

Appropriate or successful entry requires the learner to know the design grammar so as to understand and produce messages and meanings in the domain ‘creatively’<sup>6</sup>.

Semiotic domains are human creations, and consist of people who belong to an affinity group who have acquired mastery of the domain in terms of sharing sets of practices, common goals, values, norms and endeavors, starting off as a beginner or apprentice and who attempt to acquire eventual mastery within the domain.

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<sup>6</sup> Creative understanding of messages and meanings in the domain requires an ability and willingness on the part of the newcomer or learner to understand another person’s perspective in the domain successfully.



Gaining insider status into the affinity group of the semiotic domain differs from mere rote learning whereby learners, for example, commit details and facts to memory without any knowledge of the design grammar of the domain. Such learning disallows the reproduction of the semiotic domain by learners or users.

In this regard Gee advocates that successful entry into the affinity group in the domain requires learners to 'situate meanings' (Gee, 2001, 3). By extension this implies that words mean only as they are situated within a domain and could mean differently in another domain by virtue of their register and the context within which words and therefore language are used.

This recruitment of language is referred to as a 'social language'<sup>7</sup> whose use differs within different semiotic domains. An understanding of how the social language of a semiotic domain is acquired is significant to literacy practices, first, as learners are members of socio-cultural groupings, and second, as it provides an insight into the manner in which learners make meaning and therefore acquire knowledge through particular apprenticeships within semiotic domains.

A critical part of this position is that learners acquire understanding and possible mastery within a domain,

through the acquisition of the social language of the domain, which has its own distinctive vocabulary, and its own distinctive syntactic, pragmatic and discourse

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<sup>7</sup> Each different domain recruits a different style of language at work in the domain, which has its own distinctive vocabulary, syntactic, pragmatic and discourse resources.

resources for situating complex meanings in the domain, the learner acquires an insight into and eventual mastery of the semiotic domain (Gee, 2001, 4).

In order for 'authentic learning'<sup>8</sup> to occur, processes involving 'bootstrapping, modeling and networking' become significant in terms of understanding the working of the social language of the domain. These processes and their significance to learning within semiotic domains are understood as follows:

On entering new domains, learners are initially not familiar with the social language of the domain and are therefore unable to situate meanings. Learners thus simulate the perspective of more advanced people in the domain, such as teachers or those who have developed adeptness at the social language of the domain. This process is known as 'bootstrapping' (Gee, 2001, 4). Bootstrapping is dependant on a modeling of 'prototypical'<sup>9</sup> cases of words, symbols, images, artifacts and combinations thereof by those people who are considered as being advanced in that particular domain. In this regard, as mentioned earlier, willingness is required on the part of learners to take on the perspectives of significant others in the domain.

Processes of bootstrapping and modeling of the social language provide a means for more complex learning, whereby learners are able to produce combinations of meanings and messages and proceed further into acquiring discourse models in the domain.

Discourse models are partial storylines, metaphors, routines, scripts, principles of thumb, or images which help members of an affinity group to act and interact in relatively typical situations in a domain (Gee, 2001, 5).

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<sup>8</sup> 'Authentic learning' (Gee, 2001, 2) refers to learning that leads to growing mastery of the domain's design grammar and gaining membership in its associated affinity group.

<sup>9</sup> Cases of words, symbols, images, artifacts and combinations thereof may be modeled by more advanced people in the domain so as to assist beginners in the domain.

Discourse models enable learners to operate within their terms, thereby reproducing predictable action, interaction and thinking using the design grammar of the domain. Therefore literacy practices I suggest, function as semiotic domains that enable apprenticeships of learners of particular kinds, by means of their design grammar. Because there are many different semiotic domains that operate simultaneously, and which are connected to each other in various ways, learners need to enter into and gain success at different domains. This requires ‘networking’<sup>10</sup> across and through different semiotic domains. For example, I earlier referred to acquiring a knowledge of video games as an example of a semiotic domain. A person who has worked successfully with this domain will enter the domain of arcade games with greater ease as one domain (video games) serves as a precursor to the other domain (arcade games). This is so because both these domains share common elements such as norms, values, goals, meaning, social language and discourse models.

The idea of networking between semiotic domains has consequences for schooled literacies. In this regard I make reference to the insights provided by The ‘New London Group’<sup>11</sup>, which call for a multi-literacy pedagogy. They argue for a broader literacy pedagogy that incorporates ‘the cultural and linguistic diversity in the world’ (New London Group, 1996, 60).

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<sup>10</sup> Semiotic domains are connected to one another in a number of complex ways and require members to access different domains simultaneously.

<sup>11</sup> The New London Group consists of several key thinkers in the area of literacy practices from Australia, England and the USA. The Australian initiated New London Group responds to the perceived demands of twenty first century democracies regarding literacy practices.

In this regard, consider learners for example, who are currently engaged in learning within a semiotic domain that incorporates the design grammar of the Cultural Heritage approach that is text-based and requires learners to engage in close reading and habits of scrutiny regarding textual practice. Learners are ‘precursed’<sup>12</sup> (Gee, 2001, 7) in a form of literacy practice which can therefore be extended further to engage in a Critical Literacy practice, also concerned with textual scrutiny but engages with issues of power that are conveyed through the discourses that underpin texts which are neglected in the design grammar of the Cultural Heritage approach. By situating meaning in the social language of the semiotic domain of the Critical Literacy approach, learners need to engage with the design grammar of Critical Literacy, which calls for a more active engagement of textual practice.

This implies that learners network different semiotic domains. Networking in terms of the example cited above enables learners who have obtained ‘insider status’<sup>13</sup> within the affinity group of the Cultural Heritage semiotic domain to draw on this and engage with the design grammar of the Critical Literacy semiotic domain – a domain where learners begin to engage with a textual practice in terms of a social language concerned with discourse and social power relating to social justice concerns. Within the Critical Literacy semiotic domain, learners acquire a design grammar that extends into an interrogation of texts that explores the shared set of values cast within a poststructuralist framework,

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<sup>12</sup> Some domains are precursors to others because one or more elements associated with the precursor domain facilitates learning in another.

<sup>13</sup> People who have gained entry into the affinity group of the semiotic domain successfully have acquired insider status.

‘recognizing that all language practices are socially grounded and so inherently ideological’ (Misson, 1996, 3).

The theoretical position of literacies as constituted in semiotic domains provides a useful frame for understanding the process literacy practices assume and how they foster different types of learning and apprenticeships for learners. It is my sense that the insights provided by Gee regarding the design grammar, affinity groups and the social language of semiotic domains serve as a framework for understanding the ways in which learners can be taken through the processes of different literacy practices to acquire new and, I propose, more relevant engagements with textual practices. As the object of this research is to pose Critical Literacy as a more relevant set of literacy practices, I consider the concept of literacy practices as semiotic domains to be valuable in terms of learning within the poststructuralist framework of Critical Literacy. In the following section I examine the current classroom practice, one that is informed largely by the Cultural Heritage approach, as a semiotic domain.

## 1.2. CULTURAL HERITAGE AS A SEMIOTIC DOMAIN

In this section I first examine Cultural Heritage as dominant literacy practice, as this has implications for the semiotic domain and the design grammar that this approach recruits. In this regard, I focus on the significant position held by English literature within English teaching and the kind of apprenticeship of learners the design grammar of this semiotic domain enables.

I am located as an educator at a former House of Delegates (HOD) school in KwaZulu-Natal, where I teach English Primary Language. An HOD school is one that was designed for learners of Indian origin, in terms of the 'Tricameral Parliamentary System'<sup>14</sup> of apartheid government in South Africa. This system was introduced in 1984 by the Nationalist Party government. Prior to this, education for Indian learners was similarly racially segregated and under the authority of the Indian Affairs Department. I focus my experiences and observations of the current literacy practice at my institution, which is attended primarily by Indian learners, and since 1991, includes African learners, in keeping with changing political trends in the country.

The literacy practices at this institution, as regards English Primary Language, is informed largely by the Cultural Heritage approach to the teaching of selected and popular cultural texts. These literacy practices however, occasionally absorb a few elements from the Personal Growth<sup>15</sup> approach to classroom practice, such as incorporating a measure of learner-centeredness, whereby the views and interests of marginalized groups in terms of race, class and gender are considered.

### 1.2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

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<sup>14</sup> Schools under this regime were strictly racially divided according to houses of parliament – House of Assembly for White learners, House of Representatives for Coloured learners and the House of Delegates for Indian learners. Education for African learners was relegated to the control of the Department of Education and Training and the Bantustan Homelands.

<sup>15</sup> Prinsloo (2002) accounts for the rise of the Personal Growth model in terms of the context of education in England changing dramatically during the sixties. A consumer economy and expanded mass media invoked altered identities and introduced a plurality of authorities. The impact of these occurrences resulted in a shift from the dominance of the Cultural Heritage approach to English teaching to incorporate the Personal Growth model. This version of literacy practice was informed by a vision that was committed to education of the masses and is celebratory of the immediate lives, culture and language of the working classes. The world of the learner-subject is constituted as being of interest and relevance.

The Cultural Heritage approach arose in the thirties in England and was strongly advocated by F.R. Leavis, and informed English language teaching globally (Eagleton, 1983, 17). This approach favored the establishment of a civilized aesthetic heritage and a return of 'high culture'. This view was to shape the role of the English teacher,

who was to assume a pastoral role, not as didactician, but as 'trusted friend', entrusted with the task of promoting the moralizing value of great literature, keeper of an English culture and protector of civilised values (Prinsloo, 2002, 61).

The beginning of English as a compulsory school subject responded in part to political and economic motives. It developed out of concerns surrounding 'the emergence of an urban working class mass population, where the rule of law and influence of religion appeared tenuous' (Eagleton, 1983, 31). Although English was regarded as a subject for the upliftment of the vulgar and poor working classes in the early twentieth century, it came to enjoy an important position in British society and in many other countries where the English language is widely used. Ball et al account for this shift in the following way:

The answer lies in the vital role played by literacy .....in the development of a mass schooling system in England in the nineteenth century. English, as school subject, originated out of fears and panics surrounding the development of the city and the emergence of an urban working class mass population (Ball et al, 1990, 48).

English thus emerged as the subject viewed as the savior of English culture and morality. It came to be regarded as the subject through which the new middle class could be civilised, thus ensuring that the working classes could have something they could idealise. Simultaneously, it provided the vehicle through which a sense of patriotism and national pride could be restored.

F. R. Leavis and his Scrutiny Group, also referred to as the Cambridge school, strongly advocated 'the literary text as the seat of moral wisdom, an inherent truth to be revealed in the interpretative strategies that were advocated' (Prinsloo, 2002, 59). The Scrutiny Group insisted on scrupulous analysis of certain literary works, that is, the literary canon of English, which was regarded as being sacrosanct and became the focus of a moral and cultural crusade (Eagleton, 1983). Leavis advocated the purging of the literary canon of English, realigning the 'Great Tradition' of English literature by an inclusion of only those texts as having great literary merit and therefore worthy of study. He excluded popular cultural texts, considering them to be dangerous for the serious pursuit and acquisition of strong moral values, which promoted a civilized culture. Leavis's belief in 'essential Englishness' (Eagleton, 1983, 36), transformed the study of the English canon through the realignment of the Great Tradition of English literature. Only selected texts considered as being worthy of conveying important moral values were considered worthy of being studied. Texts from popular culture were acknowledged but were not considered worthy of literary merit.

### 1.2.2 THE DESIGN GRAMMAR OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ITS APPRENTICESHIP OF LEARNERS

A central aspect of the design grammar of this approach is that it is text-based, and assumes that certain proclaimed texts are rich and complex texts. These texts are understood to be worthy of intense scrutiny and close reading. Both 'close reading' and



'practical criticism' are terms and devices advocated by Leavis (Prinsloo, 2002), which constitute the foundation of textual analysis, and form part of the design grammar of this approach.

Through an attention to these literary devices, the text was taken apart in an attempt to unravel its complex meaning, isolated from its historical and cultural contexts. In this regard, the text is seen as a vehicle through which certain 'truths' and moral imperatives can be conveyed. The text, through a close reading, guided wholly by the teacher, is scrutinized in terms of tone, style, artistic structure and figurative language and a detailed analytic interpretation, whilst practical criticism demanded a judgment in terms of literary greatness and centrality through focused attentiveness (Eagleton, 1983).

The design grammar of this approach positions the teacher as a particular subject, one that is cast as zealous missionary, belonging to an elite brotherhood capable of full appreciation, of the literary text. In this type of textual appreciation the meaning, that is conveyed by the text is unraveled by the teacher to the learners.

Practical criticism and close reading proposed within the semiotic domain of this approach used literature as the core of English Studies, and its reading as an active, creative and moral pursuit. The teacher is positioned as moral custodian of learners, through the teaching of great literature. This design grammar employs particular techniques through literature teaching, which claim to nurture sensitive, imaginative, responsible, sympathetic, creative, perceptive and reflective citizens.

Entry into the domain goes beyond what Prinsloo calls 'an acquaintance' (1998, 135) with the narrative or the moral of the story. Learners instead acquire habits of scrutiny that discern nuances, connections and values. The learner has to discriminate and judge within a particular interpretative and ethical framework, demanding more cognitive work than exacting plot detail. In this regard Green suggests that,

both literature and education are to be recognized as social mechanisms for the mobilization, authorization and dissemination of certain specific discourses and in varying ways, the refusal and marginalization of others .... There is an intrication of discourse and power in the intimate relationship between language and ideology (1990, 140).

Literature is central to the Cultural Heritage approach and the interest it serves within the Leavisite and Cultural Heritage project marks a significant link between language and social power. In this regard the semiotic domain of Cultural Heritage and its design grammar views English teaching right from the outset as a disciplinary mechanism and a means for production

of a particular kind of 'cultured' subjectivity... the interdependence of the discourses of 'literature' and 'literary criticism' are constitutive and in their relation, contextualised principally by ideological operations of schooling (Green, 1993, 144).

Literacy practice within the Cultural Heritage framework is informed by an ideology that embraces elitism as its central tenet. In terms of the design grammar of the semiotic domain of Cultural Heritage, this research proposes that the current classroom practice at former HOD schools in KZN is largely Cultural Heritage, whereby engagement with selected texts goes beyond identifying mere surface detail into acquiring habits of scrutiny that discern nuances, connections and values. However, as a version of literacy practice, it is constrained by the ethical framework it proposes for the teaching of literary

texts. In this regard the Cultural Heritage approach is aligned with an elitist ideology and as a semiotic domain it attempts to construct both learners and educators within a moralistic framework using the text as a vehicle of meaning, and promotes 'the acquisition of elite knowledge and a nostalgia for a mythic past' (Ball et al, 1990, 56).

In the following section I attend to Critical Literacy as a set of literacy practices, and the poststructuralist insights that inform this approach. I do this in order to examine how such a semiotic domain offers a more critical and active engagement with texts in terms of the underpinning discourses, ideologies and social power.

### 1.3. CRITICAL LITERACY AS A SEMIOTIC DOMAIN

In this section I first examine Critical Literacy as an alternative set of literacy practices to the Cultural Heritage approach described earlier. I explore poststructuralist insights, which provide a theoretical framework for Critical Literacy, and are concerned with language, discourse and the construction of the subject. This study will examine how elements of narrative theory and genre theory construct the reader subject. Secondly I pose Critical Literacy as a semiotic domain, which recruits a design grammar using poststructuralist insights. In doing so I suggest that Critical Literacy provides a more critical and relevant set of literacy practices, for the teaching of the short story.

### 1.3.1 THE RELEVANCE OF POSTSTRUCTURALISM TO CRITICAL LITERACY

Critical Literacy draws on theories of literacy that engage with an expanded sense of texts and these theories are considered poststructuralist. Critical Literacy engages both learners and educators as co-investigators of messages, ideas and meanings in textual studies (Prinsloo, 1998). It is informed by a 'critical pedagogy'<sup>16</sup> which views knowledge 'as a social construction, deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations' (McLaren, 1989, 1).

Poststructuralist theories of literacy propose meaning as 'the result of a process in which the reader, the text and the social conditions of society are implicated and attempt to develop in learners an orientation to texts that will enable them to question their role in relation to power relations in society' (Prinsloo, 1998, 136). Such theories seek to promote the conditions for a textual practice, which focuses on the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin texts. They attempt to interrogate texts in terms of 'their attempts to provide a model of what the world is like and to seduce us into seeing the world in that particular way, and to acquiesce to their vision of the world' (Misson, 1996, 106).

I elect to focus on particular principles or elements that inform poststructuralism and which are relevant to a critical understanding of texts. These principles include the domains of language, discourse and the construction of the subject, and may be used to question all familiar and habitual assumptions of English Studies. Further I examine the relevance of genre theory and narrative theory in relation to how they might be deployed

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<sup>16</sup> Critical pedagogy acknowledges the inequality of power in the exercise of literacy. It notes that certain types of knowledge legitimate gender, class and racial interests and can therefore be disempowering.

to develop an understanding of how the subject is constructed in texts. I focus particularly on narrative and genre as they lend itself to investigations of the South African short story.

Poststructuralist theory does not signal the end of the study of canonical texts. Instead it provides a means of re-reading them in an attempt to interrogate the ways in which their discourses have legitimated certain dominant constructions of meanings. Within a poststructuralist approach the range of textual study may also be widened to incorporate all texts, including popular and media-related texts.

#### 1.3.1.1 LANGUAGE

Language as a social system is obviously central to texts and images. The constructionist approach to meaning in language proposes that human subjects construct meaning by drawing on representational systems and their concepts and signs. This approach acknowledges that the language system represents concepts. Within this understanding of language, 'it is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning' (Hall, 1999, 25). This constructionist view of language and representation draws on semiotic insights originally attributed to Swiss linguist, de Saussure, (in Hall, 1999), which were to subsequently shape semiotic approaches to the problem of representation in a variety of cultural fields. Within this approach the production of meaning depends on language.

Language is a system of signs. Sounds, images, written words, paintings photographs, etc, function as signs within language only when they serve to

express or communicate ideas. To communicate ideas they must be part of a system of conventions (Hall, 1999, 31).

In this regard Saussure analysed the 'sign' into two further elements, firstly, the form (the actual word, photo, image etc), and secondly, the idea or concept with which the form is associated. He called the first element the 'signifier' and the second, the 'signified'.

For example, the word 'Walkman' triggers off the idea of a 'portable cassette player'.

Both these elements are required to produce meaning,

but it is the relation between them fixed by cultural and linguistic codes, which sustains representation. Thus the sign is the union of a form, which signifies (signifier), and the idea a signified (signified) (Hall, 1999, 31).

Saussure also argued that signs do not possess a fixed or essential meaning. In this regard, he maintained that signs are members of a system and are defined in relation to other members of that system. For example, the color 'red' or the essence of 'red-ness' exists only in terms of difference between red and green, or the meaning of father exists in relation to mother, son, daughter and so on.

The difference within language is fundamental to the production of meaning. The simplest way of making difference is by means of a binary opposition, whereby concepts are defined in terms of direct opposites. It is the difference between signifiers, which signify, and these are fixed by cultural codes, but not permanently, as words shift in their meaning. 'This is so because the relationship between a signifier and a signified is the result of a system of social conventions specific to each society and to specific historical moments' (Hall, 1999, 32). Therefore if meanings change historically, culturally and

socially then ‘ this opens representation to the constant ‘play’ or slippage of meaning, to the constant production of new meanings and new interpretations’ (Hall, 1999, 32).

Although Saussure, a structuralist, focused on the formal aspects of how language works, his insights provide a means of viewing language not as a transparent, empty space, but enables cultural theorists to view language, its ‘sliding’ (Hall, 1999, 33) at different moments in history to engage with issues of social power between speakers of different status and positions.

In the semiotic approach, representation is understood on the basis of the way words function as signs within language. However, language as a model of representation should focus on broader issues of knowledge and power. In this regard, I focus on discourse.

#### 1.3.1.2 DISCOURSE

Proponents of Critical Literacy employ textual strategies, which investigate texts in terms of production, cultural representation in the text and social power. In this regard the concept of discourse is central and is informed by the thinking and writing of Foucault, who argues that ‘ all knowledge circulates in the form of discourses that permeate our society’ (Foucault in Fairclough, 1992, 2).

Discourses enable members of socio-cultural groupings to make particular sense of their experiences and world and are therefore constructed in terms of their self. The concept of discourse can be characterized by a shared set of values constructed through particular ways of talking, thinking, writing and acting. In this regard knowledge is regarded as a construction linked to particular interests and social relations. The notion of power and discourse are inextricably linked. For Foucault, 'power comes from everywhere, "it is always already there" (Foucault in McLaren, 1989, 180), ' and is inextricably implicated in the micro-relations of domination and resistance' (McLaren, 1989, 180).

Discourse assumes that the writer or speaker and the readers or listeners are particular kinds of people who share particular values. By extension, this implies that the discourses work by proposing particular subject positions for their subjects and therefore create particular kinds of subjectivities. They position the human subject as the ideal recipient of what is said or implied in the discourse, therefore assuming that the subject will agree with it by offering its shape as natural and beyond question.

Discourse positions subjects (those who produce them and those they are addressed to) in particular ways. The social subject is constituted, reproduced and transformed in and through discursive practices (Fairclough, 1992, 44).

Discourses and discursive practices shape subjectivities because it is through discourse that social reality can be given meaning and thereby, 'truth' or knowledge can be constructed. Foucault argued that truth could not be viewed in terms of absolutes as 'knowledge is socially constructed, culturally mediated and historically situated' (Foucault in McLaren, 1989, 181).



The theory of discourse offers an alternative way of looking at language in so far as it contextualises language into specific social and institutional contexts. Meanings and identities or subjectivities are produced by discourse as language and textuality always have ideological inflection. This conceptualization of discourses as a 'regulated system of statements' (McLaren, 1989, 181) are not only conveyed through words, but through institutional practices, behavior patterns and through forms of teaching pedagogies and can be applied to education and to literacy practices.

From this perspective certain discourses may be regarded as dominant educational discourses that determine the type of pedagogy that will inform classroom practice, what texts will be used to convey particular beliefs and values and what 'regimes of truth' (McLaren, 1989, 181) will inform literacy practice. The theory of discourse underpins literacy practice in a Critical Literacy approach as it proposes first, that there are dominant or oppositional discourses and second, that literacy practices need to engage learners in an understanding of which discourses serve the interests of particular group/s. The dominant discourse refers to the discursive practices privileged by the discourse, whilst oppositional discourses (which are not so overt), refer to those that challenge the dominant discourse.

Furthermore the theory of discourse addresses questions of truth and meaning, which are here, not to be understood in terms of absolutes that exist outside discourses. According to Foucault, truth is neither necessarily good or bad, but what is of importance, is an

understanding of how it works, that is how truth is produced, by the exercising of power and power is exercised through producing truth.

Since Critical Literacy is concerned with, among other things, relations of power conveyed by discourses underpinning texts, this research argues that a critical discourse analysis is central in engaging learners as critical subjects in textual analysis.

In the following section, I examine how the subject is constructed through language and discourse.

### 1.3.1.3 THE SUBJECT

The subject and the construction of the subject or subjectivity is crucial to Critical Literacy as it offers insights into the type of meanings that subjects negotiate in their interaction with texts. In this regard I attend to the positioning of the subject through language and discourse as this has implications for the way in which texts are produced and received. The conventional or humanist notion of the subject as fixed has shifted

*...towards a constructionist conception of language and representation which did a great deal to displace the subject from a privileged position in relation to knowledge and meaning. Subjects may produce particular texts, but they operate within the limits of the discursive formation, the regime of truth, of a particular period and culture and the subject is produced within discourse (Hall, 1999, 55).*

Subjects assume the particular types of knowledge that are produced by the discourse thus becoming subjects of particular discourses, and therefore the bearer of their power and knowledge. In this sense, the subject is located in

a position from which the discourse makes most sense, and thus becomes its subject by being subjected to its meanings, power and regulation. All discourses then, construct subject positions from which they alone can make sense (Hall, 1999, 56).

Through subject positioning, discourses create or construct particular subjectivities in humans. Misson suggests that

discourse attempts to put us into particular subject positions, it creates a particular kind of subjectivity in us, it tries to make us the ideal recipient of what is said and implied in the discourse. It does this by assuming that we will agree with it, offering its ideological shape as natural and beyond question (Misson, 1996, 106).

A text 'interpellates' (Althusser, 1984 in Misson, 1996) the reader into the subject position, sometimes calling the reader into multiple subject positions through the different discourses that operate simultaneously in texts, thereby creating within the reader multiple subjectivities.

In the above discussion I have attempted to convey how language and discourse construct the subject. These concepts are central to textual studies within a Critical Literacy approach as they offer useful insights into understanding the design grammar of the semiotic domain of Critical Literacy, and the apprenticeship of learners it fosters.

In the following section I move to a different strand of theory – to aspects of textual theory, which I draw on within the poststructuralist frame I have presented here in order to explore how they provide insights into the construction and purpose of texts.

#### 1.3.1.4 NARRATIVE THEORY

Thus far I have examined the relevance of discourse, language and the construction of the subject within a poststructuralist approach to literacy practice. In this section I turn to textual theory as this relates to the concerns of this research, which focuses on the short story using a Critical Literacy approach. I therefore focus on narrative theory, which is necessary towards an understanding of how narratives are constructed. As the object of this study is to produce a critical analysis based on three short stories, using insights from post-structuralism, I examine how narratives are organized and structured using elements from narrative theory. These elements enable an examination of how the narrative is moved forward. In its structure the narrative can be argued to inscribe particular discourses, which are privileged and which propose particular subjectivities in the receiver. The narrative can be described as ‘ a chain of events in a cause-effect relationship occurring in time...A narrative begins with one situation; a series of changes occur according to a pattern of causes and effects; finally a situation arises which brings about the end of the narrative...Usually the agents of cause and effect are characters’ (Bordwell and Thompson in Prinsloo and Criticos, 1991, 132).

With this definition in mind I focus on different narrative theorists and their contribution to narrative theory. The ideas and models presented by these theorists will be used to analyse the short story narratives in chapter four. In this regard the insights provided by Propp (1975), Todorov (1977) and Levi-Strauss (1968) will be drawn upon. These insights are useful for undertaking a critical analysis of the short story texts used in

Chapter Four and contrast with the 'content-thematic' approach used in the current classroom practice, fostered by the commercial guide.

I begin first with the insights provided by Vladimir Propp<sup>17</sup>, (in Turner, 1988), the Russian formalist. He chose to analyse the Russian folktale in an attempt to establish a reliable system for their classification. He found that these folktales shared common structural features even though they differed in surface details. He broke down the folktale into what he considered their essential parts, which he called narrative functions (see Appendix 1).

A function consisted of a single action, which was not related to a literal event, but served to describe a particular function that is performed in the overall development of the narrative (Prinsloo, 1991, 134).

In his analysis Propp focuses on both events and characters and categorizes characters in terms of their function (see Appendix 1) within the narrative and the sphere of action they inhabit. In this regard he identifies seven 'character' functions; namely, villains, donors or providers, helpers, the princess and the father, dispatchers, heroes or victims and the false hero. In his analysis of the Russian folktale, Propp arrived at the following four conclusions:

1. Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale independent of how and by whom, they are told.
  2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited.
  3. The sequence of events is always identical.
  4. All fairy tales are of one type in regard to structure.
- (Prinsloo, 1991, 136).

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<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the folktale was first published in 1928. He chose to analyse the Russian folktale in an attempt to establish a reliable system for their classification. He ignored the content of the hundred folktales he analysed and concentrated on their latent form and broke them down to what he considered their essential parts, which he called *functions*.

This structural outline of the narrative is useful in understanding how the organization of the narrative conveys particular discourses that may be considered dominant whilst marginalizing others. According to the Proppian analysis of Russian folktales, heroes have helpers of one sort or another, for example, people, animals, magic weapons etc. who, assist or support the hero in his quest or his struggle with the villain and enable the hero to triumph. Villains have helpers in the form of those characters that take advantage of the negative associations connected to the villain and this group represents the other side of the equation. In this regard the hero-villain conflict is indirectly a conflict between two poles, usually good and evil.

What may be deduced from the Proppian model is that 'there is no logic to narratives and that they are constructed according to rules that have not varied greatly over the centuries. There are heroes and heroines, there are villains and villainesses, there is conflict, there are helpers, there are magic agents or powers that the heroes have and that the villains have' (Berger, 1996, 22).

Also relevant are the ideas put forward by Tzevetan Todorov<sup>18</sup> (in Prinsloo and Criticos, 1991) who looks at the overall course of structure in the narrative process. He describes the narrative process as beginning from an initial equilibrium where there is a state of order, of happiness and fulfillment, also described as a state of plenitude. This state is disrupted by an event, crisis or a power resulting in disequilibrium. The course of the

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<sup>18</sup> Todorov looks at the structure of stories as comprising a process that moves from initial equilibrium where there is a balance of social, psychological or moral elements according to the story genre; a disruption and a new equilibrium or what he calls 'plenitude' when things are satisfactory, peaceful, calm or recognizably normal.

narrative is subsequently concerned with the attempt to put right the disequilibrium or deal with the disruption and its effects. By the end of the narrative, the disequilibrium is rectified and there is a return to a new state of equilibrium. The second state of equilibrium or re-equilibrium is an altered one and not the same as the initial one, in that the characters have undergone change. These insights on narrative theory provided by Todorov will be applied in the critical analysis of the short stories in chapter four.

The work of Levi-Strauss also provides insight into the function of cultural mythology, which enabled human beings to negotiate a peace between themselves and their environments. Levi-Strauss suggests that a feature of mythologies is their dependence upon 'binary oppositions' a two-term conflict. One of the ways in which humans understand the world is by dividing it into mutually exclusive categories known as binary oppositions which divide and structure our understanding of the world. Binary oppositions 'provide a way of determining meaning which is the product of the construction of differences and similarities, placing an object on one side of an opposition rather than on the other' (Turner, 1996, 73). An example of the social construction of gender difference within a patriarchal frame may read as follows:

MALE	FEMALE
Strong	Weak
Rational	Emotional
Provider	Nurturer

\*

Levi-Strauss saw this perceptual and linguistic concept repeated in the structure and process of narrative in terms of its dependence on conflict and binary oppositions. These insights will be applied in the critical analysis of the short stories when they are explored in terms of the presentation of characters within the narrative and the discourses that are privileged through this presentation (in chapter four).

Thus an understanding of narrative theory enables an examination of how certain narratives favour particular discourses and therefore particular ideologies and when applied to the short story text (in chapter four) it enables an exploration of relations of power that are conveyed by the discourses that underpin them.

#### 1.3.1.5 GENRE THEORY

Since this study elects to focus on the short story as a sub-genre, it is necessary to examine briefly the concept of genre. The term genre when used within a literary context refers to a kind or type of text. In literary studies it is used to delineate the difference between satire, comedy, tragedy, romance, sci-fi, etc. within one type of literature studies genre, for example within the novel genre, there exists different kinds of writing which vary in terms of length or structure, such as the novella or short story. These variations are referred to as sub-genres.

Genre is frequently referred to in classifying media products because of similarities in their subject matter, thematic concerns, characteristics, plots, formulas and settings.



These conventions and elements relate to a range of recognizable elements which viewers or readers clearly associate with the other texts of the same kind. In this regard it is possible to distinguish between one genre and another because of the characteristics or conventions that define each as a genre or sub-genre. Knowledge of the genre enables receivers to work from a position of familiarity with the genre, its conventional features and with particular expectations of the genre.

A genre consists of a coded set of formulas and conventions, which indicate a culturally accepted way of organizing material into distinct patterns. In doing so they offer the possibility of identifying certain common discourses that are characteristic of the genre.

Prinsloo suggests that:

An analysis of narrative of any aspect media can assist in acquiring and understanding of how these discourses are inscribed both in the media and nurtured in society at large, how these representations organize the 'real' world for us and how we acquire our knowledge (1991,141).

