

On the Inside Writing Out: The Dramatic Representation of the Private Boys' Boarding School on the South African Stage.

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The cast and crew of all the productions of *War Cry*

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The Playhouse Company

This dissertation is dedicated to the school Michaelhouse which equipped me to think, write and critique, and taught me to question.

DECLARATION

I declare that unless otherwise acknowledged in the text, this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Natal, Durban. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets out to analyze the manner in which the writers of dramatic fiction deconstruct the mythology and ideology of the private boys' boarding school in their work. It also seeks to interrogate the sociological and philosophical notions that underpin this fictional work. The central thrust of this dissertation is to explore the representation of the private boys' boarding school experience on the South African stage, with particular reference to writers whose work reflects their personal experiences within such institutions.

Private boys' boarding schools promote the ideology that they provide a superior education based on liberal and democratic principles. These institutions supposedly oversee the development of the individual's mental, physical, spiritual, cultural and social education. The projected ideology of the private boys' boarding schools has become entrenched and has manifested itself as a pervasive mythology, which glorifies and glamourises the social reality of such institutions.

This mythology is challenged and refuted by the appropriation of various sociological, and philosophical theorists, including: traditional Marxist critiques such as the theories of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976); structuralist theories such as those proposed by Louis Althusser (1971) and Antonio Gramsci (1971), whose notions of hegemony carry much relevance when considering private boys' boarding schools; and finally, Michel Foucault's (1977) theories of power and power hierarchies (Lotringer, 1989; Smart, 1985).

Since South Africa's democratization in 1994, a number of fictional works have emerged that have engaged with the social reality of private boys' boarding schools. Most notably, two plays, Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys* (2000) and John van de Ruit's *War Cry* (1999), have highlighted issues surrounding private boys' boarding schools in South

Africa. Together with a variety of texts written for different media, these works have formed a critical base that, to some degree, has undermined the supremely positive resonance of the entrenched private school mythology, and in so doing, challenge the projected ideology. This dissertation's prime focus is on South African private boys' boarding schools; however, it also includes texts that articulate the social reality of private education in England and America. These texts are relevant firstly because the South African private schools are modeled very closely on the English public school system and secondly, because their inclusion adds weight and variety to the discussion.

Important areas of study within this dissertation will be the interpretation of the various thematic concerns raised, and character constructions created by the various writers. This will be underpinned by the theoretical framework, which analyzes systems of power and power hierarchies, and the notion of hegemonic masculinity. Finally, the private boys' boarding school will be examined as a site for hegemonic struggle where power and privilege are continually contested in a relationship characterized by coercion and consent. The critical discourse of the fictional texts and its theoretical underpinning will be placed in opposition to the elitist mythology of the private boys' boarding school and the ideology that these institutions espouse.

PREFACE

This is an acknowledgement that one of the key texts used in this dissertation, *War Cry*, is written by the author of this dissertation. The text has been included firstly because it articulates the social reality of a South African private boys' boarding school. Secondly, it is the only South African text included that identifies the issue of race specifically as an important thematic concern. Finally, it offers a contrast to other plays discussed in the dissertation as it specifically works against character stereotypes.

Having personally attended Michaelhouse, and pursuing a career in theatre and playwriting, I am interested in the intersection point between these two areas of my experience. *War Cry* is, therefore, a product of that intersection point. In the context of my thesis, which centres on the way that writers critique and engage with the private boys' boarding school experience, I feel that *War Cry* forms an essential part of the discussion.

In order to maintain critical distance from the text itself, I, as the writer of *War Cry* and this dissertation, have elected to refer to myself in the third person within the confines of the dissertation.

INTRODUCTION

Canon James Cameron Todd, the founder of Michaelhouse¹, once stated: “A man’s tone, moral and spiritual as well as intellectual, is largely determined for life by his school” (Quoted in Barrett, 1969:13). This statement illustrates the absolute significance that may be attributed to an individual’s education, and therefore, and more importantly perhaps, points the necessity to interrogate institutions of learning, like Michaelhouse, which claim this perspective. This dissertation seeks to unravel the various complexities, ideological standpoints and inherent contradictions that exist in institutions characterized by religious fervour and an extreme devotion to tradition by analyzing various theoretical positions and fictional and dramatic texts.

Private boys’ boarding schools have been a feature of the South African educational landscape for well over a century. These schools are amongst the most renowned institutions in Southern Africa and the education they offer is highly sought after. The principle underlying private boys’ boarding school education is that it purportedly offers each individual a holistic education promoting the physical, mental and emotional development of each pupil. This belief has developed into a widely held private boys’ boarding school ideology, which will be explored in chapter one of this dissertation. The *Michaelhouse Chronicle* of 1998 quotes Mark Henning, the national director of the Independent Schools Council, writing in Education Africa Forum, as saying that “private schools have been, and should continue to be living laboratories for educational development and initiative” (1998:37). However, in sharp contrast to the overwhelmingly positive perspective on private school education, offered by its adherents, amongst whom Henning is one, a sustained and equally vocal body of work has emerged, that challenges the moral, spiritual and cultural ethic of these private schools. This oppositional work encompasses a broad area of academic study, debate and

¹ Michaelhouse is a private boys’ boarding school in the Kwazulu-Natal Midlands, established in 1896.

representation from sociological and theoretical analysis to popular culture, including literature, theatre and film.

On a fundamentally obvious level, private boys' boarding schools offer researchers, sociologists and writers the opportunity to explore a specifically unique system, complete with its own norms, hierarchies and power dynamics. However, it is apparent that there is a marked difference between the projected institutional ideology of the schools themselves and the various dramatic and literary representations of the same social reality. These fictional works are largely supported by a vast body of sociological and philosophical analysis of private school systems. Brian Gardner, writing about English private schools in his book *The Public Schools*, emphasizes the extremity of the various debates surrounding these institutions: "There are few subjects on whom more irrational and extreme views are held, than the public schools" (1973:1). This dissertation concerns itself with the way in which these extreme views provide a space from which writers may explore and interrogate the institutions themselves.

The South African private schools are direct descendants of the English public schools many of which were built over five centuries ago. Schools such as Eton, Harrow and Rugby in England were the flag-bearers for later South African imitations. Most of the now famous South African private schools - Diocesan College (Bishops) in Cape Town, St John's College in Johannesburg, St. Andrews in Grahamstown, and Hilton and Michaelhouse in the Kwazulu-Natal midlands - were founded by English clergymen and educators, eager to spread the elite British educational system to the colonies. Rob Morrell, writing about the early development of private schools in the Kwazulu-Natal Midlands, articulates this connection clearly:

At Hilton, for example the headmaster Ellis (1878 – 1904) vigorously implemented a policy based on the ideas of Thomas Arnold, Rugby's headmaster. Prefects were appointed and given great powers, the sport, rugby was introduced. (1994: 63)

In England, public schools were usually viewed by the general public in a positive light, a view supported by accounts of these institutions in popular or classical literary works such as Thomas Hughes', *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). The status attached to an individual attending these sought after public schools ultimately served to reinforce the intense class stratifications prevalent in British society at the time, and attending the right school could, and usually would, pave the way forward to financial and social success for a young aristocrat. The traditions, idiosyncrasies and even the architecture of these famous English public schools were subsequently transplanted, lock, stock and barrel, to the southern tip of Africa where they still thrive well over a century later. Much like their English ancestors, the South African private schools are still widely regarded as being at the pinnacle of education in Southern Africa.

Education, however, is not the focus of this dissertation, despite the fact that the object of this study is a specific mode of education; nor is a detailed sociological or historical analysis of private schools in South Africa the primary subject. The central concern of this dissertation is how the overwhelmingly positive ideology espoused by these schools is challenged dramatically on the South African stage. These dramatic representations, which include South African and international plays based on private boys' boarding schools, in addition to various academic studies of theoretical significance, stand as a counterpoint to the long held and widely believed private school ideology.

The mediums of film and popular literature and, to a lesser degree, the field of sociological study, do much to provide alternative means of understanding social reality to a broad mass of people on an international scale. Theatre too, often proves a potent weapon in illustrating or challenging the very norms and foundations of society. This was aptly demonstrated in Apartheid South Africa, when theatre proved to be a major thorn in the side of the Afrikaner Nationalists whose desperate efforts to suppress protest theatre only served to fan the flames and confirm theatre's power as a revolutionary tool. Playwrights such as Athol Fugard, Paul Slabolepszy, and Maishe Maponya, used the immense power of the theatrical medium to create an international awareness of the

injustices of South Africa's Apartheid regime and in so doing, may be said to have helped bring about its end. In a similar way, popular dramatic works offer a challenge to the prevalent private school ideology.

In England, it was Julian Mitchell's play, *Another Country* (1982) which began to erode the widely held and much loved myth of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* by sharply revealing the argument that:

The experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools, their glories and disappointments are so intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development. From these it results that the greater part of the ruling class remains adolescent, school minded, self conscious, cowardly, sentimental and in the last analysis homosexual. (Connolly, C, quoted in Mitchell, 1982:Frontispiece)

Another Country created a certain amount of controversy and debate amongst the English elite and the play-going public. The play was made into a feature film (1983) and did much to create an awareness that the rosy-hued propaganda issued by the schools themselves, and widely accepted by the population at large, was at best idealistic and at worst a blatant, scandalous lie. Similarly, in the last five years, two plays, both of which are based on Michaelhouse, have questioned, and to a certain degree attacked, the glossy myth of the private boys' boarding school in South Africa.

Of major importance in relation to this dissertation, is the fact that the studied playwrights are writing from a place of personal experience, having attended private boys' boarding schools themselves. One of these writers, internationally acclaimed playwright and director Anthony Akerman, premiered *Old Boys* on the 8th of June 1996 at the Natal Playhouse Loft Theatre. The play received positive responses from critics and audiences alike;² at the same time, it was the target of some sharp criticism from certain

² A selection of reviews from the different productions of *Old Boys* appears in Appendix E.

members of the Michaelhouse old boys' community. Although the school's name is never directly mentioned in the script, the design, costume, use of slang and even a taped recording of the school hymn, left few in doubt that the immediate context of the play was Michaelhouse in the 1960s. Akerman's own experiences at the school were largely negative as he himself notes in an interview:

It was a powerful institution, one that for four years dominated your life, one that I didn't have the strength to face up to. After a singularly undistinguished career at Michaelhouse, I left and never looked back. They weren't the happiest days of my life. (*Sunday Times*, June 23,1996)

This reflection is clearly articulated in *Old Boys* and will be analyzed in chapter two of this dissertation.

Three years later *War Cry* premiered on the 21st of September 1999, at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in Durban. This award winning play, written by John van de Ruit, (as noted in the preface to this dissertation), met with a similarly positive response.³ Although far less specific in its setting than *Old Boys*, *War Cry* nonetheless uses Michaelhouse as its source, the writer having attended the school in the early 1990s:

The five memorable years I spent at Michaelhouse were at the very heart of *War Cry*. From the moment I began to write, I knew it was only a matter of time before I returned to the ghosts and wonders of my high school years.
(*The Mercury*, February 23,2000)

The play itself, although based on the same institution as *Old Boys*, differs markedly in that it articulates the private boys' boarding school in a completely different era. One of

³ A selection of reviews and press material from the different productions of *War Cry* appears in Appendix D.

the issues raised in *War Cry* is the idea of race, which places it specifically in a post-Apartheid South African context. This is a reflection of the writer's context and particular agenda.

Old Boys and *War Cry* form the foundation of this dissertation, for it is by analyzing these plays, written about different eras, by playwrights with contrasting agendas and experiences, but with a similar personal connection to the school, that one can begin to find a counterpoint to the discourses espoused in and by the private school canon. Other fictional works will be interrogated to add weight and offer support and contrast to the aforementioned two seminal texts.

However, before embarking on a literary or dramatic analysis, a sociological and theoretical examination of private boys' boarding schools needs to be undertaken in order to establish a theoretical underpinning for the analysis of the works themselves. Chapter one of this dissertation considers the framework in which the literary or dramatic works may be viewed. The chapter begins with a brief analysis of the traditional Marxist perspective on education with particular reference to the work of sociologists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976). Secondly, chapter one examines Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and hegemonic power. Gramsci (1971), writing in reaction to the Italian dictatorship of Mussolini in the 1920s and 1930s, highlights the intense hegemonic power wielded by education in the socializing of all members of civil society. For the purpose of this dissertation, the private school will be treated as a complete societal entity and thus, the classroom and dormitory become the spheres of conflict and the sites for hegemonic struggle. The Gramscian hegemonic model shall be extended to include fellow Marxist structuralist and French philosopher Louis Althusser (1971), who draws a strong correlation between elitist education and the reinforcement of ruling class domination through ideology. His theories on the Ideological State Apparatus and the coercive Repressive State Apparatus,⁴ coincide with the Gramscian notions of hegemony and hegemonic control with direct reference to institutions and institutional power.

⁴ Althusser's notions of the Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses will be explained in chapter one of this dissertation.

These crucial systems of power and the unique power dynamics within private boys' boarding schools will also be examined with reference to Michel Foucault's writings around the various discourses of power and institutional control. Foucault undertook various studies of power within institutions, most notably his work on crime and punishment with reference to the phenomenon of incarceration (1977). These ideas and particularly, his theories on power and power hierarchies (Lotringer, 1989 & Smart, 1985) will be applied.

Sociological theories of masculinity and schooling will also be explored, with a particular focus on sport, identity, homosexuality and the struggle for hegemonic masculinity. The brief analysis of masculinity in chapter one is not intended to cover every element in the broad field of masculinity and men's studies, but rather seeks to identify the various ideas and theories that impact directly on the social reality of private boys' boarding schools. These theoretical and sociological ideas will be interrogated with direct reference to both the established private school ideology and mythology, and the dramatic representations of the private boys' boarding school contained in the various plays, films and novels.

In the second chapter, a detailed analysis of the thematic concerns of the various texts will be contextualised within the framework established by the sociological and philosophical theories of chapter one. Chapter three will integrate the character in fiction with the debates around masculinity, power and identity. Besides *War Cry* (1999) and *Old Boys* (2000), the second and third chapters will incorporate other texts that engage with the private boys' boarding school experience. Plays such as Julian Mitchell's *Another Country* (1982) and Compton James's *A Crowd of Twisted Things* (1994) will be discussed alongside two popular films *Dead Poets Society* (1984) and *The Browning Version* (1996), and David Sherwin's screenplay *If* (1968). The novels *Iron Love* (1999) written by Marguerite Poland and Craig Higginson's *Embodied Laughter* (1998) will be briefly discussed in order to explore further the various theories and debates raised in an attempt to deconstruct the numerous myths and ideologies of the South African private boys' boarding school.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Jerry Paquette, writing about alternative agendas in secondary schools, emphasizes the importance of not analyzing education and schooling in isolation from wider sociological trends: “Education policy and practice should not be considered outside some framework for understanding the major global and popularly understood ideologies of social purpose, which drive social policy debate” (1991:20). It is with the above premise in mind that this dissertation seeks to structure the theoretical framework into a three-tiered discussion of the social reality of private boys’ boarding schools. Firstly, there is a widely believed private school ideology or mythology promoted by the schools themselves. Secondly, there are a variety of theories around and criticisms of, that particular ideology, formulated by the various philosophical and sociological theorists. Thirdly, there are questions about the construction of masculinity that such private schools promulgate.

This study of private boys’ schooling, and more specifically the South African private boys’ boarding school, seeks to establish a sound theoretical framework within which the dramatic and literary texts selected may be discussed. The first area of the study concerns the constructed private school mythology and its created ideology. The difference between these two notions will be explored and their relationship to the sociological and philosophical theories will be examined.