For example, the short stories analyzed critically in chapter four are taken from an anthology of short stories that are underpinned by postcolonial discourses which afford a voice to those groups of people who are marginalized in terms of race and class in a Southern African context. In this regard, genre may be viewed as a social process as 'texts are patterned in reasonably predictable ways according to patterns of social interaction in a particular culture... [G]enres moreover give their users access to certain realms of social action and interaction, certain realms of social influence and power' (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993, 7). An understanding of the short stories as a sub-genre

enables an investigation of the hegemonic postcolonial discourses that they convey through the narratives they employ.

### 1.3.2 CRITICAL LITERACY AS AN ALTERNATIVE SET OF LITERACY PRACTICES

The elements of the semiotic domain of Critical Literacy pattern together to form a design grammar, which is concerned with how issues of social power are conveyed through texts. By extension, the design grammar considers the type of language and discourse that underpin texts and how they construct or position the subject. In examining the semiotic domain and the design grammar of Critical Literacy, I consider how meaning and knowledge are derived through an examination of language, discourse and the construction of the subject in texts.

Critical Literacy is informed by a different understanding of language compared to the Cultural Heritage approach described in this chapter. Within a Critical Literacy approach to the teaching of texts, language is viewed as a social process and the meanings conveyed by language are regarded as being socially and culturally situated; are never neutral and attempt particular ideological positionings, which produce, reproduce or maintain arrangements of power. Critical Literacy proposes that literacy is a socio-cultural process that allows learners to construct meanings in terms of their lived experience. It also recognizes the classroom as a place where knowledge is constructed as



specific interactions between participants occur as part of the teaching and learning process, as teachers and learners live out their daily lives.

Thus a Critical Literacy approach to literacy practice is informed by a pedagogy that allows for a critical engagement with the text. Such textual engagement is conducive to an investigation of how social relations of power and privilege are conveyed through textual representation; through the discourses at work in the text regarding race, class, ethnicity and patriarchy.

Particular principles inform the semiotic domain of Critical Literacy:

- All messages are constructions
- Messages are representations of social reality
- Individuals construct meanings from messages
- Messages have social, political and aesthetic purposes
- Each form and genre has unique characteristics and purposes

(Hobbs, 1993, 169).

Critical literacy attempts to develop an 'affinity group' (Gee, 2001) of readers as discussed earlier, who through their reading, and or writing of texts, are able to identify ideological concerns within texts and develop an awareness of their possible role in the production and circulation of power relations. The text is viewed as a communicative artifact, which presents a version of reality and which is underpinned by discourse/s. The role of the teacher becomes a more complex one in developing in learners an awareness of the social and cultural processes of language use. Since there is no formulaic approach that informs the engagement with texts in the Critical Literacy approach, literary teaching involves,

critical ways of working with and talking about texts and their institutional contexts . . . . we give students tools for weighing and critiquing, analyzing and appraising the textual techniques and ideologies, values and positions to engage students with a study of how texts work semiotically and linguistically while at the same taking up explicitly how texts and their affiliated social institutions work politically to construct and position writers and readers in relations of power and knowledge or a lack thereof (Luke et al, 1995, 35).

Proponents of Critical Literacy attempt to develop within readers and writers of texts an awareness of their roles in the production and circulation of power relations. Critical Literacy teaching begins by problematising the cultures and knowledge of texts, through critical debate, judging and critiquing. According to Luke et al,

we develop wide ranging classroom frames for talking about and in whose interest social institutions and texts retract and bend social reality, manipulate and position readers and writers (1995, 36).

The pedagogy proposed in this way may also include and develop the use of a design grammar for talking about language and literacy, for example, learners may be encouraged to engage with terminology such as ‘research, data, evidence, turn-taking’(Luke et al, 1995, 37) and therefore become more analytically sensitive to language variation and use, in a range of contexts and settings, thereby engaging in a broader view of textual practice.

Critical pedagogy also attempts to develop in learners a critical purchase of how texts may be negotiated or constructed differently. In this way, issues of hegemonic processes at work within the discourses underpinning the text may be interrogated, for example, whose interests are dominant in the text, and whose interests are marginalised and why: how particular subject positionings attempt to create particular subjectivities within the

receiver of the text; and how positions of inequity become naturalised through the dominant discourses conveyed by the text. Critical theorists acknowledge that texts are value-laden and therefore become vehicles for ideology, which McLaren describes as

the production of sense and meaning, a way of viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals and representations that we accept as common sense . . . . and tend to disguise as the inequitable relations of power and privilege, sometimes referred to as ideological hegemony (McLaren, 1989, 176).

The semiotic domain of Critical Literacy also calls for a broader view of literacy. In this regard a significant variant of Critical Literacy is the 'Multi-literacy Project', which argues for

a multiplicity of communication channels to engage with increasing cultural and linguistic diversity in the world. In this regard, it calls for an extension of the scope of literacy pedagogy to account for increasingly globalised societies for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate (The New London Group, 1996, 61).

Luke et al (1995), maintain that an adherence to literacy practices that have roots in the nineteenth and twentieth century British Commonwealth literary studies (in effect those described earlier as Cultural Heritage), are ill-suited to an effective and critical engagement with work and culture in contemporary, 'fast capitalist' societies because they do not address the life possibilities and futures of multicultural and lower socio-economic students who are at risk of joining the economic underclass. Literacy practice must therefore include 'multiple linguistic and cultural differences in three spheres of activity, namely in work, civic and private life' (New London Group, 1996, 64).

In this regard Critical Literacy incorporates texts from everyday cultural lives, which are referred to as 'community texts', and poses ways of critically engaging with these texts.

This implies working with and talking about texts and their institutional contexts.

Six key areas of textual studies have been identified by media educators working within such a critical frame and usefully guide textual engagement in a Critical Literacy

approach. They are:

- Who is communicating and why?
- What type of text is it?
- How do we know what it means?
- How has it been produced?
- How does it present its subject to us?
- Who perceives it and what sense do they make of it?

(Bazalgette, 1989, 8).

Thus classroom practice that incorporates the design grammar of a Critical Literacy approach does not encourage learners to repeat details, facts or messages from the textual domain, but attempts to engage learners in the production of analytic understandings of the text. This requires the teacher to engage with texts in terms of semiotics, agencies of production and reception of texts, locating the text within its historical specificity and the learner within his/her socio-cultural context.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have presented a theoretical framework to literacy practices, which focus on the workings of semiotic domains of the different kinds of literacy practices and the kind of apprenticeship they engage learners in. I have also attempted to investigate the

limitations that inform particular literacy practices, for example, the Cultural Heritage approach to classroom practice with a view towards providing alternative literacy practices that I consider more relevant, namely Critical Literacy, which engages with literacy by addressing issues of social justice.

In the following chapter I focus on the use of the commercial guide, which is at present commonly used by many teachers and learners at former HOD schools, and which constrains literacy practice and textual studies to a simple version of the Cultural Heritage approach, one that teacher-colleagues loosely refer to as the ‘content-thematic’ approach to the teaching of texts.

The content-thematic engages with texts on the assumption that meaning is inherent in the text. This meaning may be unraveled by the teacher, who engages learners in a master-student type of apprenticeship, where emphasis is placed on identifying themes in relation to content in texts.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE COMMERCIAL GUIDE

#### INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I first briefly define the South African short story, which is part of the grade twelve syllabus. Second, I focus on the current classroom practice, which is broadly Cultural Heritage but includes the content-thematic approach to the teaching of selected texts. In this regard some teachers and learners have come to rely on the use of Commercial Guides, when engaging with texts. To this end, I examine the use of the Commercial Guide, which employs a version of the Cultural Heritage approach to the teaching of texts. The commercial guide has come to be seen as inscribing the appropriate or validated textual approach and is viewed as a crutch by many teachers and learners. As such it is strongly indicative of prevailing classroom practices, one that is geared to examinations and assumes a version of the Cultural Heritage approach.

The short story genre forms part of the grade twelve syllabus which is prescribed for English Primary Language<sup>19</sup> as a 'minor'<sup>20</sup> literary work. To this end, certain short stories out of anthologies are prescribed. There are eight Southern African short stories prescribed for study by grade twelve learners, which since 1994 have been part of the corpus that is repeated every second or third year. These texts are also available in the school stockroom, having been purchased for study purposes when they were first

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<sup>19</sup> English as a school subject is divided into English Primary Language for first language speakers and English Additional Language is recommended for second language speakers.

<sup>20</sup> The literature syllabus includes Shakespeare, poetry, a major literary work and the short story, which is frequently referred to as a 'minor' work.



prescribed. They are taken from the anthology of short stories compiled by Malan (1994), entitled “Being Here”. For the purpose of this research I focus on three of the eight stories prescribed for grade twelve learners. They are:

Head, Bessie: The Wind and the Boy

Rush, Norman: Bruns

Ndebele, Njabulo: The Music of the Violin

I have chosen these three stories which all address issues of race, class and gender within an African context. They offer an interesting point for undertaking a critical investigation of the stories thereby engaging with the genre of the short story using a different set of literacy practices, namely Critical Literacy.

## 2.1 A BRIEF DEFINITION OF THE SHORT STORY

The short story is one of many kinds of narratives, which attempts to retell events using the format of a story. Stories are widespread in many cultures as people of all ages are entertained or emotionally moved by them.

The short story is a narrative genre, with its socio-cultural context and social purposes. It serves to amuse, entertain, provoke and move emotionally. Its characteristic short and compact form enables it to be read in one sitting. It usually contains fewer characters in comparison to a novel, a narrow time frame, a single place setting and one main event. This contributes to the unity of effect or overall single impression that is characteristic of many short stories (Queensland Syllabus Material, 1994, 8).

The short stories referred to in this research deal with a spectrum of life’s experiences informed by an African context. Although the stories are fictional, the world of the story

is presented as real and is referred to 'as the possible world of the fictional narrative' (Queensland Syllabus Material, 1994, 8).

All three stories explored in this research articulate discourses that are pertinent to the Southern African socio-cultural context, for example those addressing elements of race, class and patriarchy are located within a South African socio-cultural framework. This is conveyed through the plots, utterances, characterization and settings within the South African context.

The events and ideas of the subject matter of the stories are usually selected and organised by the writer who is choosing to construct particular scenarios and particular discourses. Therefore as examples of the short story genre, these stories offer the possibility for interrogation and critical investigation for both learners and teachers.

## 2.2 THE COMMERCIAL GUIDE AS AN AID TO LITERACY PRACTICE

A practice that has become commonplace at most former HOD schools in KwaZulu-Natal is the use of and dependence on commercial guides in classroom practice. For this reason I focus on the commercial guide (see Appendix 2) in particular, which is available for English Primary Language literature studies with specific reference to the short story.

Commercial guides, driven by economic motives, were initially marketed in the mid-seventies in KZN as support material to assist learners in grade twelve, with textual

studies, and with preparation for the Senior Certificate Examination, and are used currently by many teachers at former HOD schools. They are available for almost all subjects, and assume an examination orientation in their form and content, as opposed to an engagement with knowledge or with the pleasure of the text.

I argue that the guide responds to the hegemonic approach inscribed by the grade twelve or Senior Certificate examination, whereby learners are expected to answer questions in terms of a particular schooled reading of the text which the guide purports to offer through support material based on particular texts, prescribed for study for this exam as though this is the only approach.

Different commercial guides are marketed by various small business enterprises but essentially adopt similar format and content. For the purpose of this research, I examine “Guidelines Study Aids – The Blue Book Series”, available for English literature, in particular the guide available for short stories. The Blue Book Series purports to offer support material, based on a variety of titles, of the different books prescribed for study at secondary school level in KwaZulu-Natal, and is loosely referred to by teacher-colleagues as ‘the guide’.

The guide addresses the anthology of short stories “Being Here”, by including eight short stories, and employs a particular format to address each story. I therefore examine the guide in order to highlight what has come to be the dominant approach in many former HOD schools. The guide includes sections entitled:

Biographical Note, Vocabulary, Summary of Content, Detailed Analysis, Comment, Questions and Suggested Answers (Guidelines, 2000).

In this format, a singular reading of the short story text is reinforced, in terms of a content-thematic approach to the teaching of texts. In the following sections I examine the structure of the guide and its engagement with the stories in line with the guide's presentation of a singular reading of the texts. In particular I focus on the 'Introduction' to the guide and then the synopsis or summary of each of the short stories.

### 2.2.1 THE 'INTRODUCTION – GUIDELINES'

The introduction of the guide presents a brief overview of the short story genre in terms of a definition and characteristics of terminology in the following order: plot, character, structure, theme, style, point of view, tone, symbolism, atmosphere, foreshadowing, irony and tempo or pace. These terms are briefly discussed using examples from the stories to illustrate their meanings. These terms are explicitly drawn from Cultural Heritage strategies.

It is in these discussions that a single reading is conveyed in terms of the plot, seeking a position of 'high culture', through an analysis of theme and character, which are strategies for textual analysis, taken from the semiotic domain of Cultural Heritage. For example, under the heading 'Theme', the guide makes reference to the theme of 'prejudice' from the story Bruns, and substantiates this theme through the following discussion:

Note that the theme of a story, (or poem or novel), should be described in a sentence rather than a single word. For example, it should never be described as 'love' or 'death' or 'parenthood', but rather as 'the healing power of love' or 'death is not the end of life but a stepping stone to eternal life' etc (Guidelines, 2000, 5).

This reading engages with the story in line with the semiotic domain of the Cultural Heritage approach by attempting to promote moral approval and enlightened thinking. Other examples cited throughout the 'Introduction', convey commentaries on characters, themes, plot discussion, etc in a similar mode, whereby the learner subject is assumed to be being in need of moral guidance and upliftment. The different techniques listed, and briefly discussed in the 'Introduction' may be used by learners to develop a deeper understanding of texts. However, the synopsis of the stories presented in the guide is constrained to a content-thematic analysis of texts, based on a singular reading of the story.

The 'Introduction' is informed by an approach to the teaching of texts that assumes that meaning is inherent in the text. Therefore the summaries presented in the guide attempt to unravel the meaning and message contained in the dominant reading of the story. In doing so the semiotic domain of the content-thematic approach is engaged with, in terms of citing important themes and moral values in the plot of the short story. Simultaneously, the 'Introduction' uses its format to locate the summaries of the stories within a broader, if not tenuous, Cultural Heritage framework.

The commentary provided by the 'Introduction', as regards literary techniques such as style, symbolism, tone, etc presents brief definitions to direct the reader's attention to

particular techniques that may be employed when analysing the short story text or when answering questions in the examination.

Of particular note is the section entitled 'Point of View', which explains the different types of narrators that may be identified in the different stories. In the sub-section entitled 'first person narrator', the guide concedes 'that this narrator tells the story from his personal point of view and speaks directly to the reader' (Guidelines, 2000, 5).

This statement underscores the design grammar of the Cultural Heritage approach, whereby the text is regarded as containing the author's message, which the learner must unravel.

Another aspect of the design grammar of this semiotic domain is evident where the authorial view is sought and conveyed as the dominant reading of the text. In fact the singular reading presented in the guide is conveyed as the correct reading. Learners are encouraged to engage with the information in the guide as a means of seeking the author's intended meaning. This is located in the next example under the heading, 'Character – Methods of Characterization':

analysing character in a short story involves identifying three things: the kind of character, the function of the character and the method of characterization the writer uses (Guidelines, 2000, 2).

The assumption conveyed in this example is that firstly, there is a singular interpretation of the text, which learners must discover. Secondly, seeking the meaning and message intended by the author is in line with the design grammar of a Cultural Heritage approach to literacy practice.

The 'Introduction' of the guide is didactic in intention, uses short sentences and assumes a transmission approach (which is a skills-based approach to literacy practice), at particular times for the teaching and understanding of texts. This approach assumes the kind of affinity group (Gee, 2001) that requires learners to commit to memory particular techniques of understanding texts.

### 2.2.2 STRUCTURE OF THE SHORT STORY SUMMARIES IN 'GUIDELINES'

Each of the eight stories is presented within a particular format using the following headings – 'Biographical Note, Vocabulary, Content, Comment, Questions, Suggested Answers' (Guidelines, 2000). Occasionally an extra sub-heading is included, for example, 'Detailed Analysis' (Guidelines, 2000, 19) is included as an additional note in the synopsis of the story 'Bruns'.

In what follows I focus on the three short stories listed at the outset of this chapter. I examine each section of the story presented in the guide in terms of the content-thematic approach that the guide engages with, and the singular reading of the short story text the guide assumes. In doing so I also investigate the different sections that comprise the summaries of the stories presented in the guide. As this format is common to all the stories, I examine the first story in detail and thereafter I concentrate on the 'Content' and 'Comment' sections of the following two stories, with a brief reference to the 'Questions and Suggested Answers' section in the story 'Bruns'.

## 2.3 THE WIND AND THE BOY

### 2.3.1 'The Biographical Note'

This section presents biographical details of the author Bessie Head. In contrast to the other biographical notes in the guide, more detail is presented about the author of this story. It includes details of birth and place of birth in terms of the circumstances of Head's birth and parenthood. Information about the author being an illegitimate child, of mixed parentage, and her mother being committed to a mental institution after Head's birth, is presented in this section. Further detail is provided on Head's disjointed childhood and her brief adult life. Other novels and writing by Head are cited, and it states that the favored topic of Head's writing is 'women entrapped in their particular society- as she seemed to have been' (Guidelines, 2000, 17). Thus it frames the reading of the story and anticipates particular concerns.

The biographical note proposes Head as an object of sympathy. Reader positioning is attempted in this section, by calling for sympathy and admiration (perhaps awe) regarding Head's life. The preferred reading suggests a sympathetic reader through the presentation of the emotional hardship that characterized Head's life and the tragedy surrounding her death.

The placement of the biographical note at the outset attempts a reader positioning in terms of accepting the authorial status as an important and privileged one. The 'Content' and 'Comment' sections, offer a description of the author's intention and message in the



short story, and thus disallows the possibility of other readings. That the author of this short story has presented a single version of a possible reality at a particular moment in history is not engaged with.

### 2.3.2 'Vocabulary'

A list of words and simple definitions, aimed at assisting learners with examination preparation, is provided in this section. It is my sense that this list attempts to enable learners to access the information of the guide more easily and limits the reading of the information to an uncritical or unreflective manner, thereby reinforcing the guide's content as being reliable and sufficient as regards preparation for the examination rather than encouraging any probing.

### 2.3.3 'Content'

In the 'Content' section, the character of Friedman is presented as a special child, privileged to enjoy the freedom of boyhood 'that only an unsophisticated child could know. His grandmother Sejoseny adores him' (Guidelines, 2000, 17).

The reader of the opening paragraph is positioned into receiving Friedman as a privileged boy child who enjoys a special status and place in his grandmother's heart and amongst the people of the village who watch him grow up. This reader positioning continues throughout the section in terms of a re-telling of events from the story, which constitute a dominant reading of the story. In this reading the characters of both Friedman and Sejosenje are presented as being worthy of praise and admiration and it attempts to

position the receiver as the awestruck subject. This reader position is extended to the end of the section whereby the tragic deaths of Friedman and Sejosenje are described, thereby constructing the receiver as the empathetic subject and Friedman and Sejosenje as victims.

#### 2.3.4 'Comment'

This section complements the 'Content' section, and presents an account of the different themes that are conveyed by the narrative of the story. The themes that are identified highlight particular moral sentiments conveyed by the dominant reading of the story and are in keeping with the Cultural Heritage approach to textual practice. For example, 'the wind implies a type of spiritual freedom, which is absent in the urban world. All the evil that comes to the boy comes from the outside world' (Guidelines, 2000, 18). The rural world, where spiritual freedom is assumed to be possible, is conveyed as peaceful and comforting against the harshness of an empty and decadent urban existence. The outside world (urban life) is constructed as a foil to the harmonious world of the village.

The 'Comment' concludes with the sentiment that 'the destructive nature of the new order where individuals are only interested in becoming rich and gaining status and one where the 'wind' is ignored. Everything is hard and material' (Guidelines, 2000, 19). Such a sentiment is in keeping with the apprenticeship of learners in the semiotic domain of the Cultural Heritage approach to the teaching of texts, promoting the acquisition of morally rich values and sentiments, which are intended to enlighten learners.

### 2.3.5 Gaps and Silences in the 'Content/Comment' Section:

Traditional reading practices assume literary texts to be perfectly complete and unified. But modern theories of reading suggest that this sense of completeness is produced by the reading, not the text. It may be argued that for reading to function at all, gaps in a text are necessary. In order to foster Critical Literacy, it is important to challenge the apparently immaculate authority of the text at points where the hidden implications promoted by the gaps and silences are passively naturalised, by reading conventions (Motheram, 1995, 29).

The reading provided by the guide of the story is a singular one and in terms of the purpose (providing support material), of the guide it remains the dominant reading. It is however, silent about many issues regarding the discourses underpinning the text. Firstly, why is Friedman being raised by his grandmother; secondly, why does his mother (Sejosenje's daughter), hand the child over so readily to continue her job as a typist in the metropol?

The practice amongst African and some other working class people, leaving children to be reared by grandparents, whilst they seek better employment opportunities is not questioned nor explored. The 'Content' section does not contextualise why this practice has become a naturalised one particularly amongst African people, and what impact this type of upbringing was to have on the character of Friedman and the fate he was to suffer. This dominant reading of the story is conveyed within the framework of the Cultural Heritage approach, whereby the single reading of the text, seeking the authorial view (in this instance it is the view of the writer of the guide), is conveyed as the only reading.

Gendered assumptions are also implicit in this reading. I question this section with regard to the following:

- Would Sejosenje have raised the child similarly if it were a girl child?
- What would have been the significance of the stories of the bravery of Robinson Crusoe to a young girl?
- Where or who is Friedman's father?
- Where are the men of the village?
- Would the girl child have been as adored as Friedman?

This section of the guide being limited to Cultural Heritage framework, and employing the design grammar of the 'content-thematic' approach, does not consider other explorations or investigations of the text that may be possible within a poststructuralist approach to literacy practice, such as Critical Literacy. In this regard the 'Content' does not interrogate the discourse underpinning the narrative in terms of gendered representation. The type of reader or subject positioning constructed by the dominant reading in the 'Content' is one that is limited to the rejection of the newly empowered Black elite as 'these people are in too much of a hurry to worry about anything except their new social status' (Guidelines, 2000, 18).

Discourses regarding race and class that underpin the short story are briefly engaged with in the condemnation of the creation of the privileged class of Black people at the expense of the rural poor. The 'Content' is silent on the issue of the language of the text, in terms of its construction of particular subjectivities on issues of race, class, gender, the perpetuation of the migrant labour system or the various gaps that exist in the single reading of the story.

In this regard the dominant reading is aligned with the Leavisite position of textual analysis, in that it harks back to the notion of literature as a panacea for the working class masses, considered as being in danger of a loss of innocence and morality in the face of industrial capitalism. This is presented through the implied theme of rural utopia and urban dystopia conveyed in this section through the absence of men and the migrant labour system, which are left unexplored.

The poverty that affects most people in rural areas, and the barest minimum that rural folk accept as a way of life are not interrogated. Instead readers are positioned in this section within the discourse of the preferred reading, which is the corruption of the emergent black elite, and the brutal loss of a special life. Further, a patriarchal discourse underpinning the narrative in terms of the presence of women and children only in the rural setting of the story, the creation of Friedman's character and the special manner in which he was raised and cherished as a special child are not considered in these sections.

### 2.3.6 'The Questions and Suggested Answers' Section

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of commercial guides appears to be one of providing support material to grade twelve learners, for classroom-based literature study, and to assist learners with answering questions for test and exam purposes. The concluding section of the summary of the short story therefore provides four questions and suggested answers to these questions.

The questions are based on the summary provided in the 'Content' and 'Comment' sections rather than on the reading of the text. I consider question two and its suggested answer from this section.

In what way is the boy caught between two cultures? (Guidelines, 2000, 19).

Suggested Answer (extracted from Guidelines, 2000, 19):

The boy is the result of a casual relationship, a practice introduced to Africa by western culture. He is named after a foreign doctor. His mother is obviously ensconced in the modern world while he is brought up in the country, close to nature. However, he rides a bicycle and is eventually killed by a vehicle driven by someone who is part of the new dispensation where status and money are all that count (Guidelines, 2000, 19).

The assumption conveyed through the concept of two cultures is limited to the difference between rural and urban life. Nowhere prior to the question is the concept of culture sufficiently addressed in terms of defining the concept, locating the concept of culture within the narrative or contextualising the concept of culture in terms of lived experiences of different groups of people represented in the text. Instead the concept of the two cultures loosely refers to the different lifestyles of certain African people surviving in rural areas and others seeking employment in urban areas. It evades the complexity of existence.

Through the suggested answer, the view that rural life is peaceful, carefree and untainted by the modern world is privileged, resonating a Leavisite sentiment. For example, 'the boy is the result of a casual relationship, a practice introduced to Africa by Western culture' (Guidelines, 2000, 19). The assumption conveyed through the suggested answer is one of a corrupt Western world that promotes decadence, and that casual sex is un-

African. The African subject (for example, Friedman's mother) is constructed as having been pure until she is seduced by a Western way of life. The possibility that poverty or hardship experienced by people in rural areas, and the need to survive which has driven African people to seek employment opportunities in urban areas is not explored in the suggested answer. Instead the suggested answer is inscribed within the singular reading of the 'Content' and 'Comment' sections.

The suggested answers provide plausible explanations and responses, but within the constraints of firstly, a very limited content-thematic approach to literary practice; and secondly, within this singular or dominant reading of the text. Other readings of the text involving a disruption of the dominant reading in terms of role reversal or gender reversal, are absent in the summary of the guide.

## 2.4 BRUNS

### 1.4.1 'The Content and Comment'

The summary of 'Bruns' is presented in the same format as that of 'The Wind and the Boy'. However under the sub-heading 'Content', a brief sketch of the story is presented. This is followed by the sub-heading 'Detailed Analysis', a section, in which a detailed synopsis of the story is presented. The detailed synopsis presents a version of the story in terms of the guide's singular reading of the story. In this reading the story is engaged with only in terms of the narrator of the short story and her partial observation of events in Keteng, where the story is set. I focus on the 'Comment' in particular.

#### 2.4.2 'The Comment'

The 'Comment' section opens with the following paragraph:

The first paragraph sets the tone for this short story. The hatred of 'poor Bruns' is so disproportionate that the reader is prepared for an extravagant, almost soap style story. Certainly the storyline itself is exaggerated – the confrontation between Bruns and Du Toit is farcical, and Bruns's revenge is so unbelievable as to be comic (Guidelines, 2000, 34).

This statement underscores the singular reading of the guide. In fact the entire 'Comment' and 'Content' summaries comprise an attack on the role of the narrator (the anthropologist) without any undertaking of an explanation of concepts such as feudalism, pacifism, class distinction or tribalism, which form part of the backdrop to the narrative.

In emphasising a singular reading of the story in terms of limiting the synopsis of the story to the inadequacies and shortcomings of the narrator, the guide presents its version of the narrator as being prejudiced and lacking in understanding of events and characters in the story. It is precisely in what the guide views as a limited and inadequate role of the narrator that the possibility for alternative readings, as well as critical engagement with the text exists. In this regard I elect to investigate the gaps and silences conveyed in the version of the story presented in the guide.

#### 2.4.3 GAPS AND SILENCES IN THE 'Comment'

The 'Comment' does not explain the concepts of prejudice, conflict nor disharmony, which could be argued as being central themes of the narrative. Instead the limitations of the role of the narrator are highlighted and criticized throughout this section.



I argue that the theme of conflict or disharmony may be considered in terms of the narrative of the story. For example, this theme is conveyed through the differences regarding issues of power and privilege, which characterizes both the Boer and Bakorwa groups, and is not engaged with in the 'Comment'. Instead the 'Comment' engages with the role of the narrator as the central concern of its engagement with the story.

According to the 'Comment' the narrator's attitude towards events in Keteng regarding both the Boers and the Bakorwa, is a contemptuous one. This version of the story is limited to a critique of the narrator's role in the story. There is no engagement with issues of power that are conveyed through the discourses of race, class and patriarchy that underpin the text, nor is there engagement with the deliberate construction of an outside narrator to ensure distance, nor is there empathy for the narrator. The 'Comment' attempts to create a particular subjectivity in the reader regarding the role of the narrator as being inept and inadequate.

Location of the two groups within a socio-cultural specificity, and an investigation into the hegemony enjoyed by the Boers in Keteng are absent in the 'Comment'. The guide's reading of the story conveyed through the 'Comment' ignores any other attempt at constructing different readings of the story through a critical discourse analysis of the text. For example, the discourse regarding gender with reference to the construction of the Boer wives as decadent, subjugated and accepting of physical abuse at the hands of their husbands, and the women of the Bakorwa tribe as being passive and accepting of their public beatings and suppression are not addressed as issues of any concern in the

‘Comment’. The singular reading in the guide is silent with regard to the reasons for patriarchal control exerted by the men in Keteng, or why these women accept their fate. A more active engagement with the text may reveal that the women are relegated to inferior positions because firstly, only men hold positions of authority, in the political, economic and social spheres in Keteng, which is also governed along feudal and racial lines, where economic control is vested in the hands of the Boer men, who maintain this control in an African state through corrupt and devious means. For example, the Bakorwa chiefs (all men), are bribed by the men of the seven Boer families, into allowing feudal lords like Du Toit to operate at will.

In this segment of the narrative no significance is attached to the role of the women, in fact the construction of the Boer wives in the dominant reading of the narrative appears to be that of bored sex partners of slothful men, whilst the Bakorwa women are presented as slaves. The violent subjugation of the Bakorwa women and the laid-back, meaningless roles of the Boer wives are not explored in terms of the possibility of these women being accepting of subservient roles. The assumed power relations the singular reading engages, regarding hegemonic masculinity, conveyed through the Boer and Bakorwa men is limited to the presentation of these men as slothful and primitive, and also constructs the women as willing subjects and passive recipients of abuse.

The ‘Comment’ is also silent about the complex role of a third person narrator employed in the short story. It does not talk about this as a narrative device frequent in short stories, which works precisely to avoid a singular reading. Instead the ‘Comment’ maintains a

persistent criticism of the narrator and her failure as an anthropologist. This is conveyed through the following example:

The anthropologist's version of the last part of the story is wildly improbable, yet she appears to believe it ... it shows her to be a spiteful woman, since she is an anthropologist, she expects us to accept everything she says...in every word she utters her prejudice shows (Guidelines, 2000, 36).

Yet it is in the 'Comment's' perceived lack in the role of the narrator that the possibility of a critical interrogation of the dominant reading exists, whereby a critical discourse analysis of the story may be undertaken with an investigation into how the language (semiotics) of the story engages with issues of power. Instead the comments are constrained to a preferred reading of the story conveyed in the reference to the narrator as 'she is bigoted; she takes herself and her opinions very seriously; the obvious prejudice her opinions reveal allows the reader to laugh at the anthropologist's expense' (Guidelines, 2000, 36).

#### 2.4.4 'Questions and Suggested Answers'

I make reference to this section as it links to the 'Comment' and it reinforces the singular reading of the 'Comment'. The following questions appear in this section, and they focus on the narrator:

- How does Rush maintain the illusion that the anthropologist is an impartial observer?
- Mention two incidents, which the anthropologist offers as fact but which simply add to our belief that she is prejudiced.
- Although the anthropologist attempts to portray Bruns as heroic, why does he come across to the reader as rather pathetic?
- There are many places in the story where the narrator is shown up as being an unpleasant character. Write about three of these (Guidelines, 2000, 37).

The suggested answers to these questions are in keeping with the guide's reading of the text and none of the other issues raised in the text are engaged with, for example, the discourses underpinning the text regarding pacifism, racism and class which draws on both the characters of Bruns and Du Toit. In this regard Bruns's feat or defeat within the narrative are not explored, neither is the origin of economic control by the Boers in Keteng investigated. The fact that the narrator is a white female anthropologist and a relief aid worker is left unexplored in terms of defining relief aid workers and possible reasons for them being in Keteng whilst the seven Boer families lived as 'feudal lords'. The 'Comment' refuses the potential for different readings of the text and is limited to the content-thematic approach to the teaching of texts, and conveys information about the story by engaging with the design grammar of the content-thematic approach.