The second element in the theoretical framework will be established by analyzing the work of a number of different theorists. The official and popularly accepted private

school ideology, as projected by the schools themselves, will be interrogated using the notions of Marxist sociologists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), who studied capitalist education in America in the 1970s. The structuralist theories of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci's theories of hegemony and hegemonic control, will be directly applied to the institutional social reality of private boys' boarding schools. Michel Foucault's theories on power and the specific discourses of power are utilized to deepen our understanding of the complexities of the power structures in operation in societal institutions. These notions are easily appropriated in relation to the institution of the private boys' boarding school with its inherent power dynamics and specific hierarchies of power. It is important that these strata of power dynamics are established before engaging with the texts themselves in order to understand the constructions of the various writers. It should be noted, however, that the aforementioned theorists were not necessarily writing with direct reference to private boys' boarding schools; elements of their theories have been appropriated and adapted to the specific private school perspective.

The final stream of analysis in this chapter is an exploration of various themes in the field of masculinity and men's studies. Particular aspects from the broad field of masculinity will be briefly examined with a specific focus on the concepts of hegemonic masculinity, sexuality and sport. This study facilitates a more profound understanding and analysis of the writers' creation of character in their respective plays.

A private school ideology

Before engaging in a theoretical debate on the social reality of South African private boys' schools, it is of major importance to establish the existing ideology projected directly by the institutions themselves. Understanding this ideology is important for a variety of reasons: firstly, it is this construction that has formed the base of understanding of private boys' boarding schools for staff, boys, old boys and indeed, the general public.

Secondly, it is this very mode of thought around which the various theorists offer analysis. Finally, and most importantly, for the purposes of this dissertation, it is largely against this promoted ideology and constructed myth that the various fictional writers create their dramatic and literary work.

Peter Randall, who studied the specific transplantation of the English public school system into South Africa, comments:

For most it seems adequate to believe at a level of simple slogan that private schools are a good thing, manufacturing high standards in a deteriorating world and upholding a system of values in which such words as integrity, truth, duty, morality, service and responsibility feature.
(1992:112)

This reflects the commonly held belief and espoused ideology of these institutions.

Randall, however, emphasizes the point that the initial traditions of the private schools were wholly adopted from the English public school system. These traditions, many of which still stand today, were swiftly incorporated into the South African model creating, in essence, a blurring between actual school history and a pervasive mythology derived from their age old English antecedents (1982:112). A.M. Barrett (1969), in documenting the history of a specific private boys' boarding school – Michaelhouse,⁵ illustrates the link between the created traditions and the lived reality. Barrett comments on Charles Walton Hannah, one of the school's most celebrated teachers, and how he actively attempted to create a mythology about Michaelhouse:

To be precise about his significance in the school's history
is extraordinarily difficult, partly because the myth of early

⁵ For the purposes of this study, the school Michaelhouse, will be used as a representative example of the private boys' boarding school system in South Africa.

Michaelhouse (the interpretation of its essential qualities) is largely his creation. This is not to say he distorted the history of Michaelhouse in his typescript reminiscences or in his conversations with boys and old boys; still less that he inflated his own share in the development of Michaelhouse. But he was proud of being one of Todd's early recruits and retained idealism about Michaelhouse. When he spoke of Michaelhouse, therefore, he could not speak with detachment but only in terms of ideals which he felt the school had achieved or should achieve; and to create a myth in this way is to contribute substantially to the growth of an institution's roots. (1969:91-92)

The above extract indicates that the constructed history is not necessarily based on objective reality, but rather on the subjective interpretation of various individuals' experiences and perceptions of the school.

This notion of a constructed mythology may also be seen in relation to fictional works. For example, Brian Gardner, writing about the English public school system, declares that "*Tom Brown's Schooldays*, an extraordinary best seller, did much to shape the idea of what a public school should be in the minds of several generations" (1973:103). Hughes' fictional account, written in 1857, created a rather glamorous perception of private boys' boarding schools and did much to create a mythologised reality around private schooling in England. John Wakeford, however, also writing about the English public school system, believes that the ideology of the private boarding schools is predominantly created by the writings of headmasters and the public image that is presented to the wider society (1969:34). For the purposes of this dissertation, the private school ideology is defined as the projected image and the stated intentions of the school itself. On the other hand, the private school mythology is defined as the widely held belief in the aforementioned private school ideology, and the way in which those that support and promote it, idealize the schools' existence. Barrett's definition of a school's

myth or ideology, on the other hand, as being the interpretation of its essential qualities (1969:91-92) is reiterated by Randall (1982) who emphasizes the abstract concept of tone and concludes that it is, indeed, an indefinable construct that somehow incorporates similar abstract ideals such as spirit, standards and aura - although to many it quite simply represents mere sporting and scholastic achievements. He concludes that the entire concept becomes somewhat farcical when a school's overall tone can be judged on the strength of hymn singing in assembly (1982:121-2). It may be plainly argued then, that the mythology around private school education and life is not the result either of actuality or haphazard chance, but rather the result of a careful construction by prominent figures within the institution designed to foster the development of this ideology in order to elevate the institution above that of an ordinary school. The traditions contained within this mythology are reinforced through many fictional accounts of boarding school life and the active documentation of a uniform tradition by teachers, headmasters and old boys alike, and thus is born and sustained a perception which easily becomes entrenched as mythology.

Wakeford, however, asserts a slightly more cynical view in comparing the development of private school ideology to that of the public relations of a corporate entity:

They are dependent on public relations to attract the custom of their potential clients. Their school magazines and publications for past pupils, various public performances, speech days and exhibitions and the school prospectus and brochures all to some extent present an official ideology. (1969:34)

This is reinforced upon perusal of, for example, the *Michaelhouse Chronicle* of 1997, which is immediately engaging by its cover photograph⁶ taken of the old school, conjuring up an image of tradition and haunting beauty. The keynote speaker for the 1996 school speech day was the former Anglican Archbishop and icon of the South

⁶ See Appendix F for a copy of this photograph.

African liberation movement, Desmond Tutu, an interesting choice considering the fact that the school itself never openly opposed Apartheid and, with its exorbitant school fees, primarily educates the children of the white elite. This is a direct example of the intention to present the image of the school as an outwardly liberal and progressive institution despite its conservative core. The glossy pages of this school magazine are filled with stories and photographs of the school's success in a broad range of subjects, from sporting to academic and cultural. It is obvious that such a publication is designed primarily to advertise the school and secondarily to document its achievements. It is exclusively positive and intended to be congratulatory. While this is, in itself, not necessarily problematic, and is certainly considered standard practice in any field of business where advertising and self promotion are central elements, it is nonetheless a carefully calculated image that in itself does much to construct a myth around the school. This myth consciously and deliberately ignores any potentially negative aspects that may threaten this apparently harmonious reality. It is this mythology that the writers are seeking to deconstruct.

The final word, however, should perhaps go to the character of Gerald Everett, the headmaster in *War Cry*, who articulates the difficulties of leading a private boys' boarding school. His conversation in the following extract is with Steven Ball, a forward thinking English teacher. Everett posits the importance of the school's reputation and the general public relations of the school:

Everett: Steven, I have to justify these fees. (*Lifts his financial report*) Forty thousand Rand a year and rising fast... One thing goes wrong and that telephone doesn't stop ringing! Parents, old boys, board of governors – even the bloody Anglican Bishop. Those people out there expect perfection!

Ball: You aren't giving them perfection Gerald –
you're lying to them.

Everett: Steven – they don't want to know the truth.

(van de Ruit, Unpublished manuscript, 1999:64)⁷

A Sociological Model

Liberal Humanism and Marxism

Before engaging in a discussion of the Marxist structuralist paradigm, the traditional liberal humanist understanding of education, which is fundamental to the private school ideology, needs to be interrogated. While it is not generally articulated as a specific theoretical paradigm, liberal humanism forms the nexus point against which the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser are formulated.⁸ It is plain to see that the private school ideology is strongly aligned with liberal humanist ideals on education whereby the supposed promotion of each individual is of paramount importance. Private school education, in its emphasis on concepts such as diligence, competition and the ever-present lure of potential success could, in many ways, be seen as the epitome of the liberal humanist ideal of education.