## 2.5 THE MUSIC OF THE VIOLIN

This story is presented in the same format as the other two stories that I have presented thus far, using short sentences that convey an uncomplicated translation of the guide's reading of the text.

### 2.5.1 'The Content and Comment'

Of note in these sections is the presentation of the character of Dorcas (Vukani's mother). It is my sense that these sections present a narrow view of her character. In this reading, Dorcas is presented as ambitious, selfish, lacking in ethics as a mother, and as an African woman who mimics a privileged White middle-class culture, whilst Doksi's (Vukani's

friend) family is presented as humble and accepting of their simple lifestyle. A particular interpretation of Dorcas's character is presented that disallows a full and active engagement with her character.

The singular reading of this story is presented in terms of opposites. On the one hand Vukani and his family are presented as being middle class, with Vukani's father being a school inspector, his mother a nurse, his sister a student at the university and Vukani as an intelligent scholar competing for first place in his class at school. Other members of the community of Soweto, for example Doksi and his family, are presented as being simple, humble and adapting to township lifestyle easily and living in an extended family comfortably. It is through the opposites conveyed in the singular reading of the guide that the character of Dorcas is presented as selfish, unreasonable, domineering, hankering after a middle-class lifestyle and is in awe of White people. This is conveyed in the following comment,

Dorcas feels that relations bring problems. She believes in the nuclear family that Whites prefer (Guidelines, 2000, 40).

She is compared to her husband who is described as being 'more sceptical and reasonable, Mrs. Zwane (a family friend) is a foil to the character of Dorcas and tends to see through her, Teboho (Dorcas's daughter) is more reasonable, intelligent and balanced' (Guidelines, 2000, 40).

These examples serve to reinforce the singular reading presented in the 'Comment', which conveys a vilification of Dorcas's character. In fact the reading presented in the 'Comment and Content' are a continuous attack on the character of Dorcas and the reader

subject is constructed as sympathizing with all those around her whilst recognizing her overbearing nature.

### 2.5.2 GAPS AND SILENCES

A disruption of the dominant reading might examine the character of Dorcas as holding out against a submission to the hardships of an African township lifestyle. In an alternative reading of the story, the possibility of including the strength in Dorcas's character as an African woman who is motivated by the need to ensure better survival for her family and herself as opposed to accepting a lifestyle typical of African townships, could be investigated. The conflicts and tension that confront people living in African townships are unexplored in the synopsis of the character of Dorcas in the guide.

A critical discourse analysis of race and class are absent in the dominant reading of the guide. Instead a reference is made to 'the apartheid system and the enormous gap between black and white ... who under normal circumstances, would have moved to middle-class suburb where their aspirations would be understood and others would think the way they did. The South African situation however prevents this, and Vukani has to put up with the persecution of not being understood' (Guidelines, 2000, 40). There is sufficient space in the dominant reading of the short story to engage more actively and holistically with the text in terms of different readings, however the guide is silent on any other reading except a singular, dominant reading, which engages with only a content-thematic approach.

## CONCLUSION

The guide purports to offer support material to grade twelve learners within a teaching framework that aligns itself with established classroom practice that informs the literacy practice at most former HOD schools. Being commercial material, it has to be formatted along the lines of the dominant classroom practice as it is driven by an economic motive and marketed on the basis of profit.

The limitations associated with the approaches described in chapter one may be further extended to incorporate the support material provided by the guide. In its attempt to capture the grade twelve learner market, it is constructed as simply as possible, and purports to offer a simplified version of texts prescribed for study. It is therefore silent on issues regarding unequal power relations that underpin its singular reading of texts. It contains gaps, therefore neglecting to deal with issues of discourse, ideology and textuality (which are associated with a poststructuralist approach to the teaching of texts). Instead it is simplistically limited to a version of the Cultural Heritage approach to literacy practice, briefly engaging with issues of plot, theme and character.

Furthermore, the approach to textual practice inherent in the guide engages with an appreciation of the high cultural value of selected texts. The guide also employs particular lines of argument and discussion of texts that are aligned with the notion of promoting certain moral imperatives in keeping with elitist discourses that underpin Leavis's Cultural Heritage.

In the following chapter I develop a framework for teaching Critical Literacy by using three South African short stories. To this end I examine the short story as a sub-genre, postcoloniality and postcolonial discourses that are conveyed by the short stories.



## CHAPTER THREE

### DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING CRITICAL LITERACY USING THREE SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT STORIES:

#### INTRODUCTION

As this research proposes Critical Literacy as its central focus, I consider the short story as a text for analysis in order to use poststructuralist insights and understandings for textual practice. In this regard I attempt to show how these insights offer a more critical and active engagement with texts, as opposed to the textual practice favoured by the Cultural Heritage approach described earlier. To this end, I first examine the short story as a sub-genre. Second, I explore post coloniality and postcolonial writings, as these three stories are taken from a South African anthology. This anthology includes the work of writers from previously marginalized groups, whose work was not considered as part of the great canon of English literature setworks prescribed for English Primary Language Study but this work is now considered as part of the expanding canon. The Critical Literacy approach will consider the texts themselves by exploring the discourses that underpin them using a semiotic and a narratival analysis.

This exploration will argue that the text serves particular interests and therefore attempts to involve particular subjectivities within readers. For this reason, processes of production and reception are also important elements of the Critical Literacy approach.

Texts are not ‘... sinister or manipulative, and obscure or subvert ‘true meaning’; but ... that such processes are part of the meaning of any text’ (Bazalgette, 1991, 3).

### 3.1 THE SHORT STORY AS A SUB-GENRE

The short story used in this study can be understood as being within a political genre. As suggested by its name, it is short or compact (as compared to the novel for example), in that it may be read at one sitting. Writers of short stories present the world of the story as being real or at least plausible and this is known as ‘the possible world of the fictional narrative where the plot focuses on a series of related events: the actions, utterances, thoughts and feelings of characters in a particular setting in place and time. In addition to retelling what characters in different contexts say, think, feel and do, writers are concerned with the significance behind these events’ (Queensland Syllabus Materials, 1994, 8).

There are also different sub-genres of the short stories such as the short story cycle, which is written by a single author in an anthology, but contains a number of different stories, and the anthology of short stories which contains a number of stories written by different writers in one anthology. As a category of text, this anthology of short stories forms part of a wider range of short story types, such as mystery, horror, sci-fi etc. As a written text, language in the short stories is used to convey meaning, which enables an analysis of how the text constructs particular characters and events. These constructions are underpinned by certain discourses which serve particular interests and therefore

position the reader in particular ways, in terms of the relations of power conveyed by the text.

I have elected to analyse short stories as they are prescribed as one of three networks for study in the grade twelve syllabus in KZN. As mentioned in chapter two the various role players in the English Primary Language programme view the short story as a 'smaller' text compared to the prescribed Shakespearean play and the novel, and is therefore perceived by both teachers and learners as being arguably a 'minor' work. Whilst this is so, the short story like the other texts prescribed, allows for the possibility of a critical analysis using poststructuralist insights within a Critical Literacy framework as will be undertaken in the next chapter of this study which presents a critical analysis that contrasts with the content-thematic approach discussed earlier.

Interestingly, the short story text is popular amongst grade twelve learners who consider this story to be more manageable and easy to cope with in terms of length and content as well as containment of setting, place and characters. Being a South African publication, this anthology addresses issues that are pertinent to a South African context, and enables a quicker, more personalized learner-response and is more favourably received by grade twelve learners in this regard.

This popularity of text extends to many educators currently teaching the short story genre as it is viewed as a text that is less demanding than the more complex and dense novel or Shakespearean play. This view is couched in a Leavisite sensibility as the current

classroom practice adopts in the main, the Cultural Heritage approach to the teaching of texts.

The postcolonial nature of these stories affords learners and teachers the opportunity to consider worldviews of both the dominant and marginalized groups within a Southern African context.

The short story genre like other genres is characterized by particular generic conventions or elements. These generic conventions have implications for both the production and the reception of this text. This anthology is a softback South African publication, which enables mass production of the text. This allows for the text to become accessible to a greater number of learners and other users as compared to the hardback edition of textbooks that are more exclusive because of a higher price tag. In this regard the profit motive may also be noted in the mass production of these texts. This anthology also contains stories that were previously part of banned literature. These stories may be viewed as embodying a social purpose, as they also address issues that are considered anti-colonial within a post-apartheid society and aims to highlight the concerns of the social and economic under-class in a Southern African context.

The expectations by readers or receivers of such an anthology would therefore include engaging with issues of racial oppression, injustices experienced by people as a result of apartheid and colonialism, tensions between the different classes of people in South

African society and their concomitant lifestyles and empathising with the pathos of the rural poor.

In this regard these short stories convey 'what characters in different contexts say, think, feel and do and with the significance behind these events, which readers explore in terms of different levels of subject matter regarding themes, ideas and issues in the story. The events and ideas in the subject matter, usually reflect the writer's cultural and ideological background and may also reflect that of the reader's' (Queensland Syllabus Material, 1994, 9).

As noted earlier, the Critical Literacy approach proposed in this research offers important insights as it shares with genre based theory (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993) the concern that texts do ideological work, which is conveyed through the discourses in the stories.

Insights from genre-based theory may be used to interrogate the text in terms of relations of power conveyed by the discourses at work in the text.

Queensland Syllabus Materials suggest that:

[t]here are a number of generic structures for short stories. One such structure is commonly known as the classic short story, which includes a minimum of three stages for the retelling of events: an orientation, a complication and a resolution (Queensland Syllabus Material, 1994, 10).

The stories used in this research are constructed in the classic short story convention. As such this generic structure proposes a particular subject position for the reader through the fictional world it presents in its narrative structure. I cite the following example from "The Music of the Violin" to illustrate this structure. In this story the reader is orientated

in the fictional world of the narrative, which presents the middle class lifestyle of Vukani and his family. A complication is introduced in the form of Vukani being forced to play the violin by his mother, which causes him immense pain and personal trauma as he is mocked and taunted by the township boys, and his peers. A resolution occurs when he finally stands up to his mother by refusing to play the instrument any longer, thereby resolving the complication in his life through his own intervention.

The short story also employs significant language features such as cohesion, vocabulary, grammar and other overall language features, which construct characters and themes in the story. In this regard,

[t]exts and authors represent and construct a version of the social world; and they position and locate the reader in a social relation to the text and the world. They do so through various lexical and grammatical, generic and semiotic features (Fairclough in Luke et al, 1995, 35).

Such insights provided suggest a concern for the characteristics and conventions that constitute the short story as a sub-genre to enable a critical reading which investigates how semiotics, narrative theory and discourse work together to construct particular readings and positioning of the reader subject. In the following section I examine the short story sub-genre as a postcolonial work.

### 3.2 POSTCOLONIALITY AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT STORY

As mentioned in the preceding section the stories used in this research are taken from an anthology which is considered a postcolonial work, firstly as it includes the work of

writers who are not part of the canon of Great English Literature. Second, it is a post 1994 production<sup>21</sup>, which includes literary work in the form of short stories that address issues of race and class within a South African context. Previously these stories were considered to be part of banned literature, but at present this type of anthology attempts to incorporate the life world and views of colonised or dominated groups in order to engage with the interests and issues of those groups who are viewed as having been marginalised by colonial powers.

Postcolonialism is a term, which refers literally to the state or condition of a country after it has achieved independence from colonial rulers. The prefix 'post' signifies 'after', while the word 'colonialism' refers to the practices of a dominant culture or group in its attempts to rule those who are politically weaker. Postcolonialism [therefore] is a term which signals the breaking down of colonial structures and is relevant to many countries today (Martino, 1999, 6).

Since 1994, with the advent of democracy in South Africa, literature syllabi for English Primary Language, have expanded to include literary works that address the interests of marginalised groups who still remain in the margins or the periphery of Southern African society.

The work of postcolonial writers involve

[p]ostcolonial approaches to reading and writing which are informed by a knowledge about the workings and effects of colonial practices and powers. Such approaches, therefore, may involve examining power relations between colonised groups and the colonial rulers who often exploit and force them to adopt a way of life that is alien to their culture. Postcolonial perspectives make available a language for making sense of practices of the colonisers, while at the same time, allowing those who have been colonised to be heard (Martino, 1999, 6).

Postcoloniality selects particular texts for study and includes perspectives that provide a framework for reading texts by foregrounding the point of view of those from

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<sup>21</sup> 1994 is a significant year for South Africa, as it signaled the end of apartheid control.

marginalised groups. In doing so, postcoloniality attempts to challenge dominant colonialist assumptions at the basis of traditional texts.

The anthology of short stories “Being Here”, which is used in this research, draws attention to issues such as racist practices and attitudes, class distinction, the political and economic disempowerment of rural people and colonialism.

By using texts written from the point of view of the colonised these world views produced from the ‘centre’ can be challenged. The ‘centre’ becomes a metaphor for representing the dominant cultural position, while ‘margins’ represent those who are outside, inhabiting the fringes (Martino, 1999, 12).

As a prescribed network, the anthology provides a means for readers to gain access to and read texts from the margins, in keeping with political transformation in the country. Such an anthology also allows for different worldviews or versions of reality of former colonised groups to be engaged with.

Postcolonial reading and writing practices involve examining power relations, as it calls in question the extent to which colonial attitudes and values are embedded in the socio-political structures of postcolonial countries. Thus postcolonialism incorporates a set of strategies that enable an interpretation or critiquing of the dominant culture from a different standpoint on the margins. As such a postcolonial reading practice focuses on multiple and conflicting ways in which cultural identity is constructed and negotiated by drawing attention to the links between reader, text and context.



The three short stories selected from “Being Here” for this research share common themes and attempt to address issues that convey, among other things, a hostility to modernity, to colonialism, to class distinction and to Eurocentric influences that accompany colonization. The term Eurocentric is frequently used when exploring a postcolonial reading position. This is because many European countries were colonised in the eighteenth century. This term conveys the dominant, White, European worldview, which has dominated historical and fictional writing in European settlements.

This view may also be applied to the stories in this research. As a postcolonial work, the stories in this anthology espouse particular thematic concerns that highlight a tension between Black and White racial groups; the European coloniser (Westernism) and the African colonised; and the privileged and the underprivileged. These tensions are conveyed through the short story narratives that attempt to address issues of poverty, exploitation experienced by African people, together with African people having to cope with an embattled identity against the dominant influence of Westernisation. These tensions, which are presented in the form of postcolonial discourses in the subject matter of the short stories, will be critically investigated in the following chapter when I explore three short stories, using critical tools for analysis.

### 3.3 TOWARDS A CRITICAL READING OF THREE SHORT STORIES

This research focuses on the short story text as the object for critical analysis. As such, extensive reference is made to 'texts', as they form the primary focus of critical analysis and interrogation in this research. I therefore first briefly define 'texts', so as to show their orderly and intentional construction. Thereafter I investigate analytical tools available which enable a critical analysis of the short story texts, which provide different understandings of texts and textuality (as compared to the Cultural Heritage and content-thematic approaches to texts described earlier).

#### 3.3.1 A BRIEF DEFINITION OF 'TEXT'

Graddol et al (1994, 40), describe texts as 'communicative artefacts'<sup>22</sup>, which are intricate constructions or 'weavings' of writers' ideas. Consequently texts have structure and are not random collections of signs, which encode particular social relations between the reader and writer or producer.

Texts are instantiations of socially regulated discourses, whose process of production and reception are socially constrained (Janks, 1997, 329).

As such, texts involve a wide range of social, political and cultural practices and are seen, 'as part of an economic, political and cultural system, any or all of which can play some kind of role in determining what it means, what it can and cannot say, whom it can reach, and how it is valued' (Bazalgette, 1991, 18).

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<sup>22</sup> The traditional definition of 'text' is a verbal, written entity printed with ink on paper. However, this view is considered narrow as it excludes the non-verbal and certain spoken texts and it insists on a particular material form.

These insights into the production and construction of texts have implications for a critical analysis of the short story text within a Critical Literacy framework, as they enable a critical understanding of the way in which texts are produced, constructed and read. Texts are thus viewed as vehicles that convey meanings and messages that have historical and cultural location and specificity.

In the following section I establish the analytical tools to be used for a critical reading of the short story text. These tools will show that the text is morally and politically loaded, and presents a specific worldview as a version of reality.

### 3.3.2 IDENTIFYING AND ESTABLISHING ANALYTICAL TOOLS FOR A CRITICAL READING OF THE SHORT STORIES

One of the concerns of Critical Literacy is how social identity and relations of power are established and mediated in texts. Proponents of Critical Literacy advocate an investigation into the semiotic and linguistic functions of texts, which construct and position readers in relations of power or lack thereof. Such textual practice calls in question the conditions of production and interpretation or reception of texts, in order to examine whose interests are served or negated through the discourses present in the text. Since this research proposes a critical approach for the teaching of texts, I focus on narrative theory, critical discourse analysis and a semiotic analysis, which includes an exploration of the binary oppositions conveyed through the language of the stories. These theoretical insights will be used as tools to analyse the stories. I briefly explore these

research tools in order to show their relevance for a critical reading of the stories. The short story recruits the narrative as a vehicle through which it conveys meanings and messages. As such it 'provides a framework through which we process our experience, measuring it up against the model provided by the narrative' (Mission, 1996, 105).

Narrative theory, described earlier, will be applied to the stories in the following chapter as it enables an understanding for example, of how the hero is constructed through the equilibrium, disequilibrium and new equilibrium or plenitude he/she experiences in the narrative of the short story. These elements of narrative theory attempt to position the reader subject using 'different modes of signification' (Neale, 1980, 6).

A critical analysis of the discourses inscribed in these narratives draws on semiotics, which enables an analysis of the sign systems to convey particular meanings in texts. The use of language in the text conveys certain discourses and therefore serves an ideological purpose. Thus an important insight, also discussed earlier, in relation to the language of the text also includes in its usage, a structural element known as the binary opposition, which influences meaning. A discussion of the binary opposition in a text allows receivers of texts an opportunity to investigate the assumptions and meanings that are associated with how a text configures opposing or conflicting perceptions of the world. As an analytical tool, binary oppositions that are written into the narratives privilege particular assumptions of characters, thematic concerns or discourses, through the juxtapositions they convey.

The analytical tools that I have established in the preceding discussion provide a preamble to developing a critical reading of the three short stories in the following chapter. In doing so I show how, with the use of critical or analytical tools, the short story text may be engaged with in a reflective, active and critical manner.

### 3.3.3 A FOCUS ON POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSES CONVEYED BY THE SHORT STORIES

As noted earlier, I have selected as the focus of the critical analysis proposed in chapter four, three short stories that share common themes. These stories convey particular discourses that relate to colonialism, modernity, race and class. Their narratives are concerned with the workings and effects of hegemonic colonial practices and powers. They also draw attention to the injustices experienced by African people within contexts of race, class and modernity. In this regard, these stories are underpinned by discourses that convey a type of challenge to things European or Western, and intend a type of sympathy towards African working classes and the African rural poor.

In postcolonial terms African people may be described as the dominated group, and these stories are informed by an approach that examines the legacy of colonial practices and powers, albeit within a post-1994 democratic framework. The discourses inscribed in these stories promote the view of formerly colonised people or of those who may be regarded as marginalised. Further, these discourses also hint at a kind of nostalgia for pre-

colonial times and convey a romanticized vision of pre-colonial African identity. To this end, European colonial power structures are challenged through a presentation of the world-views and life experiences of those from the marginalized African group.

However it may be noted that particular contradictions appear in the presentation of the narratives of the short stories in that certain elements of the dominant European cultural position are simplified in favour of an African cultural position. For example, the simplicity and innocence of rural African life and the humility of the working class life experience are privileged in these stories. In this regard issues of disadvantage and poverty are glossed over in favour of a heroism that accompanies the African rural poor, working classes or particular disempowered African communities. These contradictions together with postcolonial discourses will be further investigated in the following chapter when three short stories are critically analysed.

#### CONCLUSION:

This chapter has considered the relevance of investigating issues concerning the production and reception of the short story as a sub-genre and the power relations that are conveyed when such an exploration is undertaken. The critical tools for analysis described in this chapter will be used in the following chapter to investigate the short stories in terms of their socio-cultural and historical specificity, the discourses they convey which may be considered postcolonial and the reader positioning they therefore intend. This chapter has also attempted to examine the purpose these stories serve in

terms of their relevance as a prescribed work in the post-1994 South African classroom and the broad ideological concerns it is aligned with. These insights will be investigated in the following chapter when the short stories are critically analysed and a different understanding of them is produced, one that is poststructuralist and engages with issues of power that the text conveys. In this regard it attempts to provide an alternative engagement with texts as compared to the Cultural Heritage and the content-thematic approaches described in chapters one and two.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A CRITICAL READING OF THREE SHORT STORIES

In this chapter I critically analyse three short stories taken from “Being Here” and they are:

Head, Bessie: The Wind and the Boy.

Ndebele, Njabulo: The Music of the Violin.

Rush, Norman: Bruns.

These short stories were introduced in Chapter Two when the Commercial Guide was scrutinized as a teaching aid used in the current classroom practice and fostering the ‘content-thematic’ approach to literacy practice. The analysis that is undertaken in this chapter proposes a more critical engagement with these texts, using poststructuralist insights established in Chapters One and Three, and is framed within a Critical Literacy approach to textual practice. Each of the stories is examined separately by focusing on elements of narrative theory, semiotics and a critical discourse analysis.



## 4.1 THE WIND AND THE BOY

In this analysis I present constituent segments of the story, which will be used as a framework to undertake a narrational analysis of the short story, using insights from Todorov's and Propp's models, described in Chapter One. Thereafter, I present a critical discourse analysis of the story to show how the characters of Friedman and Sejosenje are constructed as special and different from the other village people, and are presented as victims of a society undergoing political transformation. Included in this analysis will be an attention to the postcolonial discourse that is conveyed in this story by focusing on an inherent tension between modernity and the harmony that characterizes rural African people.

### 4.1.1 CONSTITUENT SEGMENTS OF THE STORY

This story is recounted by a third person narrator, is anecdotal and marked by nostalgia and sadness about the tragic tale of Friedman and his granny Sejosenye who lived among the people of Ga-Safete-Molemo village. This narration includes a flashback to Friedman's birth and close bonding with Sejosenye who rears him. Below I set out the segments of the story in the order of their narration:

1. The story begins with a description of the village boys who were recognized as a special set, with Friedman presented as extraordinary within this set. These boys are described as unrestrained, and whose adventurousness included playing the role of providers by bringing home meat for the pot.

2. A flashback technique describes the birth, special rearing and growth of Friedman. Friedman's birth is the result of a casual affair of Sejosenye's youngest daughter (unidentified), who willingly hands over the child to her mother as she wishes to return to her job as a typist in the city.

3. Sejosenye is overjoyed at the prospect of rearing Friedman as all her children have grown up and left the rural nest. An extremely close bond develops between Friedman and his granny and they are deeply admired and viewed as extraordinary by the village people.

4. As a nightly ritual Sejosenye tells Friedman of the bravery of Robinson Crusoe whose masculine bravery he hopes to emulate.

5. As he grows up Friedman receives a bicycle from his mother, which he uses to run errands.

6. Sejosenye adjourns annually to her farm during planting season to ensure that she has sufficient supplies for the year ahead. During one of these annual activities, she runs out of provisions and arranges for Friedman to cycle to the village to buy them.

7. As he arrives in the village he notices a motor vehicle approaching, and decides to wilfully outrace it and rides into its path.

8. The vehicle was driven by a male civil servant, who was unlicensed. Friedman is killed as the speeding truck smashes the bicycle and drags him for another twenty yards before coming to a halt. Sejosenye is devastated, suffers a mental breakdown and dies two weeks later.

#### 4.1.2 A NARRATIVAL ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

In order to investigate the narratival structure, insights from Todorov's model regarding narratives are applied to investigate the equilibrium, disruption and the new equilibrium of this story. Thereafter I use the character functions from the Proppian model to examine how the narrative is moved forward.

The initial equilibrium in "The Wind and the Boy" consists of the harmonious existence of Sejosenye and Friedman as a family in a rural African village. A disruption is introduced when a government official, who was unlicensed, drives his motor vehicle at a

high speed in the village, collides with Friedman on his bicycle and kills him. Even though the story presents a tragic conclusion through the deaths of both Friedman and Sejosenye, there is an imagined re-equilibrium conveyed through the cynicism of the author at the end. This new equilibrium consists of the arrival of political transformation in the village, which is conveyed as being inevitable and ironically, as being discordant with the harmony that characterizes the rural village. Also implicit in such transformation is the sacrifice of many innocent villagers.

Drawing on insights relating to the Proppian model I identify certain character functions and apply them to the roles and functions of characters in "The Wind and the Boy". Friedman may be identified as the hero who provides comfort and support to his aging granny Sejosenye who is a member of the family. She lacks certain household provisions and sends Friedman out on a mission. He uses a bicycle, which is a gift from his mother, who may be identified as a helper and the bicycle a magical agent. Friedman may also be identified as the hero or victim who goes on a quest that he fails to achieve and the driver of the motor vehicle as the villain who kills him. The driver may be viewed as representative of corruption at governmental level and therefore the government may be regarded as the villain's helper. It may be noted that even though Friedman rides the bicycle recklessly and is killed, it is used to highlight the corrupt actions of the civil servant who fulfills the role of the villain, as it is he who kills Friedman due to his corrupt actions (not possessing a driver's license nor a vehicle that is roadworthy). Although the hero and a member of the family are killed, the hero is recognized as a victim in terms of the tension in the story between the innocence and harmony of the rural village people

reminiscent of pre-colonial times and modernity, which accompanies transformation.

This tension forms part of the postcolonial discourse, which underpins the text.

The following table provides an illustration of Proppian character functions, which may be identified in the story:

<b>PROPP</b>	<b>THE WIND AND THE BOY</b>
8 A member of the family lacks or desires something.	Sejosenye requires household provisions.
9 This lack is made known, the hero is given a command or request.	Friedman is asked to go to the village for provisions.
11 The hero leaves home.	Friedman is sent to fetch supplies.
12 The hero receives a magical agent or helper.	Friedman's mother sends him a bicycle.
14. The hero uses the magical agent.	Friedman uses the bicycle to fetch supplies.
17 The hero is branded.	Friedman is killed by the driver.
27 The hero is recognized.	Friedman's death is recognized as a tragic consequence of modernization and transformation.

TABLE 1: The Proppian Model used to show character functions in “The Wind and the Boy. (See Appendix 1 for full list).

#### 4.1.3 USING ELEMENTS OF NARRATIVE THEORY TO ANALYSE THE STORY

The structural outline of the narrative undertaken in the preceding section enables an investigation of the discourses that underpin this short story. As such I investigate the postcolonial discourse that is privileged in “The Wind and the Boy”, and thereafter I

examine those that are marginalized. (Since all quotes from the stories are taken from the anthology "Being Here", I will reference only the year and page number).

The characters of both Friedman and Sejoseny are constructed as special, extraordinary and different from the rest of the village people. The special characteristics attributed to their characters serve to position the reader as respectful and admiring of their lifestyle, simplicity and innocence, whilst condemning the actions and life of the newly empowered political elite. This character construction is linked to the thematic concern discussed earlier, which hints at the tension conveyed by the story, between the peaceful innocence of the rural poor and the effects of modernity that accompany political transformation, and the installation of the bureaucratic elite. This tension is connoted in the 'the new, rich, civil servant class' (1994, 46).

This story also conveys the suffering and disadvantage experienced by African communities, in particular the rural poor. They are presented as victims of a post apartheid society, whose innocence, sincerity and humility are contrasted to the interests of a modern regime (represented by the civil servant and his modernized vehicle), which is conveyed as having no genuine concern for the upliftment of the rural poor. I focus on the issue of modernization, which the story conveys through the death of Friedman. His death at the hands of a corrupt government official raises questions about the kind of transformation that will reach the rural poor, or whether any form of modern progress and development will actually benefit them, so they may experience a lifestyle free of disadvantage and exploitation. There is cynicism connoted by the closing lines of the

story in ‘this progress, development and a preoccupation with status and living standards first announced themselves to the village. It looked like an ugly story, with many decapitated bodies on the main road’ (1994, 47).

I examine the contrasts conveyed in this story between tradition and modernization, by focusing on the difference between rural and urban lifestyles:

<b>URBAN</b>	<b>RURAL</b>
car	bicycle
drivers	pedestrians
city folk	country folk
individualistic	communal
corrupt	innocent
wealthy	poor
elite	peasant
arrogant	humble
worldly	naïve
hypocritical	sincere

TABLE 2: Binary Oppositions representing rural and urban lifestyles in “The Wind and the Boy”.

The binary opposition constructs the rural community as peace-loving, innocent and perhaps naïve members of a group that remains sidelined, even though political

transformation has long since begun. They are conveyed as a group that will continue to suffer and be compromised in a new age that does not seek to genuinely include nor respect their interests nor concerns. They are presented as enjoying a sense of peace and togetherness synonymous with pre-colonial times. In this regard the story proposes a romantic nostalgia, inherent in Leavis's rejection of modernization and industrialization in Britain in the 1920's (Ball et al, 1992), whereby modernization is viewed as a disruptive force eroding the innocence of a group of people through political change.

In this light I move to consider the construction of the character of Friedman, the hero and Sejosenye, the member of his family by looking at the language and signification (semiotics) in terms of the following lines taken from the introduction of the story:

For years and years the combination of the boy Friedman and his grandmother Sejosenye made the people of Ga-Safete-Molemo ward smile, laugh and then cry (1994, 41).

They are introduced anecdotally as being exceptional people, worthy of admiration, sympathy and perhaps envy and as different from the village people who are conveyed as ordinary. They may therefore be considered as other. These lines also convey the close bond that boy and granny shared. Their specialness is signaled further as they are the only characters named, whilst the others are referred to generically as 'the village people or the village boys' (1994, 40).

Friedman is further constructed as different or blessed with some kind of enchantment in the opening lines of the story in, 'perhaps the enchanted wind that blew for him filled the whole world with magic' (1994, 40).



He is described as fulfilling an emotional need in his grandmother Sejosenye, and provided her with a sense of purpose in the experience at late motherhood. This is suggested in the phrase ‘the child is a gift to keep her heart warm and she took care of him with extravagant care and tenderness’ (1994, 41). The village people’s fond recollection of Friedman’s growth physically and personally is conveyed in describing him as ‘a tall, spindly-legged, graceful gazelle, with large, grave eyes. There was an odd musical lilt to his speech...he became the king of all kings in the area... his movements were neat, he could turn his hand to anything and made the best wire cars...the village people were hypnotized by him’ (1994, 41- 42). I examine the contrast between Friedman and the village boys that is signified in the language mentioned on pages 40 and 41:

<b>FRIEDMAN</b>	<b>OTHER BOYS</b>
<i>special</i>	<i>ordinary</i>
<i>responsible</i>	<i>petty thieves</i>
<i>creative</i>	<i>ordinary</i>
<i>intelligent</i>	<i>dull</i>
<i>good looking</i>	<i>nondescript</i>
<i>graceful</i>	<i>agile</i>
<i>admirably mischievous</i>	<i>deviantly mischievous</i>
<i>leader</i>	<i>follower</i>
<i>never punished</i>	<i>constantly punished</i>

TABLE 3: Binary Oppositions contrasting Friedman and the village boys.

The binary oppositions make obvious the process of construction of this character as different and special and offer a reading from which to admire him. Similarly, Sejosenye is constructed as special and different from the ordinary village women. The following grid identifies the contrast between Sejosenye and the ordinary village women, which is derived from the language (semiotics) of the story:

<b>SEJOSENYE</b>	<b>THE VILLAGE WOMEN</b>
bold	passive
proud	deferential
enterprising	timid
self-satisfying	envying
independent	dependent
hard-working	laidback

TABLE 4: Binary Oppositions contrasting Sejosenye and the village women.