Antonio Gramsci (1971), on the other hand, in his writings on capitalist education, clearly demarcates the difference between what he terms the functional school and the more prestigious classical school. These latter schools serve the interests of the ruling class by

⁷ All future references to *War Cry* are by page number and refer to the manuscript attached in Appendix A.

⁸ Haralambos defines liberal-humanist education as attempting to foster “personal development and self-fulfillment. It encourages the individual to develop his mental, physical, emotional and spiritual talents to the full....Academic credentials are awarded on merit in a system of fair competition. In the same way, jobs are awarded on merit, and there is a strong relationship between educational qualifications and occupational status.” (1985:178-179). The notion of a meritocracy is crucial to the mythology around private boys' boarding schools in South Africa.

educating their children with a curricular emphasis on languages and Mathematics, whilst the former teach the children of the massive proletariat the manual working skills that ensure and sustain their class status and position. Although Gramsci does not articulate a specific position with regards to liberal humanist education, it may be argued that liberal humanist education constitutes a form of capitalist education since its fundamental function is to serve the needs of the capitalist system.

Marxist sociologists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis also reject the liberal humanist educational ideal. However, they do acknowledge that the greatest strength of liberal humanist education is its inherently seductive ideology:

The educational system fosters and reinforces the belief that economic success depends essentially on the possession of technical and cognitive skills – skills which it is organized to provide in an efficient, equitable and unbiased manner on the basis of meritocratic principle.
(1976:103)

The various fictional texts studied in this dissertation reflect this opinion by, either directly or by implication, rejecting the liberal humanist notions of education rendering them as mere ideological manipulations by the schools themselves.

Louis Althusser, in his studies on the impact of education on society and the creation of a labour force, supports the view of Bowles and Gintis that the most efficient means of reproducing the relations of production in a capitalist society is via education (1971:127). Althusser separated the maintenance of state power into two distinct categories. Firstly, the Ideological State Apparatus, which contains key ideological apparatuses such as education, religion, law and the family. These apparatuses transmit the ruling class' ideology through society and are largely in control of the maintenance of the capitalist order. Secondly, Althusser highlights the Repressive State Apparatus, which contains elements such as the police force and the army. These elements exist as a warning

deterrent and are only used in cases of rebellion or deviation from the capitalist system. According to Althusser, education is the key socializing element in the Ideological State Apparatus and although it claims to serve each and every individual, it is merely an ideological tool of the capitalist system:

Children at school also learn the rules of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is destined for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. (1971:127)

This echoes the point made by Bowles and Gintis, that for all its idealistic ideology, capitalist education primarily serves the needs of the system, rendering the liberal humanist assertion that education is cocooned in the lofty ideals of neutrality, equality and self-determination subject to question.

Private boys' boarding schools construct an ideology to promote and sustain the system that gives them power. A Marxist analysis would suggest that such institutions manifest an elitism that keeps societal control in the hands of a privileged few at the expense of the working class. A Marxist analysis of liberal humanist education is, therefore, important as a theoretical base in which the more complex notions of Gramsci, Althusser and Foucault may be grounded. These critical theories provide the framework for analysis of the fictional and dramatic texts in chapters two and three of this dissertation.

Hegemony and Constructions of Power

The writings of Antonio Gramsci (1971) are far more directly applicable to private boys' boarding schools than the traditional Marxist discourses on education. P.J. Rich, writing around the ritualism in the English public school system, claims that the subtleties of Gramsci's hegemonic theory allow a researcher greater freedom when analyzing contemporary social and institutional reality:

Hegemonic forces á la Gramsci are not only crass class pressures or blatant social control. They also include the social rituals. In contrast with Marx's rude analysis, a Gramscian analysis has room for the small nuances, the court dances. Nowhere did such nuances flourish as fully as in the public schools. (1989:73)

Gramsci wrote largely in response to the fascist regime of Benito Mussolini in Italy in the 1930s and his work draws greatly on that of Karl Marx. Gramsci attempts to understand a discourse of power that was by its nature oppressive yet simultaneously fluid and ever changing. The unique nature of an exchange of discourse between a controlling group and a subaltern group that is, at its worst, extremely coerced yet fundamentally consensual, opens up a myriad of possibilities for an academic researcher or social theorist. Although Gramsci's hegemonic theory highlights the traditional Marxist class stratifications, the concept of hegemony itself creates a dynamic means of studying various social formations and groupings. Briefly, Gramsci's notion of hegemony suggests that there is a continual contestation of power between the ruling group and the subaltern group. This relationship is characterized by the ruling group's use of coercion and the consent to that coercion granted by the subaltern group. Such an analysis breaks away from the traditional Marxist constructions of class and privilege and impacts on society on all levels. According to Gramsci, the societal system is a complex network of hegemonic struggles continuing within the greater hegemonic struggle of Marx's

historical materialism. Williams, quoted in Harold Entwistle, highlights the complexity of the notion of hegemony:

We have to give a very complex account of hegemony if we are talking about any real social formation. Above all we have to give an account, which allows for its elements of real and constant change. We have to emphasize that hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex and have continually to be renewed and defended; and by the same token that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified. (1979:11)

As Rich (1989) highlights, public schools, or private schools as they are known in South Africa, are institutional structures containing various sites of hegemonic struggle. The multi-layered infrastructure of leadership and control creates a subtle network of coercion and moral and intellectual leadership. Such leadership does not necessarily begin only with the school's headmaster and teachers but often extends well beyond the school itself to parents, old boys, the board of governors and various shareholders who may lead the school from largely unseen positions. Within the school, the intellectual and practical leadership comes under the domain of the teachers, housemasters and prefects who form a network of control over the school by means of consent or coercion. This leadership bloc strives to maintain the status quo and to identify and correct those subjects who resist its systematic and hegemonic control.

The above notion may be illustrated by examining a key practice in private boys' boarding schools, namely that first year boys have to provide menial services for prefects. Such activities include making beds, cleaning shoes, doing laundry and preparing food and snacks for prefects and older boys. In addition, these younger boys are expected to behave in a highly respectful, polite and honourable manner as defined by the entrenched traditions of the school. This essentially reinforces the hegemony of the leaders whose

control depends on obedience to, and possession of pride in, the institution and its traditions. The twin pillars of discipline and respect constitute the foundation upon which the system rests and is sustained. In Julian Mitchell's *Another Country* (1982), a play set in an English public school in the early 1930s, the new boy Wharton accepts his subaltern status with a grim obedience:

Judd: One reason the proletariat is so exploited, Wharton, is its fatal fatalism. The way it expects the worst

Wharton: Yes Judd

Judd: So don't connive at your own oppression. Don't assume that just because you're a fag you *must* be in the wrong. Resist the tradition!

(He pours water out for Wharton)

Wharton: Thank you Judd.

Judd: *From* those with the greatest means, to those with the greatest need. *Not* school practice. But then school practice is simply designed to make people like you say sorry the whole time.

Wharton: Yes Judd.

(Mitchell, 1982:32)

Wharton, even in the face of the rebellious Marxist schoolboy Judd's attempted persuasions to the contrary, refuses to challenge his powerless position within the school. His consent is given and he accepts his position, thereby reinforcing the power that others have over him, and continuing the cycle of his own oppression.

In contrast to this, the character of Vaughan Cockburn in Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys* (2000) refuses to 'fag'⁹ for his prefect Julian Carlyle. His silent rebellion is perceived as a major affront to the traditions of the school and, more importantly, as a challenge to the foundations of the ruling group's hegemony. Such an action is what Gramsci would term counter hegemonic and results in the violent coercion of a brutal caning. Vaughan's rebellion demonstrates the hegemonic flux in such institutions, and how repressive apparatuses, such as severe beatings and other punishments, are used to quell any threat to the current hegemonic order. Gramsci insists that such repressive measures are only used in cases where an individual resists the ruling group's hegemony and usually serve as a hidden warning to the subaltern group not to rebel against the status quo (1971:28). As a system, private boys' boarding schools rely heavily on the threat of imposed coercion by members of the ruling group. Serious punishments, such as suspension or expulsion from the school, are used only in cases of extreme rebellion against the school's hegemony. The threat of these coercive forces alone, usually ensures the consent of the subaltern group to the ruling group's control.