The construction by the author of the two main characters as extraordinary contributes to the concept of tragedy used in the new equilibrium at the conclusion of the story which presents the loss of two special lives. This discourse is privileged in the story as it constructs Friedman and Sejosenje as victims of a modern regime that does not consider their happiness and satisfaction. This discourse can be understood as postcolonial and is the preferred discourse as it is structured to disallow seeing Friedman as irresponsible and perhaps primitive in his desire to challenge a motor vehicle with a bicycle.

#### 4.1.4 PROBING THE GAPS, SILENCES AND ABSENCES IN THE STORY

Literacy practice that is informed by a Critical Literacy approach to the teaching of texts, maintains that the text is not perfectly complete or unified. Critical theories of literacy argue that for reading to function more holistically it is important to acknowledge the existence of gaps in the dominant reading of texts. It is therefore necessary to challenge the 'complete authority' (Peim, 1993), of the text at points where hidden implications promoted by the gaps and silences, are passively naturalized by the dominant discourses of the text.

Ready to hand meanings that gloss over textual gaps and silences need to be interrogated in literacy practice by active, critical readers who bring to the readings personal interpretations and self-conscious reading practices (Peim, 1993, 81).

In this regard I refer to the Commercial Guide, which provides learners with ready to hand responses that are designed to assist with preparation for examinations, thereby fostering a naïve understanding of the text and lacking in critical engagement with texts.

"The Wind and the Boy" can also be examined in terms of providing alternative understandings of the text. In this regard different discourses that are not privileged in the text, such as gender and patriarchy may be engaged with. An examination of these discourses allow for different points of entry into the narrative, and attempt to address gaps, silences and absences in the text.

The story contains a gendered representation of the character of Friedman as a special boy child who is a source of joy and comfort to his grandmother. The language used to

position Friedman as special may be observed in clued adjectives like, 'tall, graceful', 'a musical lilt to speech when he teased', 'king of kings of all boys in his area', 'he made the best wire cars', 'his mannerisms were neat, compact and decisive', 'he was a boy who knew his mind' (1994, 41). I focus on the discourse on gender by considering the following issues arising from the narrative. This is a particular discourse that proposes a patriarchal or gendered discourse and can be identified by reversing gender roles

The male character of Friedman may be changed to represent a female character called Freda. In this regard I question the following:

- Would Freda be constructed as special as Friedman?
- Would her mischief and disobedience be seen as cute and beyond admonition?
- Would it have made her so adorable in the eyes of the women of the village as was with Friedman?
- Would the folktales Sejosenje told Friedman about the bravery of Robinson Crusoe be told to her?
- Would she have been taught household chores, how to tote water, learn submissive obedience and to remember her responsibilities in taking care of the home?
- Would she have been given a bicycle?

By raising questions on gender a different reader position is constructed and an alternative interpretation is produced. When the gender of the boy child is changed, a new range of attitudes and feelings in the reader are engaged with. For example, she would

not have been viewed by the villagers as a source of support, both physical and moral, to her grandmother because she would not have enjoyed the privileges accorded to the boys of the village. The expectations of her could have been restricted to eventual motherhood and caregiver, and to continue to live in the same way the other women, including Sejosenyé, did.

Similarly, an examination of the discourse on patriarchy provides a different entry point into the narrative. In this regard I focus on the visible absence of men in the story. The migrant labour system is very much a part of the lifestyle of rural African people, and whilst the story focuses on Friedman's death, what becomes naturalised is the acceptance of such a lifestyle for women and children. This lifestyle is addressed in the story in terms of poverty and disadvantage, but the discourse on patriarchy is marginalized in its reading.

That the men go out to seek jobs outside the rural village, which is presented as being correct in order for families to survive, is an inherent aspect of patriarchal power relations and is not questioned in this account. The women and children are left behind to eke out an existence from the land. In this regard Friedman is prepared through the folktales, which convey men as the hunters and gatherers, to live accordingly.

Interrogating the discourses in the text helps develop a broader understanding of writing strategies employed by the writer in his/her presentation of reality in the text. For example, if the bicycle is removed from the story:

- Would this not make Friedman's death all the more unacceptable, because in this reading the bicycle is seen as an indulgence even though it serves a practical purpose?
- Would blame for his death not rest squarely on the corrupt civil servant, as this reading would take away the element of recklessness that characterizes Friedman?

Linked to the interrogation of the different discourses in the text, is the question of pleasure, which forms an important part of reading or viewing. Enjoyable work on texts in classrooms comes from reflection and analysis, from seeing more in the text, things not noticed on first reading, seeing different possibilities that the sharing of different readings in the class builds up (Misson, 1996).

Much pleasure may be gained in challenging character constructions and recognising reader positioning attempted through the different discourses at work in the text.

In "The Wind and the Boy", the binary oppositions are used to position the ideal reader into condemning the actions of the government official who kills Friedman, and the gross injustice suffered by Sejosenyé, which leads to her death. This also serves to incite anger at the driver whilst neglecting to examine Friedman's wilful recklessness. The privileged status of Sejosenyé and Friedman in this village is a technique used to position the reader into wanting to lobby against incompetence and corruption especially at government level, in keeping with the postcolonial discourse underpinning the story.

The fact that Friedman's character at the time of his death was transformed into a responsible teenager assisting his old granny in their survival, positions the reader as the sympathetic subject, overlooking his desire to be willfully negligent and daring. His daringness is part of his masculine construction in the story. Further entry points may be used to interrogate the discourses in the text. For example, the binaries contrasting Friedman and Sejosenyé may be used to examine particular concerns from others' points of view. In this regard there might be greater empathy with the other boys or women who seem destined to a meagre existence, enjoying nothing special in their lives. If the character of Friedman was not killed, and lived to support Sejosenyé, would the focus not become rural poverty, disadvantage and marginalisation of the rural poor from the benefits of political transformation? If Friedman had grown to manhood would he not have left the rural nest as a migrant labourer like the rest of the men in the village?

#### 4.1.5 CONCLUSION

In this story I have examined how, through the critical analysis of the different discourses in the text, different understandings of the story may be produced. In this regard I have explored how elements of narrative theory are employed in the story in order to convey the story in a particular way. I undertake a critical analysis of the following story to show how different understandings of characters may be engaged with, by exploring character functions and different discourses that are conveyed by the story.

## 4.2 THE MUSIC OF THE VIOLIN

In analyzing “The Music of the Violin”, I present the constituent segments of the short story to convey the narrative structure the story employs. This breakdown is used to facilitate a narrational analysis, drawing on insights from Todorov and Propp. The narrational structure will be examined in relation to the discourses it inscribes such as colonialism, class and patriarchy. Again these discourses conveyed by the story will be analysed in terms of binary oppositions, semiotics and representation.

### 4.2.1 CONSTITUENT SEGMENTS OF THE STORY

This story like the previous one analysed is underpinned by a postcolonial discourse and also incorporates in its narrational structure a meta-narrative, which embodies a criticism of colonialism and a type of hostility towards Eurocentricism

The constituent segments of the story are listed below and will be used to facilitate an analysis of the short story.

1. Vukani is doing his homework whilst his parents are chatting with friends, Dr. and Mrs. Beatrice Zwane in the next room.

2. He finds difficulty concentrating on his homework and contemplates escape to avoid having to play the violin for guests as part of his parents’ desire to showcase their children as exposed to better.



3. Vukani recalls the painful experiences he suffered at the hands of fellow classmates and particularly with the township boys who traumatize, and physically and verbally attack him about his attempt at being 'different' because he plays the violin.

4. He experiences dread when his mother brings the guests to his room, contemplates the possibility of refusing to play and envies the uncomplicated lifestyle experienced by his friend Doksi.

5. He recalls how his classmates hid the violin from him and later placed it on his doorstep. His mother found it and bitterly chastised him.

6. Teboho, his sister, accidentally breaks Dorcas's fine china. Dorcas shouts and hurls insults at Teboho.

7. Teboho adds to these insults by accusing Dorcas of being more obsessed with material possessions rather than her children's happiness.  
Vukani takes his lead from Teboho and asks not to play the violin anymore. Dorcas is incensed and physically chastises him.

8. Vukani is rescued by Teboho who condemns her mother's behavior again.  
Vukani's father's intervention brings the argument to an end.

#### 4.2.2 USING ELEMENTS OF NARRATIVE THEORY TO ANALYSE THE STORY

It is possible to apply Todorov's model of narrational equilibrium, disequilibrium and then a new equilibrium to "The Music of the Violin". The initial equilibrium consists of the time in Vukani's life prior to his taking violin lessons. The disruption is constituted by the insistence that he learn to play the violin. (It results in the mocking he endures at the hands of the gang of boys and his peers, as well as being forced to play against his will). The final equilibrium is established when he stands up to his mother, admits his dislike for violin playing and refuses to play the instrument anymore. Importantly, even though there is plenitude or re-equilibrium at the end, this is not identical to the initial equilibrium; the characters have undergone change.

While this occurs as the narrative structuring of this part of the short story narrative, it can be extended to a larger sense of a meta-narrative, mentioned earlier, that of colonialism. The meta-narrative presumes a time of harmony that pre-dates colonisation by Europeans, the disruption is constituted by colonialism, and the re-equilibrium is a rejection of things western. This retrospective nostalgia is however, an ambivalent and impossible trajectory.

Moving from Todorov's model for narrational analysis, I now consider insights from the Proppian model in order to identify the characters functions and how they may move the narrative in a particular direction. By using Propp's character functions, it is possible to

identify characters in “The Music of the Violin” as fulfilling some of these functions or roles.

In the narrative of this story, Vukani may be identified as the hero who has a mission to lead an ‘authentic’ and appropriate life as an African and not play the violin. Violin-playing is imposed on Vukani by his mother Dorcas who fulfils the role of villain as she does this at the expense of his happiness. His sister Teboho may be identified as the helper, who assists Vukani when he stands up to his mother. With the assistance of Teboho, Vukani is able to reject violin-playing and Dorcas, the villain, is defeated.

The following table provides an illustration of the narrative of the short story, using character functions derived from the Proppian model:

<b>PROPP</b>	<b>THE MUSIC OF THE VIOLIN</b>
9 The hero is given a request or command and he goes or is sent on a quest.	Vukani’s mission is to lead a good life, but is forced to play the violin.
12 The hero is tested, attacked or interrogated.	Vukani is verbally and physically abused by the gang, etc.
15 The hero is transferred to the general location of his quest or mission.	Vukani is asked to play for the guests.
16 The hero and the villain join in direct combat.	Vukani stands up to Dorcas and refuses to play the violin.
17 The hero is branded.	Vukani is insulted and slapped by Dorcas.

18 The villain is defeated.	Dorcas is astounded and horrified.
19 The initial lack is set right.	Vukani relinquishes violin-playing.
27 The hero is recognized.	Vukani feels liberated and is happy.
30 The villain is punished.	Dorcas is ordered to stop the abuse.

TABLE 5: The Proppian Model, used to analyse “The Music of the Violin”.

#### 4.2.3 USING INSIGHTS FROM NARRATIVE THEORY TO ANALYSE CHARACTER FUNCTIONS IN THE STORY

The construction of the character of Dorcas presents her as a vehicle or narrational device, which conveys the thematic tension in the story. This tension conveys the contrast between loyalty to traditional African lifestyle and the trappings of a western or white middle class lifestyle. I examine her character construction in terms of her ‘white’, high culture, middle class aspirations, her attitude to township life and its people, and her perception of her own ‘Africaness’ and that of her family’s. I start with the following extract in order to comment on Dorcas’s character:

There is not a single boy in the whole of Soweto- including here in Dube – who has a room like yours. This room is as good as any white boy’s. Isn’t it exactly like Ronnie Simpson’s? You yourself, you ungrateful boy, have seen that room when we visited the Simpson’s in Parktown North. Kaffir children! That’s what. Always ungrateful! (1994, 92).

The character of Dorcas is constructed as the villain of the story. She is presented as being an unreasonable, ambitious mother, who aspires to all the trappings of a western

(white) lifestyle and its high culture, rather than African culture. Her persistence at ensuring that her children are different from other ordinary working class children in an African township provides a constant source of pain in Vukani's life. This is reinforced by 'a violin you have and a violin you will play' (1994, 99). Teboho is also sternly cautioned about the expensive china that must be handled with care. Dorcas's aspirations towards a middle-class lifestyle is presented as being obtained at the expense of her children's right to personal choice and happiness. She speaks of black people as 'kaffir' who are crass and therefore 'other'. This extract also constructs her as being ashamed of a traditional, African, working class lifestyle, but in awe of westernisation. In this regard she is conveyed as disloyal to her African culture and identity. She is constructed as being disparaging of working class African people of the township, whom she considers vulgar and unable to rise above their working class condition. Her need to emulate a white middle class lifestyle is conveyed in 'relatives can be real nuisance...whites saw this problem a long time ago. That's why they have very little time for relatives. Nuclear family! That's what matters' (1994, 104).

She further attempts to ensure that her family leads a western, modern lifestyle that is different from ordinary working class Africans by imposing her will on the children in 'we are not going to be humiliated by such a little flea. Play, cheeky brute!' (1994, 105). This highly negative construction of the character of Dorcas also embodies a thematic tension in the story that exists between westernisation and post-colonialism. This is conveyed through the post-colonial discourse that is privileged in this story.

The construction of Vukani’s family is contrasted to Doksi’s family who are presented as humble, pleasant working class people with a strong sense of family. These contrasts are implied in the language used to describe each family who may be considered to be binarily opposed. I present the following contrast between the two families:

<b>DOKSI’S FAMILY</b>	<b>VUKANI’S FAMILY</b>
working class	middle class
humble	proud
unambitious	ambitious
simple	competitive
extended family	nuclear family

TABLE 6: Binary Oppositions showing the contrasts between Doksi’s and Vukani’s families.

This analysis privileges the construction of Doksi’s parents in terms of their humility and quiet acceptance of a working class lifestyle and ‘Africaness’ as opposed to Vukani’s parents, particularly Dorcas, who have imbibed a western lifestyle. Doksi is presented as an ordinary working class boy with working class ideals who wishes to become a barber when he grows up and appears content with simple pastimes such as sweeping and burning hair. Vukani is conveyed as the victim of mockery at the hands of his mother, his peers and the township boys. In this regard the story privileges the working class over the middle class, within a post-colonial approach that informs this text.

If the preferred discourse is privileged it also depends on a particular discursive construction in relation to class and provides an additional point of investigation within this analysis. The tension between working class and middle class lifestyles is also created through Vukani and his family on the one hand and the gang of boys on the other. Vukani is viewed as being 'different' by his peers and the gang of boys because of his access to a better lifestyle, which includes violin-playing. This is conveyed by the following extract:

Hey music man! Don't you know your name? Everyday we greet you nice-nice and you don't answer. Because you think you are being greeted by shit? (1994, 97).

Tough working class masculinities are attributed to the gang who are conveyed as 'the kings of the township' (1994, 96), which due to circumstances regarding poverty, hardship and related socio-economic ills, provides a fertile site for social and moral decadence in 'What are you rogues doing to this poor boy? ...dogs of the street...you rogues just let decent people be' (1994, 97). The gang is also conveyed as consciously attempting to deride Vukani for having access to a cultural resource and possible socio-economic empowerment that they lack. In this regard Vukani is constructed as being a victim of an elitist lifestyle for which his mother is responsible. The following analysis examines the contrasts implied in the story between the working class gang of boys and Vukani:

<b>GANG (Working Class)</b>	<b>VUKANI (Middle Class)</b>
aggressive	passive
threatening	respectful
violent	peaceful
lion (p.104)	impala (p.104)
vulgar	refined
obscene	polite
deviant	disciplined
underprivileged	privileged

TABLE 7: Binary Oppositions contrasting Vukani with the township gang.

The difference in lifestyle and character between Vukani and the gang conveyed in this analysis points to the polarities between them in terms of belonging to different classes, and offers a point to enter this analysis. The discourse based on class constructs Vukani as the innocent victim of circumstances beyond his control, who becomes vulnerable to the torment inflicted on him by the gang due to Dorcas's need to subscribe to things western. The gang is conveyed as being products of a working class environment characteristic of an African township like Soweto. They are presented as ruthless and menacing towards Vukani, who suffers because of his middle class upbringing. In this regard the story privileges the anti-colonial discourse as a middle-class lifestyle and is presented as providing pain in Vukani's life and as being un-African.



I examine the discourse on patriarchy as an additional point of investigation into the story. Gendered roles are conveyed through the presentation of male and female characters in this story. Certain gendered assumptions are conveyed when contrasting male and female character constructions. For example, Dorcas is conveyed as a domineering mother, ambitious wife and as caregiver. What is naturalised here is a position of Dorcas as nurturer (even as a stringent one). The well being of her children, both morally and physically, appears to fall within her domain as mother. It is Dorcas who is responsible for providing refreshments, having trained her daughter to handle the chore, whilst her husband reads the paper 'putting down *The Daily Mail* and picking up *The Star*' (1994, 104), and discusses matters of current political and social interest with Dr. Zwane. The men are presented as enjoying positions of dominance within the home as a private domain. Furthermore it is Dorcas, as proud mother, who escorts the guests to Vukani's bedroom, and offers his violin playing as a showpiece for the guests, as proud mother. Although this behavior may be regarded as being part of her character type, it also slots in with tasks traditionally associated with women and mother. The women are relegated to subordinate positions in the social structure depicted in the story. The men are the drinkers of the tea, while the women are the makers of the tea (Motheram, 1995).

The women are also conveyed through culturally defined roles, for example, Dorcas is a nurse, a profession traditionally associated with women. Teboho is asked to help with domestic chores like helping with making and serving the tea. The story contextualises women as mothers and nurturers in, '“we women cook for you”...retorted his wife' (1994, 89).

The men in contrast are presented as engaging in more ‘serious pursuits’, like reading the paper, discussing their jobs and current affairs and are seated in the lounge as ones who assume more privileged roles of authority in the social circle presented in the story. It is also Vukani’s father who issues the final instruction when the domestic quarrel reaches an abusive climax in, ‘Dorcas! That’s enough now!’ (1994, 106).

The following table presents the contrasts between male and female character constructions in the story:

<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>
dominant	subordinate
Assertive	passive
Worldly	domesticated
providing	nurturing

TABLE 8: Binary Oppositions contrasting men and women in “The Music of the Violin”.

#### 4.2.4 EXPLORING GAPS AND SILENCES IN THE STORY

Exploring the gaps and silences in this story provides different understandings of characters therefore producing different constructions of meanings. The discourse based on class that underpins the short story may be explored in terms of Dorcas aspiring towards a better quality of life for her children, given the poor socio-economic conditions

that characterize an African township lifestyle, and the constraints placed on upward mobility for African people within an apartheid governed society.

In this regard Dorcas may be viewed as a strong, caring yet strict mother who wants the best for her children, thereby fulfilling a parental need to provide security and comfort for her children. She may also be viewed as being pragmatic, in wanting her children to strive for better opportunities within an oppressive political regime that stifles growth and progression of African people. Dorcas may be viewed as being strong and determined to struggle against injustices, both political and social, through personal success and achievement.

The discourse based on class may also be explored in terms of the gang of boys. The members of the gang are still viewed as victims of apartheid and poverty, who cannot be gainfully occupied due to the injustices they suffer under a regime based on racial inequality. This understanding may be disrupted to argue that while African township life provides a fertile site for social and moral decadence, the boys may also be plain lazy and un-ambitious and choose to act in a vile manner. They derive strength from numbers and waywardness, and therefore choose to sadistically taunt Vukani, because they realize their apparent 'superiority' instils fear in him. This is conveyed in, 'he [Bhuka] tightened his grip around Vukani's tie pulling him across the street towards their headquarters' (1994, 97). They are constructed as sexually aggressive boys looking for a weaker target to traumatize in, 'we would like to fuck your sister' (1994, 84).

A semiotic analysis of the title may also be undertaken in order to provide different understandings of the disruption in Vukani's life, that is taking violin lessons against his will. For instance, the violin is associated with the music of different cultures. It is used in western culture in the classical music genre and is sometimes used in avant garde country and western or pop genre, such as the music of pop and classical musician Vanessa Mae. It is used in Indian classical music and is known as the 'sarangi',<sup>23</sup> which is used to accompany devotional singing, and is used as part of light, classical Indian music. The violin is also used in the African jazz genre.

Such an exploration of the title of the story conveys many appreciations of the violin, rather than limiting it to an instrument enjoyed by the elite of western society, and in the context of this narrative may be viewed as an instrument that could help restore plenitude in the hero's life. The violin need not be rejected but used differently, with joy and creativity. In this regard Dorcas may be viewed as the helper rather than the villain as she is in touch with evolving cultural trends and therefore wishes to expose her children to different cultural opportunities.

#### 4.2.5 CONCLUSION

I have examined this story using insights from narrative theory, which show how characters are constructed in order to convey particular meanings within the text. These insights also provide a means of examining the different discourses in the text, thereby

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<sup>23</sup> A Hindi word for violin.

enabling a more critical engagement with the text. In the following story I focus on the first-person narration in which I examine the role of the narrator and her presentation of events in Keteng.

### 4.3 BRUNS

In analyzing the short story “Bruns”, I again present a Proppian narratival analysis of the story to convey the narrative structuring it employs. Second, I comment on the role of the narrator as the story is presented from her point of view. In this regard the analysis of this story is different from the other two as it explores the role of the narrator and her version of events presented in the story. Thereafter I undertake a critical analysis of the story in which I examine binary oppositions to show which discourses are privileged and which are marginalised.

#### 4.3.1 CONSTITUENT SEGMENTS OF THE STORY

This story does not consist of sequential segments, but information is offered through the cynical eye and pen of a female narrator, who assumedly does this from her room at the convent where she surveys and records events. She introduces the following context:

1. The narrator, (never identified), an anthropologist based in Keteng, whose project has collapsed, presents an account of the socio-political situation in this town.

2. Keteng is controlled economically by seven Boer families. They assert what amounts to feudal control of the town and over the Bakorwa tribe, as they are wealthy and corrupt. Bruns, a Dutch Christian missionary, does humanitarian work in Keteng in order to help the poor.

3. The Bakorwa chiefs who are bribed by the Boers administer Keteng and a common practice in asserting control of the Bakorwa is to publicly beat any member of the tribe who transgresses the law.

4. Bruns, a pacifist, objects to this practice and wishes to put an end to it by addressing the center of power Deon Du Toit, and by insisting that the Boers have a moral obligation to the Bakorwa to end such abuse.

5. Bruns visits the Du Toit residence twice, but Du Toit is not there, and is received by Marike, Du Toit's wife, who has apparent romantic intentions towards Bruns.

6. On hearing of these visits Du Toit feels threatened and is consequently incensed. His desire to question and warn Bruns about visiting his residence in his absence does not materialise.

7. Du Toit arranges to have Bruns beaten up one night by one of the local Bakorwa men.

8. Bruns, being a pacifist, retaliates by drowning himself in Du Toit's water trough.

9. This act of self-immolation results in the arrest of Du Toit and forces a process of socio-political transformation in Keteng.

#### 4.3.2 A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE STORY:

Applying insights from the Proppian model is useful in revealing this narrative structure. The notion of the Proppian hero having a quest is evident in the character of Bruns, who seeks to end the violent, public beatings or punishment of the Bakorwa people who are charged with any transgression of the law. He attempts to achieve his quest by reasoning with Du Toit who enjoys economic power and control in Keteng to thus intervene in this practice and help put an end to it.

A narrational analysis of this story conveys dual villains who are firstly, the Boer men represented by Du Toit and secondly, the Bakorwa chiefs who play according to the Boers' rules. Du Toit fulfils the role of the primary villain. He is presented as threatened by Bruns's physique and lifeworld. He resents the impact this has on his wife Marike and therefore he arranges to harm Bruns. The Bakorwa chiefs fulfill the role of the secondary

villain or the villain's helper in this story, as it is they who mete out public beatings to any Bakorwa person who is regarded as recalcitrant. I examine the role of Du Toit as it is he who arranges to have Bruns killed.

Du Toit wishes to get possession of Bruns by arranging to have him beaten. A difficult task is set for the hero who accomplishes it through the act of self-immolation. In this regard the recognition of the hero is slightly altered in that Bruns does not live to enjoy his mission being accomplished in exposing the villain, Du Toit. However, he still attains recognition in that transformation in Keteng is made possible through his death. Therefore the hero's mission is accomplished posthumously in this story.

The Proppian narrative and character functions are useful in terms of making explicit how the narrative is moved and the spheres of action the characters inhabit. The following table provides an illustration of how the narrative is structured, using some of the narrative functions from the Proppian Model:

<b>PROPP</b>	<b>BRUNS</b>
8 The villain harms a member of the family.	Du Toit and other Boers beat up their wives and the Bakorwa Chiefs administer public beatings.
9 This misfortune is made known, the hero is given a request or command and he goes on a mission.	Bruns witnesses the public beatings and his own conscience leads him to challenge it.
10 The hero plans action against the villain.	Bruns decides to address Du Toit in order to



	end the violent beatings.
12 The hero is attacked.	Bruns is attacked and severely beaten by one of the Bakorrwa men as arranged by Du Toit.
17 The hero is branded.	Bruns is beaten up badly.
25 A difficult task is set for the hero.	Bruns chooses self-immolation as retaliation and an ironic twist is the death of the hero in achieving the quest.
26 The task is accomplished.	Du Toit is arrested as socio-political transformation in Keteng begins.

TABLE 9: Proppian Model used to analyse the Narrative Structure in “Bruns”.

It is also possible to apply insights from Todorov’s model to this short story in order to analyse the narrative structure. The initial equilibrium is an imagined construction, which consists of fair practice in Keteng before colonization. The disruption, which is caused by the establishment of a corrupt regime, includes feudalism, colonialism, racism and sexism. The new equilibrium occurs when Du Toit is arrested for the death of Bruns, and political transformation is made possible in Keteng.

#### 4.3.3 FIRST PERSON NARRATION IN “BRUNS”

This story differs from the other two analysed thus far, in employing a first person narrator who presents her version of events in Keteng. This narrational device contrasts

with the use of the third person narration and its effects of omniscience. It works as a deliberate vehicle of distanciation, ensuring distance between the author and the narrator of the story on one hand, and between the reader and the narrator on the other.

The narrator's sense of removal and superiority are established early in the introduction. This is connoted through her reference to the character of Bruns as 'poor Bruns' (1994, 75), and this sentiment is repeated later (1994, 77, 84), and then reinforced in her sentiment later in 'Bruns was so naïve' (1994, 79). This reference is deliberately ironic as its intention is not only to construct Bruns as the object of empathy, but to construct the Boer and Bakorwa men as 'other'. Her interpretation of events is fused with her disgust with the Boers, whom she views as feudal lords in views such as 'they are Boers underneath forever, really unregenerate' (1994, 75), who grossly exploit and enslave the Bakorwa people as 'they still pay their farm labour in sugar and salt and permission to crawl under their cows and suck fresh milk' (1994, 76). She also views them as physically revolting in 'a funny thing about Boer men is ...they wear their belt underneath their paunches...they run into fat' (1994, 78).

The construction of the Boer men provides the backdrop to view the character and actions of Deon Du Toit, and provides a contrast to her description of Bruns who,

was very beautiful. I don't know how else to put it. He was very Aryan, with those pale blue eyes that are apparently so de rigeur for male movie stars these days. He has a wonderful physique (1994, 78).

Inasmuch as the narrator attempts to criticise issues of race within a feudal framework in Keteng, she interestingly uses a European hero in this story. She further differentiates

between the Boer men and Bruns who is of Dutch origin by stating that ‘the Boers are a humiliation to the Dutch, like they are their ids set free in the world’ (1994, 79).

These opposing character constructions of the Boer men and Bruns can be represented as binarily opposed. The qualities are implied in the text and listed hereunder, using two columns entitled ‘Bruns’ and the ‘Boer Men’ in the following table:

<b>BRUNS</b>	<b>BOER MEN</b>
Civilized	barbaric
Peaceful	aggressive
conscientious objector	warmongers
Christian missionary	exploiting
serving the poor	self-serving
good physique	physical attributes distorted
disciplined vegetarian	consumers of huge amounts of red meat
celibate	lecherous
pacifist	violent

TABLE 10: Binary Oppositions contrasting Bruns and the Boer Men.

This analysis reveals the privileging of the character of Bruns in contrast to the Boer men who are presented as feudal lords. I attempt to explore the discourses based on feudalism and patriarchy in order to investigate further the role of the narrator. I consider this story

to be polysemic, and one that in fact insists that the reader occupy more than one reading space, rather than acquiescing to the version of events presented in this story by a disgruntled woman.

The narrator's alienation and distance is evident in her disdainful attitude towards the Boer women and she presents them as decadent wives, engaging in empty pastimes like reading English tabloids, chain-smoking, consuming alcohol and flirting with men while enjoying the material comfort of being feudal wives. They are constructed as a social group with common characteristics. Marike is the only Boer wife who is named and her character commented on, firstly because her character becomes representative of the other Boer wives, and secondly in terms of the Proppian model she is conveyed as helping the villain.

The Boer men are constructed as feudal, greedy, aggressive and patriarchal. This enables one to identify the discursive positioning of the narrator as being opposed to the feudal Boer men. Through her cynicism she distances herself from the Christian missionary Bruns, and as narrator she also establishes herself as being aloof towards the characters and events of Keteng.

The narrator is hostile and presents a lack of empathy in her presentation of the Boer wives and fails to recognize them as victims of a patriarchal and feudal society. Whilst their abuse is highlighted as matter of concern, it is used as a point of condemnation and criticism of the Boer men. This interpretation may also be extended to the construction of

the Bakorwa women whose severe abuse in a traditional, patriarchal society is mentioned as a criticism of a traditional, African hierarchical society. When casually referring to the large-scale violence that characterizes the Bakorwa men, the narrator defends her viewpoint in 'this is not something you can afford to be sensitive about if you are going to work here for any length of time' (1994, 80). The narrator herself is constituted by emphasized femininity.

The narrator's references to Marike are always cast in a derogatory light, such as 'Du Toit's slutty wife, she has skin like a store dummy's, she is somewhere between twenty-five and forty but you can't tell where' (1994, 81). Even when the narrator attempts to compliment her in passing in, 'she has high cheekbones, you can't help envying, and those long eyes, rather Eurasian looking' (1984, 81), she qualifies these with demeaning remarks such as 'she wears her hair like a fool though' (1994, 81). That Boer wives are victims of patriarchal power relations, relegated to lesser roles in their social and family circles is not factored into the narrator's presentation of gender abuse in Keteng.

In contrast, the male characters, both Boer and Bakorwa, are presented in positions of authority. 'The Boers own everything in Keteng, including the chief' (1994, 75). The Boer men by virtue of their wealth, control the place and the Bakorwa chiefs enjoy power and privilege through corrupt means. This arrangement of power positions men as figures of authority and are therefore in control within a feudal framework that exists in Keteng. It is the Boer men that are constructed as hunters and providers in contrast to their wives who are steeped in material comfort, lethargy and decadence as described above.

The Bakorwa women are similarly presented in the position of gender inferiority, but through a different construction. They occupy roles as housemaids and are ‘the receivers of beatings in a shame culture’ (1994, 79). Whilst the narrator implies a condemnation of the violent abuse of women, what remains naturalised is the position of authority and the wielding of power by men. Interestingly the Bakorwa men, who violently abuse the Bakorwa women, are subservient to the Boer men. This arrangement of power is rooted in relations between the coloniser and the colonised.

Tables presenting an analysis of the Bakorwa men and Bakorwa women, and the Boer men and Boer women are presented below to demonstrate binary oppositions that underpin the discourses that are privileged. I first examine the contrast between the Boer men and women, as the Boers enjoy a privileged economic status compared to the Bakorwa men, and thereafter the Bakorwa men and women.