Michel Foucault, however, examines notions of power and discourses of power from an institutional level. Foucault likens the exercise of power in institutions to the operation of a machine in which each individual occupies a different position without ever controlling the machine itself (In Lotringer, 1989:234). Foucault's poststructuralist notions reject the Marxist structuralist emphasis on historical materialism and entrenched class and power stratifications. Instead, he proposes that power is transmitted discursively through and by the subaltern class or group:

⁹ A term used within many boarding schools to describe the enforced performance of designated menial tasks for prefects or older boys by younger boys.

Briefly, power is not conceived as a property or possession of a dominant class, state, or sovereign but as a strategy; the effects of domination associated with power arise not by an appropriation and deployment by a subject but from maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings; and a relation of power does not constitute an obligation or prohibition imposed on the 'powerless', rather it invests them, is transmitted by and through them.

(Quoted in Smart, 1985:77)

The unity of discourse and power is concretized in the formation and creation of an institutional truth or normalized action. Power creates a world of inclusions and exclusions according to the negotiated discourse of the power machine. Foucault (1977) emphasizes the fact that the discourse of power can never be absolute and static and like hegemony, is in a constant state of flux. Such a fluid theoretical perspective offers the researcher a far more flexible platform than the Marxist model from which to analyze the inner operations and power dynamics at work within the private boys' boarding school.

Foucault believes that the exercise of power carries with it an inherent cost (In Lotringer, 1989). Besides the obvious economic cost, there is a political cost to the maintenance and exercise of power. One of the key tenets in the Foucaultian notions of discourse and power is that where there is power there is always resistance. If power is exercised too violently, the controlling group runs the risk of a revolt or revolution. In David Sherwin's screenplay *If* (1968), the militant nature of the school's exercised power sparks a bloody revolt by some of the rebellious schoolboys, who fire rounds of live ammunition into a large group of teachers, parents and other boys at the school's speech day parade. On the other hand, too little power exercised - in other words if there is seemingly a lack of authoritative control - may very easily lead to civil disobedience (Foucault, in Lotringer, 1989:232). Robert Morrell, however, writing on masculinity and friendship, explains that whilst boys commonly transgress the rules and are punished for their transgressions, a violent attack on the system as exemplified in *If* is unlikely to occur:

Moments of defiance, transgressions of rules, or infringement of codes could bring violent recriminations and a reassertion of rules. In their response to power inequalities and to violence, boys did not challenge the dominant masculinity. (1996:62)

A fundamental question asked by Foucault concerns the way in which power is exercised within the machine. His answer is that power is negotiated through a process of hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and finally examination (In Lotringer, 1989:232). Hierarchical observation excludes the fictional monstrosities of the Orwellian “Big Brother” telescreen of *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1948), or the pervasive societal control of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), in favour of a systematic observation and surveillance from within. Returning to the private boys’ boarding school perspective, both *Old Boys* and *War Cry* emphasize the power of masters and prefects. In *War Cry*, the selection of prefects triggers the events that ultimately shape the outcome of the entire play. Foucault, however, pointedly identifies the fact that such observation is also performed by members of the subaltern group (In Smart, 1985:77). The possibility of one’s peers performing the function of hierarchical observer is an interesting notion when theorizing the private boys’ boarding school. It exposes issues such as peer pressure, group acceptance and rebellion. The insidious nature of such discourses of power is that they maintain the oppressive power structures with very little need for any formal and authoritative coercion by the masters and prefects. In *Another Country*, Judd and Bennett are persistently told by their peers to improve their attitude and show some school spirit. Although this falls on deaf ears, thereby making these characters exceptions to the rule, it is the manner in which the subaltern class generally responds to the discourses of power, that entrenches those dynamics at their very roots.

Normalizing judgement is ostensibly the way in which the machine deals with non-conformists. It is crucial to the system of power that rebellion is not only quelled but that those who are instigating that rebellion are brought back in line and conform once again

to the system. Foucault believes that corrective regulation frequently takes the form of a promotion rather than a punishment (In Lotringer, 1989:233). This is obvious in both *Another Country* and *Old Boys*, where the respective rebels, Judd and Carlyle, are both silenced with their acceptance of a prefectship, which forces them to reform their ways and in both cases, undermine themselves. Both boys offer outspoken disagreement with the institution of prefectship and therefore, in accepting the position, they not only contradict their own moral values but conform themselves to the system. A closer inspection of these characters' rebellions will be conducted in chapters two and three of this dissertation.

Finally, examination is the return to the normalizing gaze and the re-establishment of the current order, whereby those who placed themselves outside of the system are contained within it. The surveillance of hierarchical observation is once more continued and the system returns to a position of normality. Foucault emphasizes the circular nature of this system of power by observing that the system is complete when there is "subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected" (Quoted in Smart, 1985:86).

The theoretical framework discussed thus far has highlighted four different modes of thought with regards to private boys' boarding school education. Those modes are the created mythology and ideology by the schools themselves; the Marxist critique of liberal humanist education, as articulated by Bowles and Gintis and Althusser; Gramsci's theories of hegemony and hegemonic control; and finally, Foucault and his theories around power hierarchies in institutions.

Constructions of masculinity in the private boys' boarding school

Introduction

It would be impossible to formulate a detailed study of an institution such as the private boys' boarding school without engaging with some of the theories and notions debated in the field of masculinity. On the other hand, the ever-expanding field of masculinity and men's studies is too broad to explore fully in this dissertation. Therefore, one key area of masculinity studies will be interrogated, namely the theories associated with the schooling of boys and more particularly, the making of masculinities within the boarding school environment. Within this framework, three particular concepts will be discussed: hegemonic masculinity and the struggle for power; sexuality and identity; and, finally, the role of sport in the creation of masculinity. These three areas within the enormous framework of masculinity studies have considerable relevance when interrogating the various playwrights' creation of character and the manner in which the characters engage with each other and with the institution in which they find themselves. The creation of masculinity under careful surveillance from within the system itself, clearly dictates the institution's ideal in terms of the particular form that that masculine creation takes. Private boys' boarding schools claim to make boys into men and oversee that particular development. Anthony Ardington, the former chairman of the Michaelhouse Board of Governors, articulates that particular school's ideal of creating men in his 1996 address when he states:

Let us produce young men who will be good husbands and good fathers, good neighbours and good work colleagues as well as men who will devote their lives to the service of their fellow man and their God. (*Michaelhouse Chronicle*, 1997:Foreword)

However, what the various fictional writers studied in this dissertation clearly articulate, is that the process of an individual's masculine development within such an institution does not necessarily result in that individual reflecting the school's ideal of masculinity.

Hegemonic Masculinity

R. W. Connell, an authority in the field of masculine studies, highlights the fact that an individual's masculinity is continually contested and hence, becomes a site for constant hegemonic struggle. His belief is that the relationship between adolescent boys is a historically mobile one comprising of oppressive subordination and complicity, which ultimately leads to marginalisation (1995:77). This notion is actively represented in the various texts discussed in this dissertation, which carefully document the hierarchies of power within the institution and the manner in which that manifests itself in patterns of domination and submission. The connection between masculine power and control, and the construction of character in the various texts, reveals the impact that hegemonic masculinity has on character creation and character interaction within the texts themselves. Mike Donaldson, writing about masculinity in Australia, however, defines hegemonic masculinity as "the ability to define the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed.... to formulate ideals and define morality...." (1993:645). This notion is concretized in the play *War Cry*, where the character of Merrick Butcher dictates the terms and morality of the dormitory. It is he who decides that Anthony Bates deserves to be destroyed and, due to his hegemonic control, is able to lead his subordinates Alan Greenstein and Sid Govender into morally reprehensible actions.