<b>(WHITE) BOER MEN</b>	<b>BOER WOMEN</b>
aggressive	passive
independent	dependent
authoritative	subordinate
Outdoor	indoors
Beaters	beaten
Fat	slim
landowners	housewives
Licentious	sexually repressed

The racial discourse may also be viewed within a postcolonial context. Ironically the installation of a Black government responsible for control of Keteng still allows poverty, corruption, abuse and exploitation to continue. In this regard political control in Keteng is reflective of colonial power relations, whereby the Boers assume that 'they can behave outside the law' (1994, 85).

The narrator appears satisfied that the death of Bruns coerces the process of transformation in Keteng and which leads to the ruination of the Boers. However questions still remain in the mind of the reader regarding the type of transformation intended for Keteng which consists of an increase in the number of police, the posting of a magistrate and the setting up of a regency in Keteng as these are symbols of control that do not necessarily imply justice for people who are socially, politically and economically exploited and deprived.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the short stories in this chapter has drawn on poststructuralist insights that include elements of narrative theory, an analysis of semiotics, a critical discourse analysis and representation. In doing so this analysis proposes a different approach to the study of texts, one that is more critical and holistic as opposed to the 'content-thematic' approach to literacy practice proposed by the Commercial Guide mentioned in chapter two.

Further the critical analysis undertaken in this chapter provides an alternative approach to textual practice – one that examines the structure of the narrative using elements of

narrative theory and including an investigation of binary opposites in order to show how, in its construction, the narrative privileges certain discourses and therefore favours a particular ideology.

By drawing on Critical Literacy as the broad framework that informs this analysis, this chapter has attempted to offer an alternative and I argue more relevant approach to classroom practice, by examining the constructedness of texts and how texts favour particular ways of viewing the world through the discourses they employ. This chapter has used critical tools to provide an engagement with the stories that is poststructuralist, by locating the text within its socio-cultural and historical context so as to explore the relations of power that are inherent in the stories. In this regard it contrasts with the Cultural Heritage and content-thematic approaches inscribed by the current classroom practice, which neglect to deal with issues of power that are conveyed by the discourses that underpin these stories and sets out to provide both educators and learners with a more critical approach to textual practice. This analysis is by no means exhaustive and argues for educators in particular to willingly embrace the need to work within a paradigm that provides a forum for the implementation of a critical pedagogy that enables learners to undertake a critical engagement of texts.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to respond to the questions and concerns that have arisen in the mind of the researcher with regard to the limitations associated with the current literacy practice, with particular reference to the teaching of English Primary Language at former House of Delegates' schools in KwaZulu-Natal. These limitations are the result of, first, the teaching paradigm that informs the current classroom practice, which is largely Cultural Heritage. This approach explored in Chapters One and Two is text-based and assumes that texts are 'innocent purveyors of meanings and messages' (Prinsloo, 1998, 135). As such this approach has neglected to deal with relations of power that are conveyed through the discourses that underwrite texts, and which are explored within a poststructuralist approach to textual practice. A critical investigation of the dominant discourses conveyed through the language employed in texts which privilege particular interests and marginalise others, are either rare or non-existent in this approach.

Second, the hegemonic position enjoyed by the Senior Certificate Examination in KwaZulu-Natal and its backwash effect constrains classroom practice to the unraveling of meanings and messages in the text mainly by the educator. This practice recruits both the educator and learner subjects in a type of master-student type of apprenticeship in the teaching of texts, whereby learners are eventually prepared to sit for this examination. In this regard a relatively new phenomenon, which is the use of the Commercial Guide as teaching aid, is incorporated in classroom practice. The semiotic domain inscribed by the

Commercial Guide recruits as its design grammar the 'content-thematic' approach to the teaching of prescribed texts, and aims to assist both educators and learners with preparation for the examination. In assuming a version of the Cultural Heritage approach it presents a naïve analysis of the text by commenting on themes, character and the plot of the text. In this way it fulfills its aim of providing learners with easily accessible 'responses' to examination questions within a content-thematic framework whilst functioning as part of a market driven initiative.

The poststructuralist approach that informs the analysis of three short stories in this study, allows the possibility for learners to become critically involved with texts, opening them up for interrogation in terms of the discourses they privilege, thereby engaging in an analysis of particular relations of power and the ideological purposes that texts serve. In this regard this analysis has examined how characters, through their functions in texts construct particular subject positions for the reader or interpellate the reader in a particular way. It has located the text within its socio-cultural context and recognizes that both texts and interpretations of them are culturally bound.

This analysis contrasts with the analysis of the three stories provided by the commercial guide, which is limited to an understanding of texts as having fixed meanings. The guide presents an unraveling of the plot of the text in terms of themes and character synopses and disallows the investigation of texts in terms of the relations of power that are conveyed through the discourses by texts. The constraints imposed by both a dependency

on commercial guides and by the larger Cultural Heritage framework, include a lack of engaging learners in a critical analysis of texts. As McLaren notes that,

this dominant curriculum separates knowledge from the issue of power and treats it in an unabashedly technical manner, knowledge is seen in overwhelmingly instrumental terms as something to be mastered (1987, 180).

That knowledge is a socio-cultural construction linked to particular interests of power and social relations remains unconsidered in the current classroom practice. Therefore the approach to textual practice advocated by this research contrasts strongly with the current literacy practice in that it is poststructuralist. This approach argues for a Critical Literacy practice that relates teaching activities with regard to written, spoken and visual texts, with the aim of helping,

learners to see language not as a transparent medium, but as implicated in values and power relations, as seeking to exploit or impose on the reader, and to make language and literacy practices fairer and more democratic (Maclean and Green, 1997, 13).

By extension, poststructuralism calls for an investigation of texts in terms of a critical discourse analysis, which views language as a social practice. As such it has sought to describe,

the social forces which shape and are shaped by language; to show the relation between human interactions and large-scale institutions; to demonstrate the way in which subjectivities are created through language use and to emphasise the complex, multi-layered and heterogeneous nature of language (Maclean and Green, 1997, 13).

This research has examined the relevance of theories propounded by different critical theorists who call for roles of both the educator and learner subjects to be re-defined. This re-definition includes an awareness of the multi-layered and contradictory elements,

which constitute the socio-cultural and historical spaces they inhabit, and advocates that they become dialogic about the relations of power conveyed by texts, construct particular subjectivities in us. In this regard, the critical analysis proposed in this research is borne out of the assumption that teachers will be willing and equipped to work within a poststructuralist approach to the teaching of texts, informed by a critical pedagogy. This implies shifting from the 'high cultural' model in which only texts from the canon of great English literature are selected, to include different types of written and media-related texts, informed by a critical approach to classroom practice. The New London Group suggests that,

to be relevant, learning processes need to recruit, rather than attempt to ignore and erase, the different subjectivities – interests, intentions, commitments, and purposes – students bring to learning. Curriculum now needs to mesh with different subjectivities, and with their attendant languages, discourses, and registers, and use these as a resource for learning (1996, 72).

Understandably there might be resistance or anxiety on the part of educators to embrace a Critical Literacy approach, as it requires firstly a major shift from the Cultural Heritage teaching paradigm, which accommodates the institutionalised role of the educator as custodian of knowledge and meaning. Secondly, it is a relatively 'new' approach that requires the educator to re-evaluate and alter his/her position from that of a mentor guiding and directing the teaching of texts in the English classroom, to facilitator and co-investigator of knowledge contained in texts, with learners. Thirdly, it requires both educators and the Department of Education to network more closely. It is vital that the latter re-determine its stance from that of bureaucratic control of education, to acting as provider of resources and properly trained personnel to provide support in the form of in-

service training for both educators and departmental personnel so as to build capacity effectively.

It is acknowledged that whilst the national ministry of education of education is driven by the need to redistribute economic resources in education equitably and given the divide between advantaged and disadvantaged groups that presently exist in schooling, its interests would best be served by producing a critical citizenry, capable of addressing social justice concerns within a democratic framework. In this regard this study has recognised the implementation of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) (Department of Education, 1997), in South African schools as the new national curriculum, which is the state driven intervention in redressing imbalances in education. In fact many of the outcomes proposed by this paradigm are consonant with those of Critical Literacy. Further, it shares with Critical Literacy the need for fundamental premises of literacy pedagogy that create the potential for building learning environments that will lead to full and equitable social, political and economic participation by learners and educators.

There are, however, certain pitfalls associated with the implementation of OBE in South African schools. Prinsloo notes that Curriculum 2005 (Department of Education, 2002), with particular reference to the specific outcomes related to the Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC) learning area, 'introduces a tension between the state's imperative to ensure an education system that is consonant with its political objectives and the educational objectives progressive educators might validate. There are further tensions between what progressive educators and theorists would like to achieve and the

practices, capacities and resources of the teachers, and between the different paradigms that inform the learning area [LLC]...yet it is precisely in these tensions that the opportunities for Critical Literacy exist in a more defined way' (1998, 137).

By extension, this implies that some of the outcomes, for example, specific outcomes one and two (Department of Education, 2002) present a clear space for the implementation of Critical Literacy programs of work. In fact all of the outcomes provide spaces for the inclusion of a critical approach to textual practice. However, this requires a deliberate and concerted effort on the part of the authorities in education to provide a route to further teacher development in terms of familiarizing educators with methodologies and concepts of a critical pedagogy. This would create a willingness and ability on the part of educators to work within a more meaningful pedagogical framework informed by Critical Literacy, thus becoming critically empowered. This would facilitate transformation within the post-1994 multi-cultural classroom in keeping with 'developing a socially just curriculum' (Prinsloo, 1998, 144).

I concur with Luke et al in that:

Critical Literacy is no more universal or 'natural' than traditional, child-centered or technocratic approaches to teaching literacy. It is not about finding the 'right' methods or 'correct' approaches to teaching literacy – it is about opening up cultural, economic and political choices for teachers and students alike. It is a prescriptive educational, cultural and political agenda about how literacy should be used, and about what literate citizens should be capable of in fast, capitalist, twenty first century community and work cultures (1995, 41).

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## **APPENDIX ONE:**

PROPP'S THIRTY ONE NARRATIVE FUNCTIONS ( Prinsloo and Criticos, 1991,

135).

### **PREPARATION**

1. A member of the family leaves home
2. A prohibition or rule is imposed on the hero
3. This prohibition is broken
4. The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance
5. The villain learns something about his victim
6. The villain tries to deceive the victim to get possession of him and his belongings
7. The victim unknowingly helps the villain by being deceived or influenced by the villain

### **COMPLICATION**

8. The villain harms a member of the family/a member of the family lacks something
9. This misfortune is made known; the hero is given a command and he is sent on a quest
10. The seeker (or hero) plans action against the villain

### **TRANSFERENCE**

11. The hero leaves home
12. The hero is tested, attacked and receives a magical agent
13. The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor
14. The hero use a magical agent
15. The hero is transferred to the general location of the object of his quest

### **STRUGGLE**

16. The hero and villain join in direct combat
17. The hero is branded
18. The villain is defeated
19. The initial lack is set right

### **RETURN**

20. The hero returns
21. The hero is pursued
22. The hero is rescued from pursuit
23. The hero arrives home or elsewhere and is not recognised
24. A false hero makes false claims

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BESSIE HEAD

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The Wind and a Boy

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Like all the village boys, Friedman had a long wind blowing for him, but perhaps the enchanted wind that blew for him, filled the whole world with magic.

Until they became ordinary, dull grown men, who drank beer and made babies, the village boys were a special set all on their own. They were kings whom no one ruled. They wandered where they willed from dawn to dusk and only condescended to come home at dusk because they were afraid of the horrible things in the dark that might pounce on them. Unlike the little girls who adored household chores and drawing water, it was only now and then that the boys showed themselves as useful attachments to any household. When the first hard rains of summer fell, small dark shapes, quite naked except for their loin-cloths, sped out of the village into the bush. They knew that the first downpour had drowned all the wild rabbits, moles, and porcupines in their burrows in the earth. As they crouched down near the entrances of the burrows, they would see a small drowned nose of an animal peeping out; they knew it had struggled to emerge from its burrow, flooded by the sudden rush of storm water and as they pulled out the animal, they would say, pityingly:

'Birds have more sense than rabbits, moles and porcupines. They build their homes in trees.' But it was hunting made easy, for no matter how hard a boy and his dog ran, a wild rabbit ran ten times faster; a porcupine hurled his poisonous quills into the body; and a mole stayed where he thought it was safe — deep under the ground. So it was with inordinate pride that the boys carried home armfuls of dead animals for their families to feast on for many days. Apart from that, the boys lived very much as they pleased, with the wind and their own games.

Now and then, the activities of a single family could captivate the imagination and hearts of all the people of their surroundings; for years and years, the combination of the boy, Friedman,

and his grandmother, Sejosenyé, made the people of Ga-Sefete-Molemo ward smile, laugh, then cry.

They smiled at his first two phases. Friedman came home as a small bundle from the hospital, a bundle his grandmother nursed carefully near her bosom and crooned to day and night with extravagant care and tenderness.

'She is like that,' people remarked, 'because he may be the last child she will ever nurse. Sejosenyé is old now and will die one of these days; the child is a gift to keep her heart warm.'

Indeed, all Sejosenyé's children were grown, married, and had left home. Of all her children, only her last-born daughter was unmarried and Friedman was the result of some casual mating she had indulged in, in a town a hundred miles away where she had a job as a typist. She wanted to return to her job almost immediately, so she handed the child over to her mother and that was that; she could afford to forget him as he had a real mother now. During all the time that Sejosenyé haunted the hospital, awaiting her bundle, a friendly foreign doctor named Friedman took a fancy to her maternal, grandmotherly ways. He made a habit of walking out of his path to talk to her. She never forgot it and on receiving her bundle she called the baby, Friedman.

They smiled at his second phase, a small dark shadow who toddled silently and gravely beside a very tall grandmother; wherever the grandmother went, there went Friedman. Most women found this phase of the restless, troublesome toddler tedious; they dumped the toddler onto one of their younger girls and were off to weddings and visits on their own.

'Why can't you leave your handbag at home some times, granny?' they said.

'Oh, he's no trouble,' Sejosenyé would reply.

They began to laugh at his third phase. Almost overnight he turned into a tall, spindly-legged, graceful gazelle with large, grave eyes. There was an odd, musical lilt to his speech and when he teased, or was up to mischief, he moved his head on his long thin neck from side to side like a cobra. It was he who became the king of kings of all the boys in his area; he could turn his hand to anything and made the best wire cars with their wheels of shoe polish tins. All his movements were neat, compact, decisive, and for his age he was a boy who knew his own



... they laughed at his knowingness and certainty of all things, for he was like the grandmother who had had a flaming youth all her own too. Sejosenyé had scandalized the whole village in her days of good morals by leaving her own village ward to live with a married man in Ga-Sefete-Molemo ward. She had won him from his wife and married him and then lived down the scandal in the way only natural queens can. Even in old age, she was still impressive. She sailed through the village, head in the air, with a quiet, almost expressionless face. She had developed large buttocks as time went by and they announced their presence firmly in rhythm with her walk.

Another of Sejosenyé's certainties was that she was a woman who could plough, but it was like a special gift. Each season, in drought or hail or sun, she removed herself to her lands. She not only ploughed but nursed and brooded over her crops. She was there all the time till the corn ripened and the birds had to be chased off the land, till harvesting and threshing were done; so that even in drought years with their scanty rain, she came home with some crops. She was the envy of all the women of the surroundings.

'Sejosenyé always eats fine things in her house,' they said. 'She ploughs and then sits down for many months and enjoys the fruits of her labour.'

The women also envied her beautiful grandson. There was something special there, so that even when Friedman moved into his bad phase, they forgave him crimes other boys received a sound thrashing for. The small boys were terrible thieves who harassed people by stealing their food and money. It was all part of the games they played but one which people did not like. Of them all, Friedman was the worst thief, so that his name was mentioned more and more in any thieving that had been uncovered.

'But Friedman showed us how to open the window with a knife and string,' the sobbing, lashed boys would protest.

'Friedman isn't as bad as you,' the parents would reply, irrationally. They were hypnotised by a beautiful creature. The boy Friedman, who had become a real nuisance by then, also walked around as though he were special. He couldn't possibly be a thief and he added an aloof, offended, disdainful expression to his pretty face. He wasn't an ordinary sort of boy in Ga-Sefete-

... It happened, quite accidentally, that his grandmother told him all those stories about the hunters, warriors, and emissaries of old. She was normally a quiet, absent-minded woman, given to dreaming by herself but she liked to sing the boy a little song now and then as they sat by the outdoor fire. A lot of them were church songs and rather sad; they more or less passed as her bed-time prayer at night – she was one of the old church-goers. Now and then she added a quaint little song to her repertoire and as the night-time, fire-light flames flickered between them, she never failed to note that this particular song was always well received by the boy. A little light would awaken in his eyes and he would bend forward and listen attentively.

'Welcome, Robinson Crusoe, welcome,' she would sing, in clear, sweet tones. 'How could you stay, so long away, Robinson, how could you do so?'

When she was very young, Sejosenyé had attended the mission school of the village for about a year; made a slight acquaintance with the ABC and one, two, three, four, five, and the little song about Robinson Crusoe. But girls didn't need an education in those days when ploughing and marriage made up their whole world. Yet Robinson Crusoe lived on as a gay and out-of-context memory of her school-days. One evening the boy leaned forward and asked:

'Is that a special praise-poem song for Robinson Crusoe, grandmother?'

'Oh yes,' she said smiling.

'What great things did he do?' the boy asked pointedly.

'They say he was a hunter who went by Gweta side and killed an elephant all by himself,' she said making up a story on the spot. 'Oh! In those days, no man could kill an elephant by himself. All the regiments had to join together and each man had to thrust his sword into the side of the elephant before it died. Well, Robinson Crusoe was gone many days and people wondered about him: "Perhaps he has been eaten by a lion," they said. "Robinson likes to be a solitary person and do foolish things. We won't ever go out into the bush by ourselves because we know it is dangerous." Well, one day, Robinson suddenly appeared in their midst and people could see that he had a great thing on his mind. They all gathered around him. He said: "I have killed an

... people were surprised: "Robinson!" they said. "It is impossible! How did you do it? The very thought of an elephant approaching the village makes us shiver!" And Robinson said: "Ah, people, I saw a terrible sight! I was standing at the feet of the elephant. I was just a small ant. I could not see the world any more. Elephant was above me until his very head touched the sky and his ears spread out like great winds. He was angry but I only looked into one eye which was turning round and round in anger. What to do now? I thought it better to put that eye out. I raised my spear and threw it at the angry eye. People! It went right inside. Elephant said not a word and he fell to one side. Come, I will show you what I have done." They ran to fetch their containers as some wanted the meat of the elephant; some wanted the fat. The men made their knives sharp. They would make shoes and many things from the skin and bones. There was something for all the people in the great work Robinson Crusoe did.'

All this while, as he listened to the story, the boy's eyes had glowed softly. At the end of it, he drew in a long breath.

'Grandmother,' he whispered, adroitly stepping into the role of Robinson Crusoe, the great hunter. 'One day, I'm going to be like that. I'm going to be a hunter like Robinson Crusoe and bring meat to all the people.' He paused for breath and then added tensely: 'And what other great thing did Robinson Crusoe do?'

'Tsaal' she said clicking her tongue in exhaustion. 'Am I then going away that I must tell *all* the stories at once?'

Although his image of Robinson Crusoe, the great hunter, was never to grow beyond his everyday boyish activities of pushing wire cars, hunting in the fields for wild rabbits, climbing trees to pull down old bird's nests and yelling out in alarm to find that a small snake now occupied the abandoned abode, or racing against the wind with the spoils of his latest theft, the stories awakened a great tenderness in him. If Robinson Crusoe was not churning up the dust in deadly hand-to-hand combat with an enemy, he was crossing swollen rivers and wild jungles as the great messenger and ambassador of the chief - all his activities were touchingly in aid of or in defence of the people. One day Friedman expressed this awakened compassion for life in a strange way. After a particularly violent storm, people

found their huts invaded by many small mice and they were hard-pressed to rid themselves of these pests. Sejosenye ordered Friedman to kill the mice.

'But grandmother,' he protested. 'They have come to us for shelter. They lost all their homes in the storm. It's better that I put them in a box and carry them out into the fields again once the rains are over.'

She had laughed in surprise at this and spread the story around among her women friends, who smiled tenderly then said to their own offspring:

'Friedman isn't as bad as you.'

Life and its responsibilities began to weigh down heavily on Friedman as he approached his fourteenth year. Less time was spent in boyish activities. He grew more and more devoted to his grandmother and concerned to assist her in every way. He wanted a bicycle so that he might run up and down to the shops for her, deliver messages, or do any other chore she might have in mind. His mother, who worked in a town far away, sent him the money to purchase the bicycle. The gift brought the story of his life abruptly to a close.

Toward the beginning of the rainy season, he accompanied his grandmother to her lands, which were some twenty miles outside the village. They sowed seed together after the hired tractor had turned up the lands but the boy's main chore was to keep the household pot filled with meat. Sometimes they ate birds Friedman had trapped, sometimes they ate fried tortoise-meat or wild rabbit; but there was always something as the bush abounded with animal life. Sejosenye only had to take a bag of mealie meal, packets of sugar, tea, and powdered milk as provisions for their stay at the lands; meat was never a problem. Midway through the ploughing season, she began to run out of sugar, tea, and milk.

'Friedman,' she said that evening. 'I shall wake you early tomorrow morning. You will have to take the bicycle into the village and purchase some more sugar, tea, and milk.'

He was up at dawn with the birds, a solitary figure cycling on a pathway through the empty bush. By nine, he had reached the village and first made his way to Ga-Sefete-Molemo ward and the yard of a friend of his grandmother, who gave him a cup of tea and a plate of porridge. Then he put one foot on the bicycle

eyes. His smile was to linger vividly before her for many days as a short while later, hard pounding feet came running into her yard to report that Friedman was dead.

He pushed the bicycle through the winding, sandy pathways of the village ward, reached the high embankment of the main road, pedalled vigorously up it and, out of the corner of his eye, saw a small green truck speeding towards him. In the devil-may-care fashion of all the small boys, he cycled right into its path, turned his head and smiled appealingly at the driver. The truck caught him on the front bumper, squashed the bicycle and dragged the boy along at a crazy speed for another hundred yards, dropped him and careered on another twenty yards before coming to a halt. The boy's pretty face was a smear all along the road and he only had a torso left.

People of Ga-Sefete-Molemo ward never forgot the last coherent word Sejosenye spoke to the police. A number of them climbed into the police truck and accompanied it to her lands. They saw her walk slowly and inquiringly towards the truck, they heard the matter-of-fact voice of the policeman announce the death, then they heard Sejosenye say piteously: 'Can't you return those words back?'

She turned away from them, either to collect her wits or the few possession she had brought with her. Her feet and buttocks quivered anxiously as she stumbled towards her hut. Then her feet tripped her up and she fell to the ground like a stunned log.

The people of Ga-Sefete-Molemo ward buried the boy Friedman but none of them would go near the hospital where Sejosenye lay. The stories brought to them by way of the nurses were too terrible for words. They said the old woman sang and laughed and talked to herself all the time. So they merely asked each other, 'Have you been to see Mma-Sejosenye?' 'I'm afraid I cannot. It would kill my heart.' Two weeks later, they buried her.

As was village habit, the incident was discussed thoroughly from all sides till it was understood. In this timeless, sleepy village, the goats stood and suckled their young ones on the main road or lay down and took their afternoon naps there. The motorists either stopped for them or gave way. But it appeared that the driver of the truck had neither brakes on his car nor a driving licence. He belonged to the new, rich civil-servant class

...these things had become fantastically high since independence. They had to have cars in keeping with their new status; they had to have any car, as long it was a car; they were in such a hurry about everything that they couldn't be bothered to take driving lessons. And thus progress, development, and a preoccupation with status and living-standards first announced themselves to the village. It looked like being an ugly story with many decapitated bodies on the main road.

and departed laden with the sparse furnishing of the households of Dikies Diek, whose inhabitants sat on these trucks, resignation on their faces. Their destination was Meadowlands, Soweto.

They waved to those whom they left behind. 'Chip-Chip' the barber, Chong the butcher, Dassault, Khan, Lepere, people whose names and skins kept them in Newclare.

Dassault did not wave back. He stood on his terrace, his face hard and controlled. Nicholas scrambled down the hill, but was kept back from the truck that carried Aaron and his family by a uniformed policeman. Nicholas waved, tears streaming down his face, as the truck pulled off, but there was no reaction from Aaron, who merely smiled that uncaring smile.

Nicholas stayed behind in Dikies Diek, which was a ghost town by the end of the day. He watched, with a strange feeling of detachment, teams of workmen pulling down the corrugated iron shanties, and laying them out in neat piles.

He watched as other trucks brought people from nearby Sophiatown to live in the few brick houses in Dikies Diek. People with children like him, who looked like him, had fathers like him.

In one day Dikies Diek was gone.

That night, many years ago, he had acceded readily to a request he had denied his father for months, and agreed to attend a boarding school in Aliwal North.

He rose early, and breakfasted with his parents as he had done as a scholar all those years ago. He had an appointment that morning. His father had arranged with a friend to see Nicholas about employment.

'It's a good opportunity. In South Africa no one becomes labourers or ushers unless they're crippled,' Dassault said.

The train was full, and as it swayed, Nicholas felt the ebb of an apprehension that had beset him the moment he alighted at Newclare station the day before.

At Johannesburg station he locked himself in a toilet and counted out the exact amount of money the ticket office said the fare would be.

As inconspicuous as all the others in the queue, he shuffled along until his turn came at the window.

'Third Class to Cape Town. Single please.'

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## NORMAN RUSH

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### Bruns

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Poor Bruns. They hated him so much it was baroque. But then so is Keteng baroque, everything about it.

Probably the Boers were going to hate Bruns no matter what. Boers run Keteng. They've been up there for generations, since before the Protectorate. When independence came, it meant next to nothing to them. They ignored it. They're all citizens of Botswana, but they are Boers underneath forever, really unregenerate. Also, in Keteng you're very close to the border with South Africa. They still mostly use rands for money instead of pula. Boers slightly intrigue me. For a woman, I'm somewhat an elitist, and hierarchy always interests me. I admit these things. The Boers own everything in Keteng, including the chief. They wave him to the head of the queue for petrol, which he gets for free, naturally, just like the cane liquor they give him. They own the shops. Also they think they really know how to manage the Bakorwa, which actually they do. You have to realize that the Bakorwa have the reputation of being the most violent and petulant tribe in the country, which is about right. All the other tribes say so. And in fact the Boers do get along with them. In fact, the original whites in Keteng — that would be the Vissers, Du Toits, Pieterses ... seven families altogether — were all rescued by the Bakorwa when their oxwagons broke down in the desert when they were trekking somewhere. They started out as bankrupts and now they own the place. It's so feudal up there you cannot conceive. That is, it has been until now.

I know a lot about Keteng. I got interested in Keteng out of boredom with my project. Actually, my project collapsed. My thesis adviser at Stanford talked me into my topic anyway, so it wasn't all that unbearable when it flopped. At certain moments I can even get a certain vicious satisfaction out of it. Frankly, the problem is partly too many anthropologists in one small area. We are thick on the ground. And actually we hate each other. The problem is that people are contaminating one another's

research, so hatred is structural and I don't need to apologize. At any rate, I was getting zero. I was supposed to be showing a relationship between diet and fertility among the Bakorwa up near Tswapong, in the hills. The theory was that fertility would show some seasonality because the diet in the deep bush was supposedly ninety per cent hunting-gathering, which would mean sharp seasonal changes in diet content. But the sad fact is you go into the middle of nowhere and people are eating Simba chips and cornflakes and drinking Castle Lager. The problem is Americans, partly. Take the hartebeest domestication project, where they give away so much food and scraps and things that you have a kind of permanent beggar settlement outside the gate. And just to mention the other research people you have encumbering the ground - you have me, you have the anthropologists from the stupid Migration Study and the census, and you have people from some land-grant college someplace following baboons around. By the way, there were several baboon attacks on Bakorwa gathering firewood around Keteng, which they blame on the Americans for pestering the baboons. Or Imiricans, as the Boers would say. America gets the blame.

The other thing is that Keteng is remote. It's five hours from the rail line, over unspeakable roads, through broiling-hot empty thornveld. In one place there's no road and you just creep over red granite swells for a kilometer, following a little line of rocks. So the Boers got used to doing what they wanted, black government or not. They still pay their farm labor in sugar and salt and permission to crawl underneath their cows and suck fresh milk. It is baroque. So I got interested in Keteng and started weekend-ing. At my project site, camping was getting uncomfortable, I should mention, with strange figures hanging around my perimeter. Nobody did anything, but it makes you nervous. In Keteng I can always get a room from the sisters at the mission hospital and a bath instead of washing my armpits under my shirt because you never know who's watching.

The place I stay when I descend into Keteng is interesting and is one reason I keep going back. I can see everything from the room the sisters give me. The hospital is up on the side of a hill, and the sisters' hostel is higher than that, on the very top. My room is right under the roof, the second story, where there's a water tank and therefore a perpetual sound of water cascading

down through pipes, a sound you get famished for in a place so arid. Also in tubs on the roof they have vines growing that drape down over the face of the building, so you have this green-curtain effect over your window. The sisters have a little tiny enclosed locked-up courtyard where they hang their underthings to dry, which is supposed to be secret and sacrosanct, which you can see into from my room. You can also see where Bruns stayed - a pathetic bare little shack near the hospital with gravel around the stoop and a camp stool so he could sit in the sun and watch his carrots wither. At the foot of the hill the one street in Keteng begins at the hospital gate and runs straight to the chief's court at the other end of town. Downtown amounts to a dozen one-story buildings - shops with big houses behind them. You can see the Bakorwa wards spreading away from the center of Keteng - log kraals, mud rondavels with thatch, mostly, although cement block square houses with sheet-metal roofs held down by cobbles are infiltrating the scene. Sometimes I think anthropology should be considered a form of voyeurism rather than a science, with all the probing into reproductive life and so forth we do. I'm voyeuristic. I like to pull my bed up to the window and lie there naked, studying Keteng. Not that the street life is so exotic. Mostly it's goats and cattle. I did once see a guy frying a piece of meat on a stove. The nuns have really hard beds, which I happen to prefer.

Poor Bruns. The first thing I ever heard about him was that there was somebody new in Keteng who was making people as nervous as poultry, as they put it. That's an Afrikaans idiom. They meant Bruns. He was a volunteer from some Netherlands religious outfit and a conscientious objector like practically all the Dutch and German volunteers are. He was assigned to be the fleet mechanic at the mission hospital. He was a demon mechanic, it turned out, who could fix anything. Including the X-ray machine, for example, which was an old British Army World War 1 field unit, an antique everybody had given up on. Of course, what do the Boers care, because when they get even just a little cut it's into the Cessna and over the border into the Republic or Potgietersrust or even Pretoria. But other people were ecstatic. Bruns was truly amazing. People found out. A few of the Bakorwa farmers have treated



in his spare time. On Saturdays you'd see Bakorwa pushing these old wrecks, hordes of them pushing these three or four old wrecks toward Keteng for Bruns. So, number one, right away that made Bruns less than popular around Du Toit's garage. Du Toit didn't like it. It even got a little mean, with some of Bruns's tools disappearing from his workroom at the hospital until he started really locking things up.

The other thing that fed into making people nervous right away was Bruns physically. He was very beautiful. I don't know how else to put it. He was very Aryan, with those pale-blue eyes that are apparently so de rigueur for male movie stars these days. He had a wonderful physique. At some point possibly he had been a physical culturist, or maybe it was just the effect of constant manual work and lifting. Also I can't resist mentioning a funny thing about Boer men. Or, rather, let me back into it: there is a thing with black African men called the African Physiological Stance, which means essentially that men, when they stand around, don't bother to hold their bellies in. It might seem like a funny cultural trait to borrow, but Boer men picked it up. It doesn't look so bad with blacks because the men stay pretty skinny, usually. But in whites, especially in Boers, who run to fat anyway, it isn't so enthralling. They wear their belts underneath their paunches, somewhat on the order of a sling. Now consider Bruns strictly as a specimen walking around with his nice flat belly, a real waist, and, face it, a very compact nice little behind, and also keep in mind that he's Dutch, so in a remote way he's the same stock as the Boer men there, and the contrast was not going to be lost on the women, who are another story. The women have nothing to do. Help is thick on the ground. They get up at noon. They consume bales of true-romance magazines from Britain and the Republic, so incredibly crude. They do makeup. And they can get very flirtatious in an incredibly heavy-handed way after a couple of brandies. Bruns was the opposite of flirtatious. I wonder what the women thought it meant. He was very scrupulous when he was talking to you, unlike everybody else. He kept his eyes on your face. As a person with large breasts I'm sensitized to this. Boer men are not normal. They think they're a godsend to any white woman who turns up in this wilderness. Their sex ideas are derived

from their animals. I've heard they just unbanned *Love Without Fear* in South Africa this year, which says something. The book was published in 1941.