Gramsci (1971) stresses that hegemony is transferred through and by the subaltern group. This is echoed by Morrell who believes that the boys themselves actively contribute to the creation and reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity (1994:57). This is achieved through the acceptance of various sex roles and discriminatory values inculcated through tradition, stereotyping and homophobia. Jonathon Salisbury (1966), writing about the

maturation process of adolescent boys, emphasizes the use of language as a weapon of control. He believes that the trading of insults leads directly to hegemonic control or subordination (1966:66). This is demonstrated in *Old Boys*, when Julian Carlyle gains the ascendancy over the rugby-playing prefect Miles Carruthers via his intelligent use of language:

Julian: *(sitting)* This is an unexpected honour.
What are you supposed to talk about when
you have tea in the cop shop? All the
floggings you've given out this term?
House spirit?

Miles: *(Without looking up)* It's about time you
showed some house spirit.

Julian: What are you reading Carruthers?

Miles flashes the cover of his Western.

Julian: Have you run out of comics?

Miles: Piss off.

Adrian: *(louder)* Cack!

Julian: Wouldn't you say in the Wild West the
sheriff was a kind of prefect?

Miles: *(Suspicious)* What do you mean?

Julian: Well he's slow of speech, he runs a jail, he's never very popular and in the end –

Miles: I'm going to toys.¹⁰

Julian: - he never gets the girl.

Miles grabs his shoes and blazer.

Julian: Swotting already?

Miles stops in front of the door.

Miles: Some of us take matric seriously.

Julian: Really? Okay, what did Neville Chamberlain say to the British people after he signed the Munich pact?

Miles: Get fucked.

(2000:111-112)

The trading of insults is a daily occurrence in these institutions. Not only do they represent the male adolescent jostling for leverage and intellectual ascendancy, but also indicate the calculated and insidious manner in which hegemonic masculinity is contested and won. The assumption that hegemonic power is achieved by physical force and brute strength is refuted by Salisbury who claims that "Male power works quietly and secretly

¹⁰ A term used at Michaelhouse to denote a study cubicle.

as an institutional reality in secondary schools. Its power is in its secrecy and taken for grantedness” (1966:18).

Kehily and Nayak suggest that within the hegemonic contest of power, humour has a crucial role to play and that “pupils use of humour is a class cultural ritual of resistance” (1997:70). It is difficult to determine whether humour is a subtle way to deflect or soften the insults of other boys or whether it is indeed a form of counter hegemonic resistance to insulting language. The character of Sid Govender in *War Cry* is, by all accounts, less intelligent than his peers; however, he uses his ignorance and stupidity to humorous ends by playing the role of the class clown. This enables him to cement a position for himself in the power hierarchy that allows him to function effectively, rather than being victimized and marginalized in the system. Govender buys into the role of class clown because it affords him a status position amongst his peers and within the institution as a whole. His response to Merrick’s betrayal in the English class is not to demonstrate anger or resentment, which would equate with a loss of face, but rather to resist by making a ridiculous statement about Merrick’s sister’s breasts (Appendix A:22). On a superficial level Sid Govender is sparring with Merrick Butcher; on a deeper level, he is resisting the ruling hegemony of Merrick Butcher by utilizing humour as a weapon:

Ball: Alright Sid you’ve been rather quite, tell me about
your socialist critique of the novel.

Sid: Er...what

Ball: Merrick tells me that you have a socialist critique
prepared.

Sid: No sir he’s lying

Sid jabs Merrick in the ribs with his elbow

Ball: Alright tell us something else.

Sid: Merrick's sister has big cans!

Merrick jabs Sid in the ribs, more laughter and mocking jibes

(22)

Specific examples of hegemonic masculinity will be studied further in the discussion around thematic constructions and the character creations of the fictional writers in chapters two and three.

Sexuality, Homosexuality and Sport

Michael Kimmel, in his studies on masculinity in America, states that "Whatever the variations of race, class, age, ethnicity or sexual orientation, being a man means 'not being like women'" (Quoted in Brod, H & Kaufman, M, 1994:26). The assertion of one's masculinity in the private boys' boarding school is one of the greatest challenges that an adolescent boy faces. The hegemonic nature of masculinity emphasizes the non-static nature of each individual's own masculinity, hence the constant need for boys to reassert their masculine identity. This particular point is reinforced by Mairtin Mac an Ghaill in his studies on sexuality and schooling when he suggests that

Since men are born into male bodies, but not into the successful accomplishment of culturally appropriate versions of masculinity, becoming a man is a complex process of learning and doing within shifting sets of social constraints. (1994:89)

It is important to note that within private boys' boarding schools, the notion of manhood is constructed as oppositional to femininity and consequently, the feminine or, by extension, the homosexual, becomes the ultimate sin against the masculine order. Therefore, a boy's masculinity constantly needs to be asserted and proved. Since the school promotes binary oppositions, this is often accomplished through the demeaning of weaker or 'othered' boys. This notion threads through many of the characterizations of the various playwrights mentioned in this dissertation.

Joseph Pleck, however, highlights the irony in this obsessive need to prove one's masculinity by questioning whether such institutions are by their nature, truly masculine: "Though run at the top by men, schools are essentially feminine institutions – the conformity to be polite, clean, obedient, neat and nice" (1981:117). A school such as Michaelhouse readily promotes cultural activities such as singing, music, performance and choir participation; however, these activities exist far lower on the hierarchical ladder in terms of the value system of the school. This is primarily because these activities may be considered, to some degree, to be feminine pursuits in as much as they do not project a strong masculinity since they do not rely on male physical strength. Whilst these somewhat feminine activities do not automatically render an individual feminine and thereby marginalized, they are often not regarded as asserting positive masculine traits. The character Anthony Bates in *War Cry*, is the exception to the rule, as he plays a harmonica and pursues intellectual activities rather than sporting activities yet is surprisingly not regarded as a 'moffie'.¹¹ These somewhat feminine activities contrast with the hyper masculine pursuits of sport, and more specifically rugby, which embody the desired masculine traits projected onto the students by the institution itself. The school rugby notes for Michaelhouse in 1951 state that rugby "provides a training in courage and self control and the best sort of toughness" (Quoted in Barrett, 1969:132). Outlining the notions behind male sex role identity, Harry Brod emphasizes the fact that

¹¹ An Afrikaans term denoting a homosexual. The word is frequently used within educational institutions in South Africa and is generally considered to be derogatory.

being a man has very little to do with one's biological sex but rather the specific roles and conditions that one has to achieve to be classed a real man:

Individuals have to possess the correct sex appropriate traits, attitudes and interests that psychologically validate or affirm their biological sex. (1987:2)

The complexity of the process of achieving one's manhood has seemingly more to do with the perception of others rather than any real organic growth as a person. The issues around sport and the value attributed to sporting prowess clearly demonstrate this notion.

Perhaps the single most extreme resistance to the prescribed notions of what it is to be a real man is homosexuality. Mike Donaldson, in his study on the link between masculinity, identity and hegemony, states that homosexuality in private boys' boarding schools can be regarded as being truly counter-hegemonic (1993:646). Homosexuality is, indeed the most powerful rejection of hegemonic masculinity and the traditions that reinforce masculine stereotypes, advocated by the schools themselves. The power of homosexuality, not only in terms of the impact that it has on the boys and the institution, but also on the audience, makes it a wonderful tool for the playwright to utilize and it is no coincidence that every playwright discussed in this dissertation deals with issues around homosexuality at some stage in their texts. This will be more deeply contextualized in chapter two of this dissertation.

The prescriptions of masculinity have so far settled on the rejection of the feminine or the homosexual; indeed, Ian Harris, articulating the various stereotypes and specific gender roles that men embrace, believes that the historical socialization of boys focuses around the negative:

Gender role socialization of boys is often characterized by negative prescription: Don't be a sissy. Don't engage in

feminine behaviour. Boys push themselves to be masculine and bury their sensitivities. (1995:43)

Sport, according to the schools themselves, embodies the positive attributes to which boys should aspire. Randall reflects on these sentiments when referring to rugby at Michaelhouse soon after the Second World War:

The school's sporting prowess is taken, more or less as an accurate indication of the tone of the school. The poor results of the Michaelhouse 1sts in 1950 caused such serious adverse comment among old boys that the Rector felt obliged to deal with the matter in his report to the school governors. (1982:181)

With the notable exception of Merrick Butcher in *War Cry*, every other first team rugby player in each studied text is a prefect, irrespective of their personality, ideology and leadership qualities. This is supported factually with reference to the *Michaelhouse Chronicle* of 1994 which reveals that only one first team rugby player was not a school or house prefect. Harris believes that

Boys learn through sports to achieve a successful male identity by competing. Organised sports have become a primary masculinity validating experience – where men learn that they must constantly prove themselves to gain acceptance. (1995:121)

Indeed, sport encompasses not only a model masculine form to which all boys should aspire, but also a unity, an imagined spirit that binds the entire school into an army of support. From this premise, it is only a small leap to equate the passion and fervour of sport (particularly rugby) to that of fighting in a war. Veblin's famous quotation that "the

battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton" (quoted in Tiger, 1969:115) is not merely an expression of patriotism. Of fundamental interest to the writers, however, is the impact of sport on the characters and the manner in which they affirm or reject its importance as a gauge of an individual's masculine identity. Obviously the characters that affirm sport as a means of asserting masculine identity are the sportsmen and prefects who are highly invested in the system as opposed to the rebellious types who challenge this dominant sporting hegemony.

Stereotypes and Male Roles

Harris (1995) outlines a number of generic male stereotypes, for example, the "rebel" (146), the "tough guy"(151), and the "sportsman"(121). He believes that men naturally migrate to various roles and types as a direct result of the pressures of modern society and an intense process of socialization (1995:55-6). In direct contradiction to this, Morrell (1994) argues that it is simplistic to try to group boys into such categories as such an action does not take into account the fluid nature of the power dynamics in such institutions: "Identifying gender types like the 'bully' or the 'troublemaker', is to offer a misleading or static account of gender" (1994:110). However, the notion of types within an institutional reality is useful in relation to the examination of character in fiction and will be appropriated and probed in chapter three.

Conclusion

This chapter has created a theoretical framework from which we may embark on an exploration of the fictional texts. The framework begins with the interrogation of the created mythology and ideology around private boys' boarding schools. This is examined from a broad philosophical and sociological theoretical base that questions and challenges the private school mythology. This theoretical base includes a traditional and

Marxist structuralist paradigm, the hegemonic theories of Gramsci, and Foucault's study of power hierarchies within institutional reality. Certain perspectives from the broad field of masculinity were also examined which not only critique the ideology of these institutions, but are also significantly relevant to the creation of character which will be explored in chapter three. The theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter will be used as a benchmark against which to examine the various fictional texts and the way in which they reflect or engage with the social reality of the private boys' boarding school.

CHAPTER 2

ALTERNATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS: THEMATIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PRIVATE BOYS' BOARDING SCHOOL

Introduction

Chapter one grounded the various structures and ideologies of the private boys' boarding school within a theoretical framework. Without this sound theoretical structure to support the analysis the dissertation would be merely a collection of subjective interpretations of the various texts. However, as stated in the introduction, this dissertation is chiefly concerned with the representation of these institutions in dramatic works of fiction, and in the way in which writers interpret social reality. This will be the focus of chapter two.

Chapter two begins with an analysis of dramatic fictional writing and the manner in which this writing illustrates or reflects social reality. It goes on to highlight the various thematic constructions raised in the studied fictional works and considers how these themes reflect the authors' personal experiences, and also challenge the stated private school ideology and created mythology. The various themes discussed in this chapter will include the issue of violence within these institutions, race and hegemonic power, memory, sport, prefects, and finally, homosexuality and sexual identity. Although the focus of the study is the representation of the private boys' boarding school on the South African stage, the discussion is extended to include texts that also articulate the English

public school system. This is of relevance primarily because, as articulated earlier, the South African private school system descends directly from the English public school system. Other media such as film and literary novels will also be included to heighten our understanding of the dramatic representations of these institutions.

Writing the private boys' boarding school

Before engaging in a broader discussion of theme and character, the different works under investigation need to be contextualised. The fact that fiction is a construction of a reality cannot be ignored and is, itself, a concept that needs to be interrogated before embarking on an analysis of the various texts. It would be presumptuous to state that the writers are perfectly recreating social reality, because their creations are fiction and therefore, stand only as representations of a particular social reality. The writers themselves may base their work on a known social reality and the resulting text may closely resemble actual reality; however, it must be noted that any writer of fiction manipulates reality - and the representation of it - to suit his or her own creative ends. This acknowledged subjectivity, however, does not mean that fictional works cannot have academic validity when analyzing an institution such as the private boys' boarding school. In this instance, the fictional works studied in this dissertation largely reinforce the realities of the structures articulated in the theoretical study of chapter one. While the writers themselves, many of whom have personal experience of private boys' boarding schools, each offer a unique view of a common institution, most of the texts articulate similar notions about the social reality of these schools.

The seminal plays in this study, *Old Boys* (2000) and *War Cry* (1999), have been introduced in the introduction to the dissertation and, together with Compton James' *A Crowd of Twisted Things* (1994), make up three South African plays based on Michaelhouse. The three playwrights, Akerman, van de Ruit and Compton James respectively, all attended the school itself. This dissertation has used Michaelhouse as an

example since all three of the aforementioned playwrights attended the school; however, it should be noted that the various ideas raised and discussed apply generally to South African private boys' boarding schools of which Michaelhouse is simply an example. Each of the above plays is specifically based on different eras of the school's existence; however, whilst they articulate the difference in those eras they also serve to outline the many similarities and this binds the three texts together. These three plays embrace the genre of realism,¹² which seeks to create the illusion of real life. However, it is in the reflection of this reality that these texts embody the theoretical constructs discussed earlier in the dissertation. The direct experience of the playwrights within the institutions impacts greatly on the manner in which they are "writing out" of the institution and, to a certain degree, reflects the way in which they reject or support the traditional private school ideology.

The plays *Old Boys*, *War Cry*, and *A Crowd of Twisted Things*, articulate the private boys' boarding school on the South African stage, which encompasses the primary thrust of this dissertation. However, to restrict the discussion merely to three South African plays would greatly limit its impact. For example, it would lessen the richness of the study to exclude Julian Mitchell's *Another Country* (1982), which, although based on the English public school system, is nevertheless a key dramatic source for this dissertation. The strong links *Another Country* shares with the three South African texts and many of the theoretical constructions of chapter one, demonstrate the connection between the English public school and its South African descendant.

In addition to these four plays, the study has been broadened to embrace texts from various other media. David Sherwin's screenplay *If* (1968), has been specifically chosen as it reflects the violence within the English public school system which has impacted greatly on the South African private boys' boarding school. *If* is also the only text studied here which demonstrates a complete rebellion against the system and thus offers a contrasting perspective to the failed rebellions dramatized in the other texts which are

¹² The *Collins English Dictionary* defines realism as "a style ... that seeks to represent the familiar or typical in real life, rather than an idealized, formalized, or romantic interpretation of it" (1994).

ultimately contained by the system. Two films, *The Browning Version* (1994) and *Dead Poets Society* (1989), although embracing different systems of education (the latter reflecting an exclusive private school in America and the former once again representing the English public school system), are important to the discussion as they embrace the role of the teacher, the often complex student-teacher relationship, and the manner in which a teacher relates to and functions within the institution. This is in contrast to the aforementioned texts that deal primarily with the students. The notable exception to this is *War Cry*, which actively examines a student-teacher relationship, thus creating an interesting counterpoint with *Dead Poets Society* and *The Browning Version*.