On top of that, the Dutch-Boer interface is so freakish and tense anyway. The Dutch call Afrikaans 'baby Dutch'. Boers are a humiliation to the Dutch, like they are their ids set free in the world or something similar. The Dutch Parliament keeps almost voting to get an oil boycott going against South Africa.

So it wasn't helpful that Bruns was some kind of absolute vegetarian, which he combined with fasting. He was whatever is beyond lactovegetarian in strictness. You have never seen people consume meat on the scale of the Boers. As a friend of mine says, Boers and meat go together like piss and porcelain. Biltong, sausages, any kind of meat product, pieces of pure solid fat — they love meat. So there was another rub.

Bruns was so naïve. He apparently had no idea he was coming to live in a shame culture. Among the Bakorwa, if you do something wrong and somebody catches you, they take you to the customary court and give you a certain number of strokes with a switch in public. They wet it first so it hurts more. This is far from being something whites thought up and imposed. It's the way it is. The nearest regular magistrate is — where? Bobonong? Who knows? Bakorwa justice is based on beatings and fear of beatings and shame, full stop. It's premodern. But here comes Bruns wearing his crucifix and wondering what is going on. The problem was he had an unfortunate introduction to the culture. You could call wife-beating among the Bakorwa pretty routine. I think he saw an admission to the hospital related to that. Also he himself was an ex-battered child, somebody said. I'm thinking of setting up a course for people who get sent there. I can give you an example of the kind of thing people should know about and not think twice about. The manager of the butchery in one of the towns caught two women shoplifting and he made them stand against the wall while he whipped them with an extension cord instead of calling the police. This shamed them and was probably effective and they didn't lose time from work or their families. You need anthropologists to prepare people for the culture here. Bruns needed help. He needed information.

Bruns belonged to some sect. It was something like the people

in England who jump out and disrupt fox hunts. Or there was a similar group, also in England, of people who were interposing themselves between prizefighters, to stop prizefighting. Bruns was from some milieu like that. I think he felt like he'd wandered into something by Hieronymus Bosch which he was supposed to do something about.

The fact is that the amount of fighting and beating there is in Bakorwa culture is fairly staggering to a person at first. Kids get beaten at school and at home, really hard sometimes. Wives naturally get beaten. Animals. Pets. Donkeys. And of course the whole traditional court process, the *kgotla*, is based on it. I think he was amazed. Every Wednesday at the *kgotla* the chief hears charges and your shirt comes off and you get two to twenty strokes, depending. Then there's the universal recreational punching and shoving that goes on when the locals start drinking. So it's not something you can afford to be sensitive about if you're going to work here for any length of time.

Bruns decided to do something. The first thing he tried was absurd and made everything worse.

He started showing up at the *kgotla* when they were giving judgment and just stood there watching them give strokes. He was male, so he could get right up in the front row. I understand he never said anything, the idea being just to be a sorrowful witness. I guess he thought it would have some effect. But the Bakorwa didn't get it and didn't care. He was welcome.

Maybe I'm just a relativist on corporal punishment. Our own wonderful culture is falling apart with crime, more than Keteng is, and you could take the position that substituting imprisonment for the various kinds of rough justice there used to be had only made things worse. Who knows if there was less crime when people just formed mobs in a cooperative spirit and rode people out of town on a rail or horsewhipped them, when that was the risk you were running rather than plea bargaining and courses in basket weaving or some other fatuous find of so-called rehabilitation? I don't.

Bruns convinced himself that the seven families were to blame for all the violence – spiritually to blame at least. He was going to ask them to do something about it, take some kind of stand, and he was going to the center of power, Deon Du Toit.

There's some disagreement as to whether Bruns went once to

Du Toit's house or twice. Everybody agrees Du Toit wasn't home and that Bruns went in and stayed, however many times he went, stayed talking with Marika, Du Toit's slutty wife. The one time everybody agrees on was at night. Bruns started to turn away when the maid told him Du Toit wasn't there. But then somehow Bruns was invited in. That's established. Then subsequently there was one long afternoon encounter, supposedly.

Bruns was going to blame the families for everything – for making money off liquor, which leads to violence, for doing nothing about violence to women and not even appearing in *kgotla* for women who worked for them when they were brutalized by their husbands or boyfriends, for corrupting the chief, who was an incompetent anyway, for doing nothing about conditions at the jail. I can generate this list out of my own knowledge of Bruns's mind: everything on it is true. Finally there was something new he was incensed about. The drought had been bad and Du Toit had just started selling water for three pula a drum. You know a drought is bad when cattle come into town and bite the brass taps off cisterns. A wildebeest charged an old woman carrying melons and knocked her down so it could get the moisture in the melons.

We know what Du Toit did when he came back and found out Bruns had been there. First he punched the housemaid, Myriad Gofetile (her twin sister also works for Du Toit), for letting Bruns in or for not telling him about it, one or the other. And Marika wasn't seen outside the house for a while, although the Boers usually try not to mark their women where it shows when they beat them.

Those are two people I would love to see fighting. Deon and Marika Du Toit, tooth and nail. It would be gorgeous. Both of them are types. He's fairly gigantic. Marika has skin like a store dummy's. She's proud of it. She's one of those people who are between twenty-five and forty but you can't tell where. She has high cheekbones you can't help envying, and these long eyes, rather Eurasian-looking. She wears her hair like a fool, though – lacquered, like a scoop around her head. Her hair is yellowish. She hardly says anything. But she doesn't need to because she's so brilliant with her cigarette, smoking and posing.

Deon was away hunting during the time or times Bruns visited. The inevitable thing happened, besides beating up on his

household, when Deon found out. This was the day he got back, midmorning. He sent a yard boy to the hospital with a message to the effect that Bruns is ordered to drop whatever he's doing and come immediately to see Deon at the house.

Bruns is cool. He sends back the message that he's engaged on work for the hospital and regrets he isn't free to visit.

So that message went back, and the yard boy comes back with a new command that Bruns should come to Du Toit's at tea, which would be at about eleven. Bruns sends the message back that he doesn't break for tea, which was true.

Suddenly you have Deon himself materializing in the hospital garage, enraged, still covered with gore from hauling game out of his pickup. He had shot some eland.

'You can't come by my wife when I am away!' He ended up screaming this at Bruns, who just carried on fixing some vehicle.

He now orders Bruns to come to his house at lunch, calling him a worm and so on, which was apropos Bruns being a pacifist.

Bruns took the position that he had authority over who was present in the garage and ordered Du Toit to leave.

Then there was a stupid exchange to the effect that Bruns would come only if Du Toit was in actual fact inviting him to a meal at noon.

Throughout all this Bruns is projecting a more and more sorrowful calmness. Also, everything Bruns says is an aside, since he keeps steadily working. Deon gets frantic. The sun is pounding down. You have this silent chorus of Africans standing around. There is no question that they are loving every moment.

It ends with Deon telling Bruns he had better be at his house at noon if he expects to live to have sons.

Of course, after the fact everybody wanted to know why somebody didn't intervene.

Bruns did go at lunchtime to Deon's.

The whole front of Deon's place is a screened veranda he uses for making biltong. From the street it looks like red laundry. There are eight or nine clotheslines perpetually hung with rags of red meat turning purple, air-drying. This is where they met. Out in the road you had an audience of Bakorwa pretending to be going somewhere, slowly.

Meat means flies. Here is where the absurd takes a hand. Deon comes onto the porch from the house. Bruns goes onto the porch from the yard. The confrontation is about to begin. Deon is just filling his lungs to launch out at Bruns when the absurd thing happens: he inhales a fly. Suddenly you have a farce going. The fly apparently got rather far up his nostril. Deon goes into a fit, stamping and snorting. He's in a state of terror. You inhale a fly and the body takes over. Also you have to remember that there are certain flies that fly up the nostrils of wildebeests and lay eggs that turn into maggots that eat the brains of the animals, which makes them gallop in circles until they die of exhaustion. Deon has seen this, of course.

The scene is over before it begins. Deon crashes back into his living room screaming for help. It is total public humiliation. The Bakorwa see Bruns walk away nonchalantly and hear Du Toit thrashing and yelling.

Marika got the fly out with tweezers, I heard. By then Bruns was back at work.

Here is my theory of the last act. Deon's next move was inevitable — to arrange for a proxy to catch Bruns that same night and give him a beating. For symbolic and other reasons, it had to be one of the Bakorwa. At this point both Bruns and Deon are deep in the grip of the process of the Duel, capital D. Pragmatically, there would be no problem for Deon in getting one of the Bakorwa to do the job and probably even take the blame for it in the unlikely event he got caught. This is not to say there was no risk to Deon, because there was, some. But if you dare a Boer to do something, which is undoubtedly the way Deon perceived it, he is lost. An example is a man who dared to kiss a rabid ox on the lips, at the abattoir in Cape Town. It was in the *Rand Daily Mail*. By the way, the point of kissing the ox on the lips is that it gives rabies its best chance of getting directly to your brain. So he did it. Not only that, he defaulted on the course of rabies injections the health department was frantically trying to get him to take. Here is your typical Boer folk hero. Add to that the Duel psychology, which is like a spell that spreads out and paralyzes people who might otherwise be expected to step in and put a stop to something so weird. Still, when someone you know personally like Bruns is found dead, it shocks you. I had out this



man's hair.

I'm positive two things happened the last night, although the official version is that only one did.

The first is that Deon sent somebody, a local, to beat Bruns up. When night falls in Keteng it's like being under a rock. There's no street lighting. The stores are closed. The whites pull their curtains. Very few Bakorwa can afford candles or paraffin lamps. It can seem unreal, because the Bakorwa are used to getting out and about in the dark and you can hear conversations and deals going down and so on, all in complete blackness. They even have parties in the dark where you can hear bojalwa being poured and people singing and playing those one-string tin-can violins. There was no moon that night and it was cloudy.

Bruns would often go out after dinner and sit on one of the big rocks up on the hill and do his own private vespers. He'd go out at sunset and sit there into the night thinking pure thoughts. He had a little missal he took with him, but what he could do with it in the dark except fondle it I have no idea.

So I think Bruns went out, got waylaid and beaten up as a lesson, and went back to his hut. I think the point of it was mainly just to humiliate him and mark him up. Of course, because of his beliefs, he would feel compelled just to endure the beating. He might try to shield his head or kidneys, but he couldn't fight back. He would not be in the slightest doubt that it was Bakorwa doing it and that they had been commissioned by Du Toit. So he comes back messed up, and what is he supposed to do?

Even very nice people find it hard to resist paradox. For example, whenever somebody who knows anything about it tells the story of poor Bruns, they always begin with the end of the story, which is that he drowned, their little irony being that of course everybody knows Botswana is a desert and Keteng is a desert. So poor Bruns, his whole story and what he did is reduced to getting this cheap initial sensation out of other people.

As I reconstruct the second thing that happened, it went like this: Bruns wandered back from his beating and possibly went into his place with the idea of cleaning himself up. His state of mind would have to be fairly terrible at this point. He has been abused by the very people he is trying to champion. At the same time, he knows Du Toit is responsible and that he can never

prove it. And also he is in the grip of the need to retaliate. And he is a pacifist. He gets an idea and slips out again in to the dark.

They found Bruns the next morning, all beaten up, drowned, his head and shoulders submerged in the watering trough in Du Toit's side yard. The police found Deon still in bed, in his clothes, hung over and incoherent. Marika was also still in bed, also under the weather, and she also was marked up and made a bad exhibit. They say Deon was struck dumb when they took him outside to show him the body.

Here's what I see. Bruns goes to Deon's, goes to the trough and plunges his head underwater and fills his lungs. I believe he could do it. It would be like he was beaten and pushed under. He was capable of this. He would see himself striking at the centre of the web and convicting Du Toit for a thousand unrecorded crimes. It's self-immolation. It's non-violent.

Deon protested that he was innocent, but he made some serious mistakes. He got panicky. He tried to contend he was with one of the other families that night, but that story collapsed when somebody else got panicky. Also it led to some perjury charges against the Vissers. Then Deon changed his story, saying how he remembered hearing some noises during the night, going out to see what they were, seeing nothing, and going back in and to bed. This could be the truth, but by the time he said it nobody believed him.

The ruin is absolute. It is a real *Götterdämmerung*. Deon is in jail, charged, and the least he can get is five years. He will have to eat out of a bucket. The chief is disgraced and they are discussing a regency. Bruns was under his protection, formally, and all the volunteer agencies are upset. In order to defend himself the chief is telling everything he can about how helpless he is in fact in Keteng, because the real power is with the seven families. He's pouring out details, so there are going to be charges against the families on other grounds, mostly about bribery and taxes. Also, an election is coming, so the local Member of Parliament has a chance to be zealous about white citizens acting like they're outside the law. Business licenses are getting suspended. Theunis Pieters is selling out. There's a new police compound going up and more police coming in. They're posting a magistrate.

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 NJABULO NDEBELE
 

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 The Music of the Violin
 

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Vukani was doing homework in his bedroom when voices in the living-room slowly filtered into his mind. He lifted his head to look up, as if to focus his ears. No. He could not recognise the voices. Now and again the hum of conversation was punctuated with laughter. Then he grew apprehensive, the continuing conversation suddenly filling him with dread. He tried to concentrate on his work. 'Answer the following questions: How did the coming of the whites lead to the establishment of prosperity and peace among the various Bantu tribes? ...' But the peace had gone from his mind. The questions had become a meaningless task. Instinctively he turned round to look at his music stand at the foot of his bed. Yesterday he had practised some Mozart. Then he saw the violin leaning against the wall next to the stand. Would they come to interrupt him? He felt certain they would. He stood up, thinking of a way to escape.

There was another peal of laughter from the living-room, and Vukani wondered again who the visitors were. As he opened the door slowly he was met by another thunderous roar. Escape would be impossible. He had to go through the living-room and would certainly be called by his mother to be introduced to the visitors, and then the usual agony would follow. A delicate clink of cups and saucers told Vukani the visitors had been served tea. Perhaps it was coffee. Most probably tea. Visitors generally preferred tea. Another roar. His father and the male visitor were laughing. He knew now that the visitors were a man and a woman, but he did not know them. Curious now, he opened the door another inch or so, and saw the woman visitor, who sat close to where the passage to the bedrooms began. Vukani's mother, in her white nursing uniform, sat close to the woman in another heavily cushioned chair. They were separated by the coffee table.

'I couldn't make it at all to the meeting last Saturday,' said Vukani's mother.

'Which meeting, dearie?' asked the woman.  
 The men laughed again during their own conversation.  
 'Don't you laugh so loudly,' Vukani's mother shouted.  
 'You see,' Vukani's father was saying. 'I had caught the fellow by surprise, as I usually do.'  
 'That's the only way to ensure that the work gets done,' said the other man.

'So I said: "Show me the students' garden plots." I saw a twitch of anguish cross his face. But he was a clever fellow, you see. He quickly recovered and said: "Of course sir, of course, come along." So we went. There was a wilderness around the school. These bush schools! I wouldn't have been surprised if a python had stopped us in our tracks. So, after about two hundred yards of walking and all the wilderness around us, I began to wonder. So I say to this teacher: "Mr Mabaso" - that was the fellow's name - "these plots, they are quite far, aren't they?" "We're just about there, sir," he said.'

'Man alive!' exclaimed the other man. 'This story is getting hot. Let me sip one more time.' There was some silence while the man sipped his tea. Vukani's mother also lifted her cup to her lips. The women were now listening too.

'So,' continued Vukani's father, 'we walked another two hundred yards and I turned to look at the man. "We're just about there, sir." I only needed to look at him and he would say: "We're just about there, sir."'

Everybody laughed. 'You see, the fellow was now sweating like a horse.'

'So?' asked the woman visitor, laughing. She was wiping her eyes with Kleenex.

'Then this fellow, Mabaso, shows me a hill about a mile away and says: "We're going there to that hill, sir, the plots are behind it. You see, sir, I figured that since the wind normally hits the hill on the side we are looking at now, I should have the plots on the leeward side to protect the plants." What bosh!'

There was more laughter and the male visitor said, in the middle of laughter: 'Beatrice, give me some Kleenex, please.' His wife stood up and disappeared from Vukani's view. She returned soon. Vukani heard a nose being blown.

'Please don't laugh, fellow Africans,' said Vukani's father. 'The man is a genius. What's this poem by the English poet, "The

man blushes unseen in the wilderness." He knew I would not go any further. So I really have no proof that there were no garden plots.'

'Of course there weren't any,' asserted Vukani's mother.

'Of course there weren't,' everybody agreed.

'You school inspectors,' said the male visitor, 'have real problems with these bush schools.'

'You don't know, you!' agreed Vukani's father. 'We just can't get it into these teachers' heads that we have to uplift the Black nation. And we cannot do that through cheating and laziness. We will not develop self-reliance that way. The fellow was just not teaching the students gardening, and that is dead against government policy.' Vukani shut the door. In spite of himself he had been amused by the story. He went back to the desk and tried to continue with the homework. He could not. What about going out through the window? No. That would be taking things too far. He wondered where Teboho, his sister, was. Probably in her bedroom. Teboho and their mother were having too many heated exchanges these days. Their mother tended to make too many demands on them. Vukani wished he could go and talk to Teboho. They had grown very close. Then he suddenly became frantic again and went back to the door. He had to escape. When he opened the door, as slightly as before, it was the woman visitor who was talking.

'You just don't know what you missed, you,' she was saying. The men laughed again.

'Please, you men!' appealed Vukani's mother. But they laughed once again.

'Do you want us to leave you and go to the bedroom?' threatened Vukani's mother. 'And you know if we go in there we won't come out.'

'Peace! Peace!' said Vukani's father. 'Peace, women of Africa!' Then he lowered his voice as he continued to talk to the other man.

'Now, come on, what have I missed?' asked Vukani's mother eagerly.

'Well, you just don't know what you missed,' said Mrs Beatrice, pulling the bait away from the fish.

'Please don't play with my anxiety.'

'I want to do just that,' said Mrs Beatrice, clapping her hands

once and sitting forward in her chair, her legs thrust underneath. She kept on pulling down her tight-fitting skirt over her big knees. But after each effort the skirt slipped back, revealing the knees again.

'You women are on again about the Housewives' League?' remarked Vukani's father, interrupting the women.

'Day in and day out,' said the other man, supporting Vukani's father.

'Of course yes!' said Mrs Beatrice with emphatic pride.

'Forget about these men,' pleaded Vukani's mother, 'and give me a pinch of the story.'

'Mother-of-Teboho, you really missed,' Mrs Beatrice started. 'A white woman came all the way from Emmarentia - high-class exclusive suburb, mind you - to address the meeting on Jewish recipes. Came all the way to Soweto for that. It was wonderful.'

'Was it not Mrs Kaplinsky?'

'As if you know!'

'Ha, woman! Please, give me! Give me!' begged Vukani's mother with great excitement, clapping her hands repeatedly. 'I'm fetching my pen, I'm fetching my pen. Give me those recipes.' But she did not leave to go and fetch her pen.

'I'm selling them, dearie. Business first, friendship after.' They laughed.

'Ei! Women and food ...' exclaimed the other man.

'What! We cook for you men,' retorted his wife.

'Exactly,' concurred Vukani's mother. 'More tea?'

'No thanks, dearie.'

'Hey you men, more tea?' But the men were already back to their conversation, and burst out laughing. Vukani's father answered while laughing, suddenly coming into Vukani's view as he brought his empty cup to the coffee table between the women. 'No thanks,' he was saying. 'No thanks ... he he he heheheee ... that was a good one ... no thanks ... what a good one.' Then he took out a handkerchief from the pocket of his trousers, wiped his eyes, wiped his whole face, and then wiped his lips. 'A jolly good evening tonight,' he remarked. Then he went back to his chair, disappearing from Vukani's view.

'Thanks for the tea,' said the other man, blowing his nose.

'Teboho!' called Vukani's mother. 'Please come and clear up here!' Teboho appeared carrying a tray. She had on denim jeans

...  
 'That was a nice cup of tea, Teboho,' said the other man. Teboho smiled shyly.

'When are you going back to 'varsity?' he asked.

'We have six more weeks,' replied Teboho.

'You are lucky to have children who are educating themselves, dearie,' said Mrs Beatrice.

'Oh, well,' said Vukani's mother, shrugging her shoulders as Teboho disappeared into the kitchen. There was some silence.

'Sometimes these South African Jews sicken me,' said the other man reflectively.

'Why?' the two women asked.

'Well, they're hypocrites! I mean look, they say they were killed left and right by the Germans, but here they are, here, helping the Boers to sit on us.'

'How can you say such a thing?' asked his wife. 'People like Mrs Kaplinsky are very good friends of ours. Some of her best friends are Africans.'

'Because she gives you recipes.'

'Food, my dear husband, belongs to mankind, not just to one race.'

'Yes, exactly,' agreed Vukani's mother. 'Like art, literature and things. Completely universal.'

'Well! ...' said the man, but he did not pursue the matter further.

'In fact this reminds me,' said Vukani's mother with sudden enthusiasm, her eyes glittering. 'Instead of sitting here talking politics, we should be listening to some music. Have you heard my son play? He plays the violin. A most wonderful instrument.'

'Yes,' said Vukani's father, 'you know ...'

Vukani swiftly shut the door, shutting out the living-room conversation with an abruptness that brought him sharply to himself as he moved to the centre of the room. He began to feel very lonely and noticed he was trembling. It was coming now. He looked at the history homework on the desk; then looked at the reading lamp with its circular light which seemed to be baking the open pages of the books on the desk with its intensity, so that the books looked as if they were waiting for that delicate moment when they would burst into flame.

Then he thought of Doksi, his friend. He wondered where he

was and what he was doing at that moment. Friday evening? Probably watching his father cutting the late evening customers' hair and trimming it carefully while he murmured a song, as always. Doksi had said to Vukani one day that when he was a grown-up he would like to be a barber like his father. Doksi seemed to love hair. Vukani remembered his favourite game: a weekly ritual of hair burning. Every Saturday afternoon Doksi would make a fire out in the yard and when it was burning steadily, toss knots of hair into it. The hair would catch fire with a crackling brilliance that always sent him into raptures of delight. He never seemed to mind the smell of the burning hair. One Saturday after his bonfire Doksi had said, while making the sign of the cross over the smoking fire: 'When God had finished burning hair he thought that it was good.' Vukani had playfully accused him of sacrilege. But Doksi, suddenly looking serious, had said: 'Dead things catch fire.'

Now, Vukani was suddenly fascinated by a desire to see the books on the desk aflame. Perhaps he should lower the lamp: bring it closer to the books. It was a silly idea, yet he lowered the lamp all the same. But the papers shone defiantly with a sheen. It was futile. Then he saw his violin again, and felt the sensation of fear deep in his breast.

He looked at the violin with dread, as something that could bring both pain and pleasure at once. It was like the red dress which Miss Yende, their class teacher in Standard Four, occasionally wore. She had once said to the class: 'When I wear this red dress, children, know that I will not stomach any nonsense that day. Know that I will expect sharp minds; I will expect quick responses to my questions; and I will expect absolute seriousness. And I shall use the stick with the vengeance of the God of the Old Testament.' That dress! It was a deep, rich, velvety red that gave the impression that the dress had a flowery fragrance. Yet, because it signalled the possibility of pain, it also had a dreadful repulsiveness.

Vukani tried to brace himself for the coming of the visitors. It was always like that. Every visitor was brought to his room, where he was required to be doing his school work or practising on the violin. Then he had to entertain these visitors with violin music. It was always an agonising nuisance to be an unwilling entertainer. What would happen if he should refuse to play that

night? He knew what his mother would say. It was the same thing every time. His eyes swept round the room. He was well provided for. There was the beautiful desk on which he did his work; bookshelves full of books, including a set of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; a reading lamp on the desk; two comfortable easy chairs; a wardrobe full of clothes; his own portable transistor radio; a violin and a music stand; a chest full of games: Monopoly, chess and many others. His mother never tired of telling him how lucky he was. There is not a single boy in the whole of Soweto – including here in Dube – who has a room like yours. Can you count them for me? Never! This room is as good as any white boy's. Isn't it exactly like Ronnie Simpson's? You yourself, you ungrateful boy, have seen that room when we visited the Simpsons in Parktown North. Kaffir children! That's what. Always ungrateful!

What did all this really mean to him when it brought so much pain? Vukani remembered what teacher Maseko had said at assembly one morning: 'Children, I would rather be a hungry dog that runs freely in the streets, than a fat, chained dog burdened with itself and the weight of the chain. Whenever the white man tells you he has made you much better off than Africans elsewhere on this continent, tell him he is lying before God! There were cheers that morning at assembly, and the children had sung the hymn with a feeling of energetic release:

*I will make you fishers of men  
Fishers of men  
Fishers of men  
I will make you fishers of men  
If you follow me.*

Three weeks later teacher Maseko was fired. The Principal made the announcement at morning assembly. He spoke in Afrikaans, always. Concluding the announcement he said: 'Children, a wandering dog that upsets garbage bins and ejects its dung all over the place, is a very dangerous animal. It is a carrier of disease and pestilence, and when you see it, pelt it with stones. What should you do to it?'

'Pelt it with stones!' was the sombre response of the assembled children that morning. Vukani wondered whether teacher Maseko was that dog. But how could anybody pelt

teacher Maseko with stones?

Vukani heard another roar of laughter from the living-room. But why did his mother have to show off at his expense in this manner? That Friday, as on all Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, he had carried his violin to school. The other children at school just never got used to it. It was a constant source of wonder and ridicule. 'Here's a fellow with a strange guitar!' some would say. Others would ask him to play the current township hits. It was so every day. Then one day his violin had disappeared from class while he had gone out to the toilet. He was met with stony faces when after school he pleaded for its return. Everybody simply went home and there was no sign of the violin. What would he say to his music teacher in town? What would he say to his mother? When he went out of the classroom he found Doksi waiting for him. They always went home together, except on the days when Vukani had to go to town for music lessons after school.

'Doksi,' he said, 'I can't find my violin. Somebody took it.'

'These boys of shit!' Doksi cursed sympathetically. He had not waited for details. He knew his friend's problem. 'Do you suspect anybody?'

'I can't say,' replied Vukani. 'The whole class seems to have ganged up on me. There are some things that will always bring them together.'

'Even Gwendoline?' asked Doksi with a mischievous smirk on his face.

Gwendoline was the frail, brilliant, beautiful girl who vied with Vukani for first position in class. Vukani had always told Doksi that he would like to marry her one day. And Doksi would always say: 'With you it's talk, talk all the time. Why don't you just go to this girl and tell her you love her? Just look at how she looks at you. She is suffering, man!'

'Look,' said Vukani, 'this is no time for jokes. My violin is lost.'

'The trouble with you, Vukani, is that you are too soft. I would never stand this nonsense. I'd just face the whole class and say: "Whoever took my violin is a coward. Why doesn't he come out and fight?" I'm sure it was taken by one of those big boys whom everybody fears. Big bodies without minds! They ought to be working in town. Just at school to avoid paying tax.



My whole family would come here looking for the bastards.'

'Let's go tell the principal,' suggested Vukani. The principal was one of those Vukani had entertained one day in his bedroom. 'But maybe we shouldn't,' said Vukani changing his mind.

'Let's go and find out from the girls sweeping your classroom,' suggested Doksi. They went back.

Most of the children had gone now. Only those whose turn it was to clean the classrooms remained. The girls were singing loudly and the room was full of dust.

'Leave it to me,' said Doksi.

There were four girls in the classroom. Gwendoline and Manana were as old as Doksi and Vukani. The other two girls, Topsana and Sarah, were much older.

'Hey, you girls,' shouted Doksi, squaring his shoulders and looking like a cowboy about to draw. 'Where is the bloody violin?' The bigger girls simply laughed.

'And who are you, toughie?' said Sarah pushing a desk out of the way for Topsana to sweep.

'Hey you, Vukani,' called Topsana, 'I want to soothe your heart. I've long been waiting for this moment. Come and kiss me.' The smaller girls giggled and Vukani regretted that they had come back. 'I mean it,' said Topsana. 'I know who took your violin. It's safe. You'll find it at home. I made them promise to take it there. There now, I want my kiss. I want to kiss the inspector's son.'

Meanwhile, Doksi turned to the younger girls: 'Hey you, what is the joke? What's there to laugh at?'

'Hha!' protested Manana, sweeping rather purposefully. 'Laughing is laughing.'

'I can show you a thing or two,' Doksi said. 'Punch you up or something.'

'Doksi,' appealed Vukani. 'Please let's go.' Doksi clearly felt the need for retreat, but it had to be done with dignity. He addressed all the girls with a sweep of his hands. 'You are all useless. One of these days I'll get you. Come on, Vukani, let's go.'

The walk home for Vukani had been a long one. Better not to tell the parents. If Topsana had been telling the truth, then he

should wait. Nobody asked about the violin that night. But he would never forget the morning following that day, when his mother stormed into his bedroom, black with anger. She simply came in and pulled the blankets off him. Then she glared at him, holding the violin in one of her hands. Vukani had felt so exposed, as if his mother would hit him with the violin. It was very early in the morning. His mother was already dressed up in her uniform, ready to go to work. If she was on day duty, she had to leave very early for the hospital.

'Vukani!' she shouted. 'What desecration is this? What ultimate act of ungratefulness is this? Is this to spite me? Is this an insult? Tell me before I finish you off.'

'What's happening, Dorcas?' Vukani saw his father entering the bedroom.

'Can you believe this? I found this violin on the doorstep outside as I was leaving for work. Can you believe this?'

'Vukani,' said his father. 'What on earth should have made you do such a thing?'

'I didn't put it there, *Baba*,' Vukani replied.

'Nonsense,' shouted his mother. 'You don't have to lie. Ungrateful boy, you have the nerve to tell your parents a lie.'

'Wait a minute, dear, maybe we should hear what he has to say.' Vukani had nothing to say. The deep feeling of having been wronged could only find expression in tears. He heard the violin land next to him and he recoiled from its coldness. He also heard his mother leave, saying that he was crying because of his sins. She never knew what had happened and seemed not to care.

But that was last year. Today he had been humiliated again in public, and there were people in that living-room who wanted to humiliate him again. Right inside his home. It was all because of this violin. The homework had made him forget the latest ordeal for a while. The homework was like a jigsaw puzzle; you simply looked for pieces which fitted. All the answers were there in the chapter. You just moved your finger up and down the page until you spotted the correct answer. There was no thinking involved. But now it was all gone. It was not South African History, the story of the coming of the white man, he was looking at; he was now faced with the reality of the violin.

There was that gang of boys who always stood under the shop veranda at Maponya's shopping complex. They shouted:

'Hey, music man!' whenever he went past their 'headquarters' on his way home to Dube. That very Friday they had done more than shout at him from a distance. They had stopped him and humiliated him before all those workers who were returning from work in town.

'Hey, music man!' the one who seemed to be their leader had called. Vukani, as a rule, never answered them. He just walked on as if he had not heard anything. But that afternoon as he was coming up from Phefeni station and was turning round the corner to go down towards the AME Church, it was as if the gang had been waiting for him.

'Hey, music man!' This time it was a chorus. A rowdy chorus. Out of the corner of his eye Vukani saw two boys detach themselves from the gang. He dare not turn to look. He had to act unconcerned. He tried to quicken his step as imperceptibly as possible.

'Music man! Don't you know your name?' They were behind him now. Crossing the street had been no problem for them. They simply walked into the street and cars came to a screeching halt. They were the kings of the township. They just parted the traffic as Moses must have parted the waves of the sea. Vukani wanted to run, but he was not going to give himself away. If he ran and they caught up with him they could do a lot of harm to him. He had had that feeling once - of wanting to take advantage of something weaker than him - when he'd found a stray dog trying to topple a garbage bin. If the dog had stood its ground and growled, he would have been afraid. But the dog had taken to its heels, tail tucked between legs, and Vukani had been filled with the urge to run after the dog, catch it, and beat it to death. As fleeing impala must excite the worst destructive urge in a lion. Vukani had once seen a film in which a lion charged at a frightened impala. There had been a confidence in the purposeful strides of the lion, as if it felt this was just a game that would surely end with the bringing down of the prey.

A hand grabbed Vukani's collar from behind and jerked him violently to a halt. The leader of the gang came round and faced him. He held Vukani by the knot of his tie. He was short but heavily built. He had puffed-up cheeks with scars on them. His bloodshot eyes suggested the violence in him. He must have been four or five years older than Vukani.

'Spy!' the leader cursed, glaring at Vukani. 'So you are special! So we had to cross the street and risk death in order to talk to you. You don't know your name, music man? Every day we greet you nice-nice and you don't answer. Because you think you are being greeted by shit. By scum, hey? Why, spy? Are we shit?'

'Ja! Just answer that,' said the fellow behind. 'Are we shit?' Vukani tried to free his neck.

'Shit!' screamed the leader. 'We just wanted to talk to you nice-nice. That's all. We just wanted to dance to your music a little. Dance to your guitar a little. But no. You don't even look at us. Do we smell, music man? Do we smell?' There was a crowd of workers now who were watching the spectacle quietly.

'Shake him up, Bhuka!' was the chorus from the rest of the gang about thirty yards away at the shop.

'What are you rogues doing to this poor boy?' asked an old lady who had a bundle of washing on her head.

'Shut up!' said Bhuka. 'Go and do your white man's washing, he'll want it tomorrow.' Some in the crowd laughed at this.

'Dogs of the street! Don't talk like that to your mother. Whose child are you?'

'I'm your child,' said Bhuka with a certain flourish. This time more of the crowd laughed.

'He's the child of his mother!' said the boy behind Vukani. None laughed at that one. He was in the shadow of his leader.

'You are laughing,' said the woman, bravely addressing the crowd. 'You are laughing at this boy being harassed, and you are laughing at me being insulted by these street urchins. I could be your mother, and this could be your son. Sies! You rogues, just let decent people be.' The woman then left, taking Vukani's hopes with her. But she had not left Bhuka unsettled. He had to move his prey to safer ground. Too many lesser animals could be a disturbance. He tightened his grip around Vukani's tie pulling him across the street towards the 'headquarters'. Vukani looked at the fist below his chin, and saw that it had a little sixth finger. There were two shining copper bangles round the wrist.

Part of the crowd left, but another part wanted to see the game to its end. They followed the trio to the shop. The gang then had Vukani completely encircled.

'Do you have a sister?' Bhuka snapped. Vukani had trouble

... when she came here she would  
might for him. 'I asked you a question. Do you have a sister?'  
Vukani nodded. 'Hey man, talk! Is your voice precious? His  
master's voice!'

'Yes,' answered Vukani in a whisper.

'I want to fuck her. Do you hear? I want to eat her up  
thoroughly. Do you hear? Tell her that.' Bhuka paused and  
jerked Vukani to and fro so that Vukani's head bobbed. He then  
stopped and glowered at Vukani. 'And what song will you play  
when I am on top of her?' There was a festive laugh from the  
crowd. Bhuka looked round with acknowledgement. 'Tell me  
now, can you play *Thoko Ujola Nobani*?' It was a current hit.

Vukani felt tears in his eyes. He winked many times to keep  
them in. Why couldn't they just leave him alone? That day  
would be final, he would simply tell his parents that he did not  
want to play the violin again. If they still insisted he would run  
away from home.

'Please leave me alone,' he heard himself say.

'I asked you. Can you play *Thoko Ujola Nobani*?'

Vukani shook his head.

'Why, music man?'

'I'd have to learn how to play it first. I can't just play it like  
that.'

'Next time you pass here you must be knowing that song.  
And come with your sister.' Then he gave Vukani a shove at the  
chest, and Vukani reeled backwards and fell on his back. But he  
still held on to the violin.

'Next time we greet you nice-nice, you must greet nice-nice.'  
Vukani got up timidly and hurried away, glancing back  
occasionally. Somehow he felt relieved. It could have been  
worse. The stories he had heard about the violence of this gang  
were simply unbelievable. He felt deep inside him the laughter  
that followed him as he slunk away. Just after passing the AME  
church he saw the rubbish heap people had created at the corner  
and wished he were brave enough to throw the violin there.

'My son,' his mother had said one day when Vukani com-  
plained about the harassment he suffered as a result of the  
violin, 'you should never yield to ignorance.'

'But maybe you should buy me a piano,' Vukani had said. 'I

'If Yehudi Menuhin had listened to fools he wouldn't be the  
greatest living violinist. A violin you have and a violin you will  
play.' That's how it had ended. But his agony continued, three  
times a week.

Then the door opened. 'Here he is!' said Vukani's mother as  
she led the visitors in. His father took the rear. Vukani looked  
blankly at the homework. Question three: Who introduced the  
European type of education among the Bantu? ... But Vukani felt  
only the solid presence of four people behind him.

'Vuka,' said his mother. 'I did not hear you practise today.' It  
was not clear from her voice whether she was finding fault with  
her son or was just trying to have something to say by way of  
introduction. Vukani turned round and smiled sheepishly. They  
all looked at him as if they expected him to defend himself, their  
eyes occasionally going to the table as if to see what he was  
doing.

'Are you doing your homework, son?' asked the male visitor.

'E!'

'Good, hard-working boy!' he said patting Vukani on the  
shoulders. Vukani felt in that hand the heaviness of condescen-  
sion.

'He's a very serious-minded boy,' added his mother with  
obvious pride.

'You are very happy, dearie, to have a child who loves  
school,' observed Mrs Beatrice.

'And here is my Mozart's violin,' said Vukani's father, point-  
ing at the violin against the wall. He took the case, opened it and  
took out the violin.

'Vuka!'

'Ma!'

'These visitors are the mother and father of Lauretta. Do you  
know her?'

'No, I don't think I do,' said Vukani shaking his head.

'But you are at the same school together. Surely you know  
Lauretta, the daughter of Doctor Zwane. Stand up to greet  
them.'

Now Vukani remembered the girl who was well known at  
school for her brilliance. She was two classes ahead of Vukani.  
But Vukani wondered if she could beat Gwendoline. Vukani



vuka, you will play the visitors something, won't you? What will you play us?' asked his mother. Vukani looked at the violin in his father's hands. He was explaining to Dr Zwane the various kinds of violins.

'This type,' he was saying, 'is very rare. You do not find it easily these days. Not at all.'

'It must have been very expensive,' observed Dr Zwane appreciatively. 'One can judge from its looks.'

'Five hundred and fifty rands down,' butted in Vukani's mother.

'Made to specifications. You just tell them how you want it and they make it. This is special.'

'One has to pay to produce a Mozart,' said Vukani's father with finality.

'We had Laretta started on ballet recently,' said Mrs Zwane, as if suggesting that they were also doing their duty. 'I'm happy to note that she seems to be doing well. All these things have to be taught at our schools. You school inspectors have a duty to ensure that it happens.'

'Indeed,' agreed Vukani's father. 'But do you think the Boers would agree? Never. Remember they say Western Civilisation is spoiling us, and so we have to cultivate the indigenous way of life.' The conversation was stopped by Vukani's mother.

'Okay now,' she clapped her hands, 'what will you play us?'

Vukani's father brought the violin to Vukani who took it with his visibly shaking hands. He saw the red, glowering eyes of Bhuka that afternoon. He heard the laughter of people in the streets. He remembered being violently shaken awake by his angry mother one morning. He remembered one of his dreams which came very frequently. He was naked in the streets and people were laughing. He did not know how he became naked. It always occurred that way. He would be naked in the streets and people would be laughing. Suddenly he would reach home and his mother would scold him for bringing shame to the family. But the dream would always end with his leaving home and flying out into the sky with his hands as wings.

Vukani found he had instinctively put the violin on his left shoulder. And when he realised that, he felt its irksome weight on him. What did people want of him? He did not want to play.

He did not want to play. And for the second time that day, he felt tears coming to his eyes, and again he winked repeatedly to keep them from flowing. This was the time.

'Mama!'

'Yes son.' But Vukani did not go on. His mother continued. 'Why don't you play some selections from Brahms? You know some excerpts from his *only* violin concerto. What about Liszt? Where are your music books? There is something on the music stand; what is it? Ahh! It's the glorious, beautiful Dvorak! Tum tee tum! Tum tee tum!' She shook her head, conducting an imaginary orchestra. 'Come and play some of this Dvorak.'

Vukani wanted to shout but his throat felt completely dry. He wanted to sink into the ground. He tried to swallow. It was only dryness he swallowed, and it hurt against the throat. Standing up would be agonising. His strength and resistance were all gathered up in his sitting position. All that strength would be dissipated if he stood up. And he would feel exposed, lonely and vulnerable. The visitors and his parents soon noticed there was something amiss.

'What is it, Vuka?' asked his mother. 'Is there something wrong?'

'Nothing wrong, Ma,' said Vukani, shaking his head. He had missed his opportunity. Why was he afraid? Why did he not act decisively for his own good? Then he felt anger building up in him, but he was not sure whether he was angry with himself, or with his parents, together with the visitors whose visit was now forcing him to come to terms with his hitherto unexpressed determination to stop doing what brought him suffering.

At that moment there was a dull explosion seemingly coming from the kitchen, of something massive suddenly disintegrating into pieces. There was a moment's silence, then Vukani's mother muttered: 'The bloody street girl has done it again,' and she stormed out of the bedroom. Her voice could be heard clearly in the kitchen: 'Awu, Lord of the heavens! my ... my expensive ... my precious ... my expensive ... this girl has done it again. Teboho! Has the devil got into you again? Do you have to be breaking something every day?'

'It slipped out of my hand,' said Teboho in a subdued voice.

'What kind of hands do you have?' said her mother shrieking

'What a costly mistake! Oh, my God. What a costly one! I gave Mrs Willard three hundred rands to bring me this set from Hong Kong when she went there on holiday. And I've pleaded with you countless times to be extra careful with the china!'

'Ma, I didn't just dash the pot to the floor ...'

'And such care doesn't cost much. How many households in the whole of Johannesburg, white and black, can boast of owning such a set ... a genuine set? Will you not appreciate that? Don't just stand there ...'

'Mama, can you please stop that.' Teboho's voice sounded urgently restrained.

'Is that how you are talking to me?'

'You don't want to listen to anybody. You just came in here shouting.' Teboho's voice was loud with a note of defiance. It seemed to have lost all restraint.

'Is that how they teach you to talk to your parents at the University?'

'Mama, that is not the point.'

'Are you arguing with me?'

'I'm not ...'

'Then what are you saying?'

'You're always telling us not to break dishes, not to scratch the furniture, not to break your house plants, there are so many things one cannot do in this house ... Haven't you been showing more interest in your dishes than in your children?'

'What?'

'I'm not going to say anything more.'

'What decent girl, but a slut, can talk like that to her mother, and there are visitors in the house?'

'Mama, will you stop!' There was a sound of a slap. Another explosion. Lighter this time; perhaps a glass.

'You've slapped me!' screamed Teboho. 'I'm leaving this house; you can stay with it. If you want to be a slave to things, then do it alone.' There was the sound of a little scuffle, followed by hurrying footsteps. Then the door to Teboho's bedroom banged shut, rattling some cutlery.

Vukani's father was about to leave for the kitchen when he

'I'm sorry for that unfortunate diversion,' she said. 'Children can be destructive. Since Teboho went to that university in the north she has some very strange ideas. Opposes everything. Defiant. Can you have your own child calling you a white black woman, a slave of things?'

And then she mimicked Teboho's voice: ' "That's how it's planned. That we be given a little of everything, and so prize the little we have that we forget about freedom." Fancy. Forgive me; but I had to remind this show-off girl that I was her parent.'

There was a moment's silence of embarrassment. The adults all exchanged glances. A wave of sadness crossed Vukani's mother's face. But it did not last.

'One can never know with children, dearie,' observed Mrs Zwane, breaking the silence.

'Indeed!' said her husband. There was another silence.

'Well Vuka,' said Vukani's father at last. 'Can you heal our broken spirits?'

'Yes!' agreed his mother. 'We have been waiting for too long.'

Vukani thought of his sister. He wanted to go to her. They were very lonely. Their parents disapproved of many of their friends. Even Doksi. His mother had said he should have friends of his own station in life. What would a barber's son bring him? All this had brought Vukani and Teboho very close. He decided then that he would not let his sister down. But what could he do? He thought of dashing the violin against the wall, and then rushing out of the house. But where would he go? Who did he know nearby? The relatives he knew lived very far away. He did not know them all that well, anyhow. He remembered how envious he would be whenever he heard other children saying they were going to spend their holidays with their relatives. Perhaps a grandmother or an uncle. He remembered once asking his mother when were they ever going to visit his uncle. His mother had not answered him. But then there was that conversation between his parents.

'By the way,' Vukani's mother had started it, 'when did you say your sister would be coming?'

'Next month.' There had been a brief silence before his father continued. 'Why do you ask? I have been telling you practically

'Well,' his father had said, putting down the *Daily Mail* and picking up the *Star*, 'I just feel there is more to the question than meets the eye.'

'You think so?'

'Yes, I think so.' There had been silence.

'Relatives,' his mother had come out eventually 'can be a real nuisance. Once you have opened the door, they come trooping in like ants. We cannot afford it these days. Not with the cost of living. These are different times. Whites saw this problem a long time ago. That is why they have very little time for relatives. Nuclear family! That's what matters. I believe in it. I've always maintained that. If relatives want to visit, they must help with the groceries. There I'm clear, my dear. Very clear.' Vukani's father had said something about 'Whites are whites; Africans are Africans.' But Vukani's aunt never came. Nobody ever said anything about her. Yet, Doksi liked to say: 'It's nice to have many relatives. Then when you are in trouble at home, you can always hide with one of them. And your father will go from relative to relative looking for you. When he finds you, he will be all smiles trying to please the relatives.'

'Vukani!' called his mother. 'We are still waiting. Will you start playing now?'

Vukani stood up slowly, feeling every movement of his body, and walked round to the music stand. Then he faced his mother, and something yielded in him.

'Ma, I don't want to play the violin any more.' There was a stunned silence. Vukani's mother looked at her husband, a puzzled expression on her face. But she quickly recovered.

'What?' she shouted.

'I don't want to play the violin any more.' Vukani was surprised at his steadiness.

'This is enough!' screamed his mother. 'Right now ... right now. You are going to play that violin right now.'

'Now you just play that instrument. What's going on in this house?' His father's voice put some fear into him.

'Wait, dearie,' pleaded Mrs Zwane. 'Maybe the boy is not well.'

'Beatrice,' answered Vukani's mother, 'there is nothing like

cheeky brute!'

'Today those boys stopped me again ...' Vukani attempted to justify his stand.

'Who?' shrieked his mother. 'Those dogs of the street? Those low things?'

'What's bothering him?' asked Dr Zwane. Vukani's mother explained briefly. Then turning toward her husband she said, 'As I told you the other day, he keeps complaining that people laugh at him because he plays the violin.'

'Jealousy!' shouted Mrs Zwane. 'Plain jealousy. Jealousy number one. Nothing else. Township people do not want to see other Africans advance.'

'Dear,' answered Vukani's mother, 'you are showing them some respect they do not deserve. If you say they are jealous you make them people with feelings. No. They do not have that. They are not people. They are animals. Absolutely raw. They have no respect for what is better than they. Not these. They just trample over everything. Hey, you, play that instrument and stop telling us about savages.'

Vukani trembled. He felt his head going round now. He did not know what to do to escape from this ordeal. The tears came back, but this time he did not stop them. He felt them going down his cheeks, and he gave in to the fury in him. 'I do not want to play ... I do not want to play ... not any more! ...' Then he choked and could not say anything more. But what he had said had carried everything he felt deep inside him. He felt free. There was a vast expanse of open space deep inside him. He was free. He could fly into the sky.

Then he heard Dr Zwane say: 'How difficult it is to bring up a child properly in Soweto! To give him culture. African people just turn away from advancement.'

Those words seemed to build a fire in Vukani's mother. They sounded like a reflection on her. She let go at Vukani with the back of her hand. Vukani reeled back and fell on the bed letting the violin drop to the floor. It made no noise on the thick carpet. Then she lifted him from the bed, and was about to strike him again when Teboho rushed into the bedroom and pulled her mother away from her brother.

'Ma! What are you doing? What are you doing?' she

... you fighting me: shikela her mother. You laid a hand on your mother. Am I bewitched?

'You never think of anybody else. Just yourself.'

'Teboho,' called her father. 'Don't say that to your mother.'

'Please, dearie, please,' appealed Mrs Zwane. 'There is no need for all this. How can you do this to your children?'

'Sies! What disgraceful children! I am a nursing sister, your father is an inspector of schools. What are you going to be, listening to savages. You cannot please everybody. Either you please the street, in which case you are going to be a heap of rubbish, something to be swept away, or you please your home, which is going to give you something to be proud of for the rest of your useless life!'

'Dorcas! That's enough now,' said Vukani's father with calm, but firm finality. Vukani's mother looked at her husband with disbelief, a wave of shock crossing her face. She looked at the visitors who stared at her. Then she turned for the door and went to her bedroom, banging the door violently. Soon there was bitter sobbing in the main bedroom. Then it turned into the wail of the bereaved.

MIA COUTO

## The Barber's Most Famous Customer

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Firipe Beruberu's barber's shop was situated under the great tree in the market at Maquinino. Its ceiling was the shade of the crab apple. Walls, there were none: which is why it blew all the cooler round the chair where Firipe sat his customers. A sign on the tree trunk displayed his prices. On it was written: '7\$50 per head'. But with the rising cost of living, Firipe had amended the inscription to: '20\$00 per headful'.

On the ageing timbers there hung a mirror, and next to it, a yellowing photo of Elvis Presley. On a crate, by the bench where the customers sat waiting, a radio shook to the rhythm of the *chimandjemandje*.

Firipe would weed heads while talking all the while. Barber's talk about this and that. But he didn't like his chitchat to tire his customers. When someone fell asleep in the chair, Beruberu would slap a tax on the final bill. Underneath the prices listed on his sign, he had even added: 'Headful plus sleep - extra 5 escudos'.

But in the generous shade of the crab apple tree there was no room for anger. The barber distributed affabilities, handshakes. Whoever let his ears wander in that direction heard only genial talk. When it came to advertising his services, Firipe never held back:

'I'm telling you: me, I'm the best barber there is. You can walk anywhere round here, look into every neighbourhood: they'll all tell you Firipe Beruberu is the greatest.'

Some customers just sat there patiently. But others provoked him, pretending to contradict him:

'That's fine salestalk, Master Firipe.'

'Salestalk? It's the truth! I've even cut top quality white man's hair.'

'What? Don't tell me you've ever had a white man in this barber's shop ...'

'I didn't say a white had been here. I said I'd cut his hair. And

## THE COMMERCIAL GUIDE

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SHORT STORY

## DEFINITION

The short story is a particular form of fiction and is not merely an abridged novel. According to TES Finn, all fiction is "an effort on the part of the reader to communicate his view of the world to the reader". In the novel the reader is introduced to the writer's fictional world gradually. There are many characters, many events and many emotions involved in it. In the short story, however, the reader is flung headlong into this world and contact between writer and reader is immediate.

The short story usually has one main character, one event and one emotion or series of emotions, produced by one situation. The difference between the novel and the short story is therefore not so much one of length as one of approach.

## CHARACTERISTICS

These may be summed up as follows:

1. It has a restricted or limited length.
2. It is a concentrated, intense form of writing. Only essential details are revealed.
3. The short story has a limited setting, i.e. the action is usually confined to a single place.
4. It usually points out or emphasises some truth about life. A short story tends to enrich the reader's experience of life.
5. The number of characters in a short story is limited. Often there is only one

who are connected to the main character in some way.

## STUDYING THE SHORT STORY

When one studies the short story as a *genre* (or particular literary type) it is useful to examine the following aspects:

- Plot
- Character
- Setting
- Structure
- Style
- Point of view
- Tone

## PLOT

This is the arrangement or pattern of events and actions in the story.

It is important to note that development usually takes place in the short story. The reader is presented with the opening situation (also called the introduction or the exposition) where the necessary information to understand the story is given.

This is then developed in the main body of the story where the crisis (or dilemma) is introduced to the reader. The crisis involves a clash of ideas or events, a type of confrontation where forces confront one another in a kind of 'showdown'.

The end of the story presents the resolution of the conflict or crisis.

In "Gerty's Brother", for example, the opening situation involves the narrator and Hussein finding out about Gerty, and Hussein planning to seduce her at a party that is to be held. The plot develops when the relationship between Hussein and Gerty becomes more permanent and she and her brother move to Hussein's home. The crisis or conflict occurs when Hussein suspects he is being watched because of his 'illegal' association with a white girl and he leaves for Durban, while Gerty and her brother presumably move back in with their older alcoholic brother. The resolution focuses on the sadness and confusion of little Riekie and on the narrator's bitterness that such a situation could occur.

The conflict here involves *the struggle between the vulnerable human spirit and an inflexible and inhumane system.*

Conflict in a short story may be one of many types: the plot of "The Homecoming", for example, which involves *the clash between an individual's values and the expectations of his society and family*, develops through a series of flashbacks. These are used to provide the reader with a clearer understanding of the main character, Nicholas Dassault.

In "Nocturne" there is yet another type of conflict – *the collision between two very different worlds or social strata.* In "Bruns" the conflict is rather more complex: not only are individuals – Bruns and Deon Du Toit -- *pitted against each other, but whole communities – the Bakorwa and the Boers -- are also in conflict.*

It is clear, therefore, that conflict can be of many types: hero versus villain, man against nature, man against society, man against himself etc.

The device of suspense is frequently used by the short story writer; it helps to keep the reader involved in the story and also to keep him reading to find out how the conflict is resolved.

## CHARACTER

It could be said that analysing character in a short story involves identifying three things: the kind of character, the function of character and the methods of characterisation that the writer uses.

### KINDS OF CHARACTER

Characters in a short story may be classified in a number of ways:

- They may be classified as either round or flat characters. Flat characters (also referred to as 'types') are presented in outline, with no individualising details. They can usually be described in a single sentence. The character of Gerty in "Gerty's Brother", for example, can be described as flat, since she undergoes no development and has few individualising characteristics at all. Round characters, on the other hand, are complex, developed and individualised. They have particular characteristics, such as the character of Bruns in "Bruns".
- They may be classified as a hero or a foil. The hero is often referred to as the protagonist and he is the chief character in the story. He is also a developing character. The foil, also referred to as the antagonist, is not developed (he is static) and is a minor character in the story.

## FUNCTIONS OF CHARACTER

- Character is used to convey the theme or central idea of the story
- The reader's feelings are manipulated by characters: we usually identify with the protagonist and feel empathy for him or her.
- The short story writer's main aim may be the exploration of a single individual, in which case he would attempt to create a developed, three-dimensional character. The character of Nicholas Dassault in "The Homecoming" is an example of this.
- Minor characters (foils) are only included in a story to bring out a particular characteristic in the main character or to make a particular point.

## METHODS OF CHARACTERISATION

The writer uses two ways to reveal the nature of his characters:

- **Direct characterisation** (also referred to as the expository method). Here the writer gives us information about a character directly.
- **Indirect characterisation** (also called dramatic characterisation). Here the reader learns about the character through his actions and through the dialogue, as well as through the opinions and comments of other characters. In "The Music of the Violin", for example, we learn a great deal about Vukani's mother through her actions, reactions and attitudes towards her children and her visitors. In this way we are able to draw conclusions about her character.

## SETTING

The term "setting" refers to the physical background, the time and the place, and the social and historical environment used in the story.

The short story writer is always selective in the details of setting he presents. It helps him to create a particular atmosphere.

"Bruns" is set in the remote town of Keteng in Botswana in the post-independence years. The details of time and place provided immediately suggest to the reader what to expect in terms of relationships between the various groups who live in this "broiling-hot empty thornveld". In "Rain" the dismal, rain-soaked streets and repeated references to the storm – for example, "The northwester sobbed heavy rain squalls against the windowpanes" -- help create the bleak atmosphere which appropriately reflects Siena's fears and heartache.

## STRUCTURE

Style and structure are closely interrelated. To illustrate this point one could look at "The Homecoming": the series of flashbacks to significant events in the protagonist's life forms the basic structure of the story. One could also say, however, that this is a *stylistic* feature.

## STYLE

Style is a rather difficult and complex concept to define. It is, essentially, the writer's distinctive use of language and devices; in other words, the particular techniques he employs to write his material. It involves many aspects, some of which are:



- **DICTION** This refers to the writer's particular choice of words and phrases. Diction may be plain, descriptive, precise, controlled, emotive or technical, to name but a few possibilities.
  - **SENTENCE STRUCTURE AND LENGTH** These may vary in order to create certain effects. For example, a writer may use sentences that are loose or periodic. In other words he may use sentences in which the main point or main clause comes first, followed by all the subordinate clauses (Loose) OR sentences in which all the subordinate clauses come first and the main point or main clause is presented last (Periodic) – to create various effects. He may also vary the length of his sentences: longer sentences create a flowing, relaxed mood, whereas shorter sentences can create tension). **REPETITION** may also play a role in sentence arrangement.
  - **PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE** The length of paragraphs creates particular effects. For example, shorter paragraphs can effectively create tension. Note how Achmat Dangor achieves this in “The Homecoming”.
  - **NARRATIVE (STORY-TELLING) TECHNIQUES** This includes the point-of-view( type of narrator ) the writer selects in the telling of his story (see below), the inclusion or absence of dialogue, the arrangement of the events in the plot and so on. For example, a writer may deliberately withhold certain details of his story from the reader until the end of the story, to create suspense; or he may include a surprise turn of events for a more interesting plot.
  - **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE** Some writers use figures of speech very liberally in their writing, while others use very few, preferring a more lit use of language.
  - **USE OF PUNCTUATION** Note here the writer's use of question marks, exclamation marks, brackets and dashes, as well as his use of dialogue and the manner in which he punctuates dialogue.
- When attempting to describe a writer's style you could ask yourself these questions, amongst others:
- ◆ Has the writer used a narrative style? In other words, has he created a story?
  - ◆ Has he used technical language (or jargon?)
  - ◆ Has the writer used figurative language?
  - ◆ Is the writing factual and objective or imaginative and subjective?
  - ◆ What type of diction has the writer chosen? Has he used colloquial language or is it more formal and sophisticated?
  - ◆ Has he used emotive words/language?
  - ◆ What tone has he used to tell his story or describe his characters?
  - ◆ What sentence structure and paragraphing construction has been used? Is the writing consequently relaxed or tense?
  - ◆ What type of narrator has he used and why? (see below)



## THEME

This term refers to the underlying concept, dominant idea or moral lesson of a story.

Usually, writers deliberately write *around* a theme. In other words, they develop a plot – with characters, setting etc – around an idea they want to express, to make that idea easier for the reader to understand. For example, one of the themes of “Bruns” is that of the consequences of prejudice. This theme is conveyed by means of the plot – the attitudes of the various groups towards each other and the consequences of these attitudes.

Sometimes a writer’s idea (theme) is expressed *directly*. Note that the theme of a story (or poem or novel) should be described in a sentence rather than in a single word. For example, it should never be described as “love” or “death” or “parenthood” but rather as “the healing power of love” or “death is not the end of life but rather as stepping-stone into eternal life”, etc.

## POINT OF VIEW

Point of view is the outlook from which the events in a story are related. The story is told through the eyes of a narrator:

### FIRST PERSON NARRATOR

This may be one of the characters involved in the story, or even the main character (protagonist). It may also be an outsider, one not involved in the story but who looks on and observes the action and the characters. This narrator then tells the story from his personal point of view (“I”) and speaks directly to the reader.

Naturally, this type of narrator has its limitations as obviously ‘he’ cannot see into the minds and hearts of the characters and may not have knowledge about what happened before or after the events dealt with in the story. The advantage of using this method, however, is that it adds authenticity to the story. We see this in “Gerty’s Brother”, for example, where the narrator’s anger at the system in which he finds himself is all the more convincing since the story is being told from his personal experience.

### THIRD PERSON NARRATOR

Here the story is told by a voice which is *apparently* that of the author. It may be either an omniscient narrator or a limited third person narrator.

The Omniscient Narrator has knowledge of all the characters and their thoughts and feelings. Omniscient literally means ‘having all knowledge’. Njabulo Ndebele’s story “The Music of the Violin” has an omniscient narrator.

The limited third person narrator means exactly that: the narrator’s knowledge is limited, usually to the thoughts and actions of only one of the characters in the story.

## OTHER IMPORTANT TERMINOLOGY

### TONE

This is an important term to understand when discussing any work of literature. Tone may be defined as the writer’s attitude towards his subject and towards the reader. When we speak our listeners can detect our tone from our voice (hence the term ‘tone of voice’). For example, a teacher’s sarcastic comments about a

student's homework not being done indicates her attitude towards laziness, as well as her attitude towards that student.

It is a little more difficult to identify tone in a piece of writing. We have to examine a writer's diction in order to ascertain his attitude towards his subject.

## SYMBOLISM

A symbol is anything which stands for something else, or for more than the thing itself. For example, a red rose has come to symbolise love (or Valentine's Day) in our culture and a cross, in a civilisation where Christianity is understood, symbolises Christ's sacrifice for man by dying on the cross, or simply Christianity itself.

Symbols add to the reader's appreciation and understanding of the central idea or theme of a story. Look, for example, at the use of the violin as a symbol of status, wealth and advancement in Ndebele's story "The Music of the Violin".

## ATMOSPHERE

This term relates to the dominant mood or feeling of a piece of writing. A writer may create a tense mood, or a romantic mood or one of excitement, to name but a few. Atmosphere is largely the result of diction as well as sentence and paragraph structure, punctuation and other stylistic features. Here, again, consider the importance of atmosphere in a story such as "Rain". (See "Setting" page 3)

## IRONY

There are essentially two types of irony:

- where a writer (or speaker) means the opposite of what he is actually saying, we say that the writer (speaker) is being ironic. A rather simplistic

example might be when a teacher walks into a noisy classroom and remarks, "What a quiet, well-behaved group of students!" One might say, then, that that teacher is using irony. One's tone can be said to be ironic.

- irony is also said to occur when an event or situation turns out in the opposite manner - or at least in a different manner - to what one might have expected. It is sometimes described as 'the hand of fate' taking over a situation, where man is powerless and loses control over the outcome of events. In writing, irony is a technique that some writers use to add humour or to heighten the tragedy of a situation - as in "Die Bushie is Dood" where the writer includes details of the family row that occurs just before Johnny sets off for the rally; this is both ironic and tragic.

## FORESHADOWING

This is a popular device in the short story and it is where the writer hints at something that is to happen at a later stage of the plot. It is most effectively used in "The Homecoming" where the details of Nicholas's wanderings in Europe foreshadow the story's conclusion.

## TEMPO or PACE

It is interesting to note how the rhythm or pace of a story is influenced by aspects such as sentence and paragraph length. This tempo often reflects how quickly or slowly events in a story are moving. A rapid pace of narration can help the writer to create a feeling of excitement or anxiety, while a slow, leisurely pace can create a relaxed, serene atmosphere.

# THE WIND AND A BOY

- BESSIE HEAD

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The widely acclaimed novelist Bessie Head was born in Pietermaritzburg in 1937. She was the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy white woman and a black stable hand. In an effort to hide their daughter's shame, her grandparents had the child put into a children's home, while their daughter was condemned to a mental institute -- from where she never returned.

Bessie was initially adopted by a white family, but when they discovered she was Coloured, they refused to keep her. She was then adopted by a Coloured family, whom she regarded as her own. When they fell on hard times, however, she returned to the orphanage, remaining there until she left school.

She was unhappy in South Africa, but she was refused permission to leave. She eventually settled in Botswana but was never granted citizenship or a passport.

She died at a tragically early age in 1986 as the result of alcohol abuse. A topic she favoured in her writing was that of women entrapped in their particular society -- as she seems to have been.

Her novels include *Maru*, *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power*. She also wrote a number of short stories as well as other writings.

## VOCABULARY

enchanted (40)	- magical
condescended	- grudgingly agreed
crouched(40)	- knelt
inordinate(40)	- excessive
captivate(40)	- fascinate
indulged(41)	- took pleasure
spindly-legged	- thin-legged
gazelle(41)	- graceful antelope
scandalised(42)	- shocked
scanty(42)	- little
thrashing(42)	- hiding
hypnotised(42)	- fascinated
nuisance(42)	- problem
emissaries(43)	- messengers
repertoire(43)	- collection
churning(44)	- stirring
abode(44)	- house
chore(45)	- task
linger (46)	- stay
vividly(46)	- well remembered
embankment	- side
vigorously(46)	- quickly
preoccupation	- occupied
status(47)	- social standing
decapitated(47)	- headless

## CONTENT

Friedman grows up close to nature in his little village, hunting small animals with the other small boys. He is a child who had "a long wind blowing for him" -- he experiences the freedom that only an unsophisticated village child could know. His grandmother, Sejosenye, adores him: he is the last child she will raise, as she is growing old.

The grandmother takes him home from hospital after he is born and names him after one of the doctors who had been friendly to her as she waited for his birth. His mother goes to work in town. The community watches him grow up.

Sejoseny is a good farmer. When she was young she had attended a mission school where she had learned, amongst other things, the little song about Robinson Crusoe. This remained in her memory and became confused with other stories in her memory.

Sejoseny tells Friedman the story of how Robinson Crusoe kills an elephant single-handed. This inspires Friedman to become a dare-devil like this Robinson Crusoe of hers and he looks forward to the day when he can be the great hunter and bring home meat to the whole village. These stories awaken in Friedman a "great tenderness" for life.

As he approaches his fourteenth year, Friedman becomes aware of his responsibilities. The boy accompanies his grandmother to the lands she works some twenty miles from the village. He wants a bicycle so that he can help her by fetching supplies, or running messages. His mother sends him money for the bicycle.

Friedman is a "great hunter" for his grandmother as he traps wild rabbits or tortoises for the pot.

One day the grandmother sends Friedman to the village to buy some sugar and tea and milk. He goes on his bicycle. On his way to the village he stops at a friend of his grandmother who gives him a cup of tea and a plate of porridge. After the boy leaves, he rides to the main road where, out of the corner of his eye, he sees a fast-moving green truck approaching him. With his daredevil attitude he swerves

right into the path of the truck, smiling at the driver. The truck hits him violently and he is decapitated. When the grandmother is told of Friedman's death, she lingers a short time and then dies of grief.

It is said that the truck was the property of one of the rich civil-servant class. These people are in too much of a hurry to worry about anything except their new social status. They don't even bother about driving licences. There is thus a collision between the new class and the simple village and it looks as if the destructive force of the new class will not stop here.

#### COMMENT

The theme of this story is the conflict between the natural environment and that of the developed world. The boy is brought up in the land of the wind, which is natural and carefree. The wind implies a type of spiritual freedom, which is absent in the urban world.

All the evil that comes to the boy comes from this outside world. First of all, he loses his mother to this world as she goes there to live and work. Secondly, the story that inspires him to be a daredevil is that of Robinson Crusoe, a remnant of a story his grandmother remembers from the mission school. Thirdly, he receives the money for the bicycle, on which he is to meet his death, from his mother who sends it from this world. Finally, the green truck, which so violently brings about his death, is part of a world where people are trying to establish social status, without any thought to the safety of others.

The boy is described as having eyes like a gazelle. They are innocent and appealing.

Even though the boy is not 'perfect' in his behaviour, in his world even stealing doesn't bring condemnation to him, since it is carried out with the freedom of the spirit of the gazelle. Compared with the violence of the new order, emphasised by the fact that the boy is not just killed but *decapitated*, his mischievous stealing is harmless.

The story is a comment on the destructive nature of the new order where individuals are only interested in becoming rich and gaining status and one where the "wind" is ignored. Everything is hard and material.

### QUESTIONS

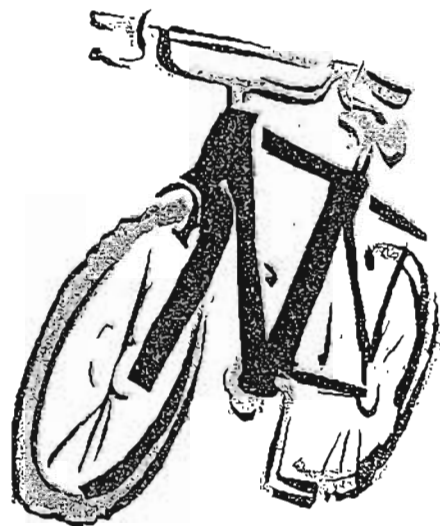
1. Comment on the significance of the title.
2. In what way is the boy caught between two cultures?
3. How does the mother contrast with the grandmother?
4. Why does the author describe the violence of the boy's death in such graphic detail?

### SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. The title 'The Wind and a Boy' conjures up the idea of the freedom that the young boy experiences both in his imagination and in his environment. This freedom is what is destroyed by the invasion of the Western world.
2. The boy is the result of a casual relationship, a practice introduced to Africa by Western culture. He is named after a foreign doctor. His mother is obviously ensconced in the modern world while he is brought up in the country, close to nature. However, he rides a bicycle and is

eventually killed by a vehicle driven by someone who is part of the new dispensation where status and money are all that count.

3. The mother is caught up in the Western world of work and money. The only support she ever offers Friedman is material support. There is no mention of any affection coming from his mother. On the other hand, his grandmother dotes on him and spends time developing him as a person. She is the one who inspires him and tells him stories and devotes her life to his well-being. Indeed, when Friedman dies, she dies of grief, whereas we don't even hear of his mother's response to his death.
4. The author is pointing out just how ruthless and cruel this culture is. The truck doesn't just kill him, it actually decapitates him. This action makes any "bad" activities Friedman took part in seem insignificant. It also reflects the violence of the impact this new culture has on the African way of life.



## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Norman Rush was born and educated in America. He lived in Botswana for a number of years; this is where this short story is set.

## VOCABULARY

baroque (75)	- 17 <sup>th</sup> Century ornate art style; here -- belonging to an earlier age
unregenerate (75)	- obstinately bad or wrong
hierarchy (75)	- social structure
anthropologist (75)	- one who studies societies & customs
elitist (75)	- believing that one belongs to a select group
contaminating(76)	- interfering
encumbering(76)	- burdening
arid (77)	- dry
sacrosanct (77)	- holy
voyeurism(77)	- obtaining pleasure from other people's actions
Cessna (77)	- type of aeroplane
Aryan (78)	- white or light-skinned person
de rigueur(78)	- required by custom
lactovegetarian (79)	- a vegetarian who includes milk in his diet
Hieronimus Bosch (80)	- artist who painted scenes from Hell
apropos (82)	- because of
vespers(84)	- prayers
self-immolation (85)	- self-sacrifice
Gotterdammerung- (85)	complete down-fall of a regime

## CONTENT

Keteng, a town in Botswana, was run by the descendants of the seven Boer families who had originally settled there. They owned everything in Keteng. A white American woman anthropologist tells the story of how Bruns – a Dutch volunteer worker – got the better of Deon Du Toit – a leader of the families – in a completely unexpected way. As a result of this, the whole oppressive character of the town was changed.

## DETAILED ANALYSIS

The narrator of the story is an American aid-worker, an anthropologist who, bored with her research project, spends much of her time in Keteng. Here she derives great satisfaction and enjoyment from watching people and speculating about events.

Keteng, a town in Botswana, was more or less owned by the descendants of seven Boer families. Generations before, the original settlers had been “trekking somewhere” when their ox-wagons broke down; they had then been rescued by the local people, the Bakorwa. Although the Boer families had nothing when they arrived, they now had everything; virtually everyone in town, including the chief and the locals, was under their control.

In the Bakorwa tribe, a “shame culture”, the law was traditionally upheld and justice was administered through public beatings. The fear of these and the shame that accompanied them kept the people in check. The customary court, run by the chief, administered these beatings,

but quite often those found doing something they shouldn't – servants, school children, wives and even animals – were given a good beating without the law getting involved. Everyone accepted this system and it seemed to work.

Then, however, Bruns, a volunteer worker, arrived from Holland. Bruns had an unsettling effect on the town. He was assigned as fleet mechanic at the missionary hospital and seemed to be able to fix anything. Soon, the Bakorwa started taking him their old machinery and vehicles and he fixed them at no charge in his spare time. This angered Deon Du Toit, the owner of Du Toit's garage and a leader of the seven families who ran the town.

In every imaginable way, Bruns was different from the Boer men. Whereas the Boers ate a great deal of meat and had paunches that hung over their trousers in a revolting fashion, Bruns was a strict vegetarian and very good looking, with a wonderful physique. The Boers regarded themselves as God's gift to any white woman who arrived in the area and as a consequence, had never bothered to cultivate good manners: they were coarse in their dealings with women. Bruns, on the other hand, had impeccable manners.

The Boer women could not help but notice the contrast between Bruns and their men and – bored with their lives of sleeping late, reading romance magazines, and putting on make-up – they began to flirt with him.

Although it does not appear that Bruns reciprocated, the Boer men disliked him intensely. The dislike was aggravated by the fact that the relationship between Dutch and Boer was an uneasy one at the best of times: they came from the same

stock, but the Dutch considered the Boers as inferior in every way.

Bruns was a pacifist and was horrified by the brutality that seemed to be everywhere in Keteng. He decided that he had to do something about it. He took to going to the customary court sittings where he stood and stared sorrowfully while the beatings were in progress -- an action which had no effect whatsoever. He then decided to accuse the seven families of being largely to blame for this culture of brutality and to challenge them to do something about it. To this end he visited Deon Du Toit.

The narrator is unsure whether Bruns went once or twice to Du Toit's house to speak to him about the beatings; but however many times it was, Du Toit had not been there and Bruns stayed to talk to Marika, Du Toit's wife. The narrator tells us that she had heard that there was an additional long, afternoon visit too.

When Du Toit heard about the visits, he beat both the housemaid and his wife, and then sent a message to Bruns, at the hospital, that he should come to see him immediately. After the second message had been rejected, Du Toit stormed to the hospital and there was an argument which was enjoyed tremendously by a number of Bakorwa spectators. Bruns remained calm throughout the exchange and finally ordered Du Toit out of the garage. Du Toit became more and more angry and finally threatened that Bruns had better be at his house at noon, or face the consequences.

When Bruns arrived at Du Toit's house, there was a large number of Bakorwa hanging about in the hopes of another spectacle. The biltong drying on Du Toit's veranda attracted flies, and as Bruns entered the house, flies flew in with him.

Du Toit came out onto the veranda and began to take a deep breath in order to shout at Bruns, inhaling a fly in the process. While Du Toit choked and spluttered and had to have the fly removed with a pair of tweezers by his wife, Bruns casually walked away, much to the delight of the Bakorwa spectators who remained to hear Du Toit yelling in fear.

The next morning Bruns was found drowned in the watering trough at Du Toit's house. Everyone had known of the confrontation between Du Toit and Bruns and so Du Toit was arrested. In his efforts to protect himself, Du Toit told a number of conflicting stories and was charged and put into jail. The result of all this was far-reaching: the chief, under whose protection Bruns had been staying in Keteng, lost his position; he, in turn, spoke out about the corruption and dealings of the seven families; the families faced several charges concerning bribery and taxes; the local Member of Parliament was able to base an election campaign on the corruption that was rife in the white sector of the society; many white shop owners lost their licences and some were forced to sell up; more police arrived to set up a station in the town; a regular court was going to be established.

The anthropologist relishes all these details, but is convinced that the final part of the story concerning Du Toit and Bruns is not correct. She warns us that the version she gives us is pure conjecture on her part, but she adds that she bases it on the knowledge she has of the characters of both men.

She believes that both men regarded the clash as a matter of personal honour: Du Toit was furious at the way things had turned out and so arranged for one of the Bakorwa to beat Bruns up. The beating in itself would be humiliating, but the fact

that it had been administered by a Bakorwa, one of those he had been trying to help, would be a suitable irony.

The anthropologist believes that, as a pacifist, Bruns put up no resistance to the beating. He knew who had instigated the action but would be unable to prove it. The fact that Du Toit has started selling water during the drought also enraged him. According to the anthropologist, Bruns longed to take revenge, but since he was a pacifist he had to think of something more subtle than simply having Du Toit beaten in return. His plan was masterful. He returned to Du Toit's house and plunged his head into the trough, taking a deep breath under water so as to fill his lungs and drown. He knew that suspicion would fall on Du Toit and that the fallout would also destroy other members of the seven families.

The anthropologist is quite sure that Bruns had worked out all the ramifications of this action, and had possessed the strength of character and determination to carry it out.

#### COMMENT

The first paragraph sets the tone for this short story. The hatred of "poor Bruns" is so disproportionate that the reader is prepared for an extravagant, almost soap opera -style story. Certainly the storyline itself is exaggerated – the confrontation between Bruns and Du Toit is farcical, and Bruns's revenge is so unbelievable as to be comic.

The main theme of the story is prejudice. The seven families had settled in Keteng, and although they have every reason to be grateful to the Bakorwa people who had rescued the original trekking party, they actively despise the locals and take



advantage of them. The chief is under their control and is kept in his place with bribes such as free petrol and gifts of alcohol. This had always been a means of subduing the local population. This attitude shows that they have no respect for the chief's traditional authority and also no regard for black culture as a whole.

The locals are also controlled through violence. Although this appears to be a traditional part of local culture, the Boers have made no attempt to change this and introduce a more temperate form of justice; they find it effective. The Boers have a negative attitude to the country as a whole. The narrator tells us that "when independence came, it meant next to nothing to them. They ignored it." Keteng is a remote town and the Boers used to doing what they wanted, black government or not. The narrator describes the relationship between the Boers and the locals as "feudal".

The Boers have no commitment to the country they have chosen to live in. They do not care about the state of things in the town, such as the equipment at the local hospital, because when necessary, they simply fly over the border in their Cessna plane and receive good medical treatment in South Africa -- even for minor medical conditions.

The Bakorwa people despise the Boers and take great delight in the confrontation between Du Toit and Bruns. However, even though Bruns is acting as their champion, it is still easy for Du Toit to arrange for a Bakorwa to beat up Bruns: this indicates that their fear of Du Toit is great, or that there exists a strange sort of feudal loyalty.

The relationship between the Boers and Bruns is not an easy one, even before the

Du Toit-Bruns confrontation. Bruns is Dutch and even though this is regarded as the parent culture of the Afrikaners, there is, by implication, a sense of Bruns's superiority. However, this is a *perceived* superiority -- the narrator tells us that Bruns is blonde and blue eyed, that he has a perfect physique, that he is well mannered, and so on -- Bruns himself never refers to this idea (maybe he is too well mannered!) It appears that the women regard him as a superior specimen when they compare him to their husbands. Consequently, the men instinctively dislike him and, of course, are angered at his sympathy for the Bakorwa.

The most important character in this story is the narrator. She is an American volunteer, an aid-worker. She is also an anthropologist, supposedly working on a project amongst the locals in Botswana. However, she has become bored with the project and consequently spends much of her time in Keteng because she finds the interaction between the different groups there interesting.

In fact, she despises everyone. Her boredom appears to have made her bitter and she finds sadistic amusement in the sordid goings-on in Keteng. As the narrator, her viewpoint dominates the story. She has become disillusioned with the work she is doing: she feels there are no pure cultures left to study. There are Simba chips and cornflakes and Castle Lager everywhere. She has a very low opinion of the Boers -- "their sex ideas are derived from their animals"; and their wives are pampered and bored and "consume bales of true-romance magazines from Britain and the Republic, so incredibly crude". She dislikes the Bakorwa -- they "have the reputation of being the most violent and petulant tribe in the country". She seems to believe that violence is the only way to uphold the law

She says: "You could take the position that substituting imprisonment for the various kinds of rough justice there used to be had only made things worse". She also does not condemn the Boers for beating the Bakorwa as a form of punishment – it "was probably effective and they didn't lose time from work or their families". Even Bruns, despite his obvious attraction -- "his nice flat belly, a real waist, and, face it, a very compact nice little behind" – is seen in a condescending light. There are a number of short, emphatic sentences that underline her attitude to Bruns, for example: "Poor Bruns"; "Brun's was so naïve"; "Brun's needed help"; "Brun's belonged to some sect".

The anthropologist's version of the last part of the story – Bruns's noble and unselfish suicide – is wildly improbable and yet she appears to believe it. In her version, Bruns achieves the status of a folk hero. She relishes the destruction of the old order in Keteng, and it gives her great satisfaction to believe that it was all brought about by Bruns. It hardly seems likely that Bruns single-handedly managed to destroy a structure that had existed for generations. In any case, the entire ongoing affair concerning Bruns and Du Toit is petty, and Bruns himself is shown as a somewhat strait-laced figure who is completely out of his depth in Keteng. Without her realising it, it is the anthropologist herself who gives us this impression of Bruns.

She chooses to believe her version of the events because in it Du Toit's downfall is not simply the natural outcome of his own actions, but one that is deliberately planned and brought about by Bruns, who becomes a romantic instrument of vengeance. The anthropologist's ending of the story could come straight out of one of the magazines read by the Boers'

wives and which she claims to despise so much: it is highly romantic and the picture of Bruns manfully plunging his head into the trough, snorting water into his lungs (while all the while mindful of the need to die in a manner suitable for a pacifist) is totally ludicrous.

The anthropologist does not get involved in the normal day to day living in Keteng. She portrays herself as an outsider looking in – "I like to pull my bed up to the window and lie there naked, studying Keteng," she says. She seems to regard the inhabitants as subjects to be studied. In addition, she acknowledges that much of what she tells us is hearsay, and so tries to give the impression she is an impartial observer. She has no compassion: she accepts completely the violence which is rife in Keteng society, and although she professes to be shocked at Bruns's death, the extent of her shock is summed up by her only real comment on his death – "I had cut this man's hair". Her undisguised glee at the outcome of events – "There is ruin. It's perfect" – shows her to be a spiteful woman.

There is much humour in the story, apart from its improbable ending. The anthropologist speaks with great authority on the people and the events. Since she is an anthropologist, she seems to expect us to accept everything she says as fact and she seems completely unaware that, with every word she utters, her prejudice shows. The many asides which she offers as fact and which have nothing to do with the actual conflict between Bruns and Du Toit ( which, after all, is the point of her story ) reinforce our belief that she is extremely bigoted. She takes herself and her opinions very seriously and this seriousness, contrasted with the obvious prejudice her opinions reveal, allows the reader to laugh at the anthropologist's expense.

## QUESTIONS

1. Mention two incidents which the anthropologist offers as fact but which simply add to our belief that she is prejudiced.
2. How does Rush maintain the illusion that the anthropologist is an impartial observer?
3. Although the anthropologist attempts to portray Bruns as heroic, why does he come across to the reader as a rather pathetic figure?
4. There are many places in the story where the narrator is shown up as being an unpleasant character. Write about three of these.

## SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. She tells us that Du Toit becomes terrified when the fly goes up his nose because he believes that certain flies fly up the nostrils of wildebeests and lay eggs that turn into maggots which eat the animals' brains. This causes the animals to gallop in circles until they finally die of exhaustion. The final sentence of that paragraph – "Deon has seen this, of course..." – underlines her belief that Du Toit is stupid and that he tells tall stories.

The story of the 'typical Boer folk hero' who kisses a rabid ox on the lips as a dare, and then refuses the rabies injections afterwards, is another example of how her prejudice comes through in something she offers as fact. Even if this story was true, the only reason the anthropologist tells it to us is so that we have the opportunity to snigger at another example of Boer stupidity.

2. She admits that much of what she is telling us is hearsay. Many of her comments underline this. For

example: "I understand he never said anything ..."; "The fly apparently got rather far up his nostril". These show that she gleaned her information from others.

The fact that we never hear her name confers on her a certain anonymity. It is also clear that she does not get involved in anything that happens in Keteng. It is only at the end, when she begins to piece together the thoughts and actions that had led to Bruns's suicide, that she accepts ownership of the ideas.

3. Through her choice of words she portrays Bruns as a pathetic figure. She says "poor Bruns" three times. The description of the place where Bruns lived – "a pathetic bare little shack ... "(page 77) – demands our pity. He appears to be completely out of his depth in Keteng society: "Bruns needed help. He needed information". Finally, the idea that Bruns has no recourse other than suicide to get back at Du Toit, is not heroic but sad.
4. Her reference to her view of the nuns' "sacrosanct" underwear (page 77) shows her up as being rather unkind and disrespectful of others' ways. On page 81, she expresses the wish to see Deon and Marika Du Toit fighting. This, she says, 'would be gorgeous'. The entire description of Marika Du Toit (page 81) is malicious.

Although we have no sympathy for the seven families, or in fact anyone in Keteng, her absolute glee at the almost total destruction of the old order betrays a spitefulness that we cannot condone.

# THE MUSIC OF THE VIOLIN

- NJABULO NDEBELE

## BACKGROUND

Njabulo Ndebele was born in 1947 in Western Native Township. He grew up in Charterston Location, near Nigel, which is the setting for many of his short stories.

He has a Master's Degree from Cambridge and a Doctorate from Denver University in the USA. He began his writing career by writing poetry but changed to writing short stories. In these he examines class distinction within contemporary black South African society.

The book from which this short story is taken, is entitled *Fools and Other Stories*. It won the Noma Award for the best book published in Africa in 1984.

At present Ndebele is the national President of the Congress of South African Writers, as well as the Chancellor of the University of the North. He has recently branched out into writing for children, as well as publishing a collection of essays on literature.



## VOCABULARY

apprehensive(86)	- fearful
Kleenex(87)	- tissues
leeward (87)	- the side protected from the wind
bosh (87)	- rubbish
heated(88)	- angry
hypocrites(90)	- people who say one thing and do another
pursue (90)	- continue
sacrilege(91)	- injuring or insulting something holy
sheen(91)	- glossy finish
futile(91)	- pointless
brace(91)	- prepare/ get ready for
desecration (91)	- the ruin of something holy
rowdy (91)	- noisy
detach (91)	- separate from
imperceptibly(91)	- unnoticed
irksome (100)	- bothersome
dissipated(101)	- lost
amiss(101)	- wrong
restraint(102)	- control
nuclear family (104)	- parents & children
advance (105)	- get on
bereaved(106)	- one mourning the death of a loved one

## CONTENT

Vukani is the son of a school inspector. His mother, Dorcas, is a nurse. His sister, Teboho, is a student at the University of the North. The family lives in Dube in Soweto. Vukani has a friend called Doksi who is the son of a barber. He likes a girl called Gwendoline, who is his greatest rival at school, in that they compete for first place in class. When the story opens the family has visitors, a Dr Zwane and his wife, Beatrice.

The family is affluent and they live well. The mother is ambitious for her children, as is the father. The children have all the opportunities and possessions needed to succeed in life. Vukani even has a violin and takes lessons three times a week.

The reader gradually realises, however, that the violin is the bane of Vukani's life. In order to go to his lessons he has to take the violin to school with him. He is teased mercilessly by the children at school and then bullied on his way home. In addition, his parents expect him to play to their visitors, something that he hates. Vukani wants to tell his parents that he doesn't want to take lessons any more but he cannot pluck up the courage to do this.

On the day that Dr Zwane and his wife visit, Vukani sits in his room in a state of dread. He has been doing history homework, but is distracted by the visitors. He knows that sooner or later he will be expected to play the violin for them. He dreads it and wonders how he can avoid the awful event. There seems to be no escape and he cannot stop thinking about the bad experiences he has had as a consequence of the violin.

Finally, his parents and the visitors enter his room. He is asked to play. There

seems to be no escape, when there is an unexpected crash from the kitchen. Dorcas rushes through and there is a scene with her daughter, who has broken some precious china. The situation is more-or-less salvaged with the aid of the visitors, and Vukani is again asked to play. At last he has the courage to speak up. There is another scene in front of the visitors and this time it involves the whole of the inspector's family. Dorcas retires to her room to weep as if bereaved.

## COMMENT

In this short story we see Vukani's family at crisis point. Problems have been building up for some time. The relationship between Dorcas and Teboho does not seem to be very good and Vukani is becoming more and more tense about having to play the violin.

In contrast to this, there seems to be far less tension in the homes of Vukani's friends. Doksi is the son of a barber. Instead of being continually busy with homework, he watches his father cut hair. Every week he makes a bonfire and enjoys playing with and then burning the hair. He seems to love hair and all he wants to be when he grows up is a barber, like his father. He is not ambitious.

Doksi's family seem much more at ease with themselves and each other. They have plenty of relatives, who live close by, and they all seem to get on relatively well. They seem to be the typical extended family. If there is a fall-out at home, Doksi runs away to one of the sets of relations. His father then has to go from family to family to look for his son. At the end of this procedure, the father is all smiles and kindness so as to please the relatives. Doksi thinks this is rather humorous because he escapes his father's

anger in this way and can use it to his own advantage.

Vukani is not surrounded by family members. Dorcas feels that relations bring problems. She believes in the nuclear family that the whites prefer. Once Vukani's aunt was going to come and stay. However, his mother saw to it that it never happened. His father tried to protest by saying "Whites are Whites; Africans are Africans", but his mother would not listen to him. She was all for white ways.

Dorcas admires all that is white, right down to the recipes. Her husband is more sceptical and balanced. Dorcas uses brutal language towards her children and even goes as far as calling them "Kaffirs". She feels they are very ungrateful. In another sense, however, she is also a very traditional black mother in that she feels that her children have no right to question her; she also beats them. Her husband is more ready to listen to his children.

Mrs Zwane is a foil to Dorcas, and tends to see through her. Some of her remarks are rather telling. On page 99 she observes, "You are very happy, dearie, to have a child who loves school." Dorcas is not altogether fair in what she expects of her children. On page 88 the writer states that "Their mother tended to make too many demands on them (her children)". This seems perfectly clear when we see the tensions in the family, and the explosion that erupts at the end. We also know that Vukani has nightmares about letting the family down.

In many ways this is an upwardly mobile family and we see all the stresses and strains that this imposes. The situation is exacerbated by the apartheid system and the enormous gap that exists between black and white. This type of family

would probably, under normal circumstances, have moved to a middle class suburb where their aspirations would be understood and others would think the way they did. The South African situation prevents this, however, and Vukani has to put up with the persecution of not being understood. He becomes caught between the aspirations of his family, especially his mother, and the situation he has to cope with on a day-to-day basis.

The family is intelligent and sees through people such as the teacher at the "bush" school. They are caught in a state of cultural transition. Although the mother still exhibits some of the traditional ways of her people, for example, the belief in corporal punishment and the desire not to be questioned, she has also adopted some middle class ideas. These include her support of the nuclear family and her need for her children to succeed at school. The children respond to her wishes and to a large extent become what she has hoped for.

Teboho is a reasonable, intelligent, balanced child. She has been trained by her education to think and question. However, because her mother has not completely made the transition from her traditional past, the questioning results in conflict. The mother does not like her authority challenged. Similarly, Vukani has a problem which he should have been able to talk about, and while his father is prepared to listen, his mother isn't. She is only prepared to blame.

This story is not just a study of the effects of apartheid on a black family, although this does have some bearing on the story. It is more the story of a family in transition. Difficulties and conflict often appear in such families because of the different levels at which members operate. Some are more individualised than others

and within one person, for example Dorcas, there are both individualised and collective ideas. This leads to confusion, poor communication and conflict.

### QUESTIONS

1. Tension is apparent even at the very beginning of the story. Explain this, then comment generally on the atmosphere evoked in this story.
2. The conversation between the adults at the beginning of the story is both western and traditional. Explain.
3. Comment on the names of some of the women in the story.
4. The story ends dramatically. What are Dorcas's feelings here?
5. Comment on the images of the dogs referred to on page 92.
6. Comment on the title of the story.

### SUGGESTED ANSWERS

1. The conversation in the lounge between the adults is light hearted and teasing. Vukani is, however, filled with dread. The situations and feelings of the two sets of people are juxtaposed so that we are intensely aware of them. This heightens the tension, as does the fact that while the adults are unaware of the tension in Vukani, we, the readers, are let in on his thoughts.
2. The comments regarding the teacher and the joke of his pretence that the children at the school do gardening, is very much like the type of joke that might be told at a white gathering, at the expense of blacks. In this sense the people present are like middle-class white people. However, the way in which they talk to each other at times is not western. For example, on page 89, Beatrice refers to Dorcas as

"Mother-of-Teboho". Other forms of expression would not be normal to western people. For example, in the wonderfully written piece of dialogue on pages 88 and 89 where Beatrice tantalises Dorcas with a juicy bit of chit chat, Dorcas says she is tantalised by Beatrice. "Please don't play with my anxiety", she pleads. "I want to do just that," Beatrice replies. This is a delightful exchange, but one can't imagine it taking place between a Mrs Jones and a Mrs Peters.

3. The names Beatrice, Laretta and Gwendoline sound rather pretentious and snobbish. Dorcas is more traditional and was, at one stage, a popular Biblical name given to girls in the black community.
4. Dorcas seems to feel that she has been let down by one family member after the other. She has tried to achieve the best for her family. Teboho has broken some of her best china and is accused of being careless. Vukani doesn't want to play the violin any longer. In her opinion, he wants to lower himself to the level of the ruffians of the street. Finally, her husband seems to take the side of the children. At the end of the story Dorcas retreats in disarray in the presence of important visitors; her carefully constructed and maintained world is in pieces as small as her now broken best crockery.

Dorcas feels confused and let down. One can imagine her telling herself how ungrateful her family is for all she has done for them. We realise that a great deal of what she has done has been to build her own fantasies and is not in the best interests of her family. Teboho is sensible and level-headed in what she says. Her mother has begun

to put too much emphasis on material objects and is consequently causing stress for her family. Dorcas's sobs of misery turn into the wail of the bereaved. The castles in the air that she has built for so long have come crashing down around her and she is being forced to face herself, her family and the mistakes she has made.

5. This is a direct reference to apartheid and the effects it had on people at the time. When writing about apartheid writers were forced to use metaphors in order to avoid being 'silenced'. The teacher Maseko was indiscreet in what he said to the children and was therefore dismissed from the school. This type of incident was not uncommon in the apartheid era.

Maseko was saying that he would rather be without proper work and be hungry, than toe the apartheid line, have a good job and be well fed. He did not want to live off the misery of others or support an unjust regime. This statement suggests that people such as Vukani's family, the Zwane family and the principal of the school were letting their people down by taking profitable jobs with the apartheid regime and giving it their support.

It is significant that the principal speaks Afrikaans, the language of the oppressors, and sees to the dismissal of the teacher who has transgressed. It is also significant that the children give the teacher a hearty cheer, while the remarks of the principal are greeted without much enthusiasm. In his metaphor he warns the children against activists who cause trouble and spread dangerous ideas. The children are told to pelt this type of dog with

stones. These images highlight the confusion apparent amongst people during the apartheid regime.

6. Violin music is usually considered to be a very 'cultured' activity; it can also be seductive. For example, lovers are traditionally serenaded by violins. This suggests that culture and the desire for culture can be seductive and alluring, but not necessarily desirable - as in the case of the inspector's family.