The intensely visual nature of the filmic medium creates the impression that films are more realistic and therefore, better able to reflect reality than other media such as theatre. This is reinforced by the fact that films are often shot on location, providing the audience with the illusion that it is watching reality. In contrast, the mechanics of the theatre dictate the set and size of the cast, and the fact that a play is performed in a theatre leaves the audience in little doubt as to its illusory nature. On the other hand, the experience of live theatre possesses the immediacy of real action, confirming its reality in the minds of the audience. Finally, the popular medium of film, and more specifically Hollywood film, has to conform to the dictates of producers and a market that is perceived to be sentimental, and this perception impacts on the way they are made. Films are produced at massive financial risk and hence, the artistic creation is often modified or compromised to serve purely economic ends. This is less of a factor with regard to theatre, which often allows more scope for experimentation and the performance of non-populist drama.

The novel, by its nature, provides for a broader and more atmospheric version of a social reality. This is the result of the greater descriptive possibilities that may be derived from the manipulation of narrative and time within the story. The two novels discussed in this dissertation, Craig Higginson's *Embodied Laughter* (1998) and Marguerite Poland's *Iron Love* (1999), will serve to counterpoint the plays and films from a literary perspective. Craig Higginson, also a Michaelhouse old boy, articulates the plight of the homosexual and the danger of an ambiguous sexual identity within such institutions. Marguerite

Poland, the only woman amongst the writers, provides a historical perspective of St. Andrews College in Grahamstown, and explores the passion of sport and the agony of World War One. *Iron Love* is the least critical and most nostalgic of the texts analyzed in this study. It is also based on fact, which separates it from the other fictional constructions in this dissertation. The texts studied here have been chosen specifically because of key thematic concerns relating to and exemplifying the theoretical underpinnings interrogated in chapter one

A thematic model

The Aristotelian model, as articulated in the *Poetics* (1961) clearly defines a number of distinct elements that underpin dramaturgical analysis. Aristotle was specifically referring to Greek tragedy of the 5th century BC; however, his model has been appropriated by many scholars and theorists of drama. While this dissertation is not attempting an Aristotelian analysis, we may appropriate terms like ‘theme’ and ‘character’ as devices of organization and for ease of reference. For the purpose of this particular study, theme embraces the broad elements of plot, story and the ideological concerns of the writer as gleaned from the text itself. Character, on the other hand, includes a detailed analysis of character creation, and the manner in which this reflects the broader theoretical and dramatic assumptions of both dramatists and theorists alike, and whether it reflects or refutes the reality of the institution itself

Thematic constructions

All the texts under discussion, with the exception of *Iron Love*, to some degree or another, offer a critique of the private boys’ boarding school system. Anthony Akerman argues the fact that, contrary to popular belief, he did not write *Old Boys* to undermine private schools and more specifically, Michaelhouse: “When I decided to write a play on

this, it wasn't just to do a hatchet job on the school" (Interview, 1997:2).¹³ It is important to note that whilst Akerman's script may not intentionally 'trash' Michaelhouse, it is nevertheless highly critical of the school and many of its traditions and policies. The idea of 'trashing' something indicates a lack of objectivity and hence, an overwhelmingly biased interpretation of a particular social reality. The notion of critique, on the other hand, is different in that it implies a degree of critical distance and informed debate. The critique of these institutions within the various writers' representations takes the form of a variety of different thematic concerns, some of which will be analyzed in this chapter. The represented notions of institutional brutality and the inherently violent nature of these institutions will be interrogated and the manner in which these representations contradict the private school ideology established in chapter one. Racial concerns will also be discussed, with particular reference to the wider South African political landscape. Other thematic notions such as memory, sport, prefects, homosexuality, and sexual identity, will be examined with reference to the representations of the writers and the entrenched beliefs and ideology of the private boys' boarding school.

The private boys' boarding school – violence or serenity?

The disparity between the image of the private boys' boarding school as represented in the various texts, and the image of the school promulgated by the official private school ideology, is illustrated in many ways. One of the ways in which this occurs is through the construction of the realistic brutality of the relationships between the boys in the institution. This is the reality of the internal experience of the school as opposed to the urbane and idyllic image of the school as seen from the outside. Part of the reason for this brutality, which has seemingly existed in these institutions over an extensive period of time, are the powerful hegemonic traditions which are reinforced by boys, old boys, parents and the teachers themselves. These traditions form an unwritten code of conduct

¹³ A transcript of the Anthony Akerman interview appears in Appendix C of this dissertation, and all page numbers apply to this appendix.

that pervades these schools as strongly as the official school rules. Compton James asserts the point through his passive rebel character Gibbo:

You want to know about real ghosts in this place? There are ghosts that don't let you sleep at night, Rigter. They're the ghosts of every cowering old boy who keeps his mouth shut about what goes on here. It's haunted by the guilty spirits of every housemaster who let the bullying go unchecked, because of tradition. You know what, I wouldn't piss on tradition if it was on fire. This place is haunted by the ghosts of all the new boys who sit there and take their beatings because they are too bloody scared. And most of all, it's haunted by parents who turn a deaf ear to their sons desperate cries for help. This so-called institution just wants to bend and crush you and if you won't fit into their mould, they destroy you.

(James, Unpublished manuscript:13-14)¹⁴

Perhaps South African private boys' boarding schools present the most glaring examples of this duality between the serene outer image and the violent internal reality of the school. As has been established earlier in the dissertation, the South African private schools are direct descendants of the English public school model. This English system, when coupled with a typically South African hyper-masculine mode of behaviour, combines to create a contradictory institutional social reality, whereby the harmony portrayed in the school's propaganda contrasts sharply with most written accounts of the actuality of private school life. The vicious beating of Vaughan Cockburn by the head of house Adrian Baynesfield in *Old Boys* articulates the manner in which violence and typically English urbanity sit side by side in a school such as Michaelhouse:

¹⁴ All future page references for *A Crowd of Twisted Things* refer to the unpublished manuscript that appears in Appendix B of this dissertation.

Adrian: I have seen Mr. Laughton and he has given me permission to give you three strokes. Now buck. *(In his confusion, Vaughan goes to the wrong chair)* Not there. Over there. Hands flat on the chair. *(He does so)* Are you wearing any padding?

Vaughan: No

Adrian: How many pairs of underpants?

Vaughan: One

Adrian: Carlyle check that

Julian looks angrily at him, then goes over and feels Vaughan's backside.

Julian: No padding

Adrian flogs three strokes, with a four second pause between each stroke. He flogs hard. Vaughan has to fight back the tears. He stands upright. Adrian shakes his hand.

Adrian: Well taken.

Vaughan: Thank you Baynesfield.

Vaughan leaves.

Adrian: That was fair wasn't it?

(Akerman, 2000:143)

The unwritten code of shaking the hand of the person who has beaten you in some way legitimizes the act in the eyes of the institution. The imposition of corporal punishment ideally exposes the duality between the brutality of the system and the old English tradition of the 'stiff upper lip'. The playwrights frequently use corporal punishment as a key inciting incident within their texts. This is evident in *Another Country* when the character of Bennett finally accepts a beating in order to protect his lover Harcourt, after resisting the hierarchical power domination of Fowler and the other members of the school prefect group called "Twenty Two."¹⁵ The effect of a beating is psychological as well as physiological, and the subsequent breaking down of a boy's spirit through beatings, reinforces the ruling group's hegemony albeit via repressive means. In the case of Bennett, he finally gives consent to his own beating for what he considers to be noble reasons; nevertheless, his rebellious stand has ended because that consent has been granted to the dominant hegemonic power. The violence of the caning itself frequently leads to a radical reaction from the victim, such as Mick's savage rebellion in *If*. This exemplifies Althusser's notions about the Repressive State Apparatus and the manner in which the hegemonic group should use institutional violence only as a last resort or run the risk of challenge or rebellion. The power to exercise violence - in this case, a beating - is the preserve of the dominant hegemonic group who utilize this repressive apparatus as the final means of regulating those who challenge the system. In conclusion, however, it should be noted that while corporal punishment has been officially outlawed in schools in post-Apartheid South Africa, the various texts that include incidences of corporal punishment are set in South Africa pre-1994.

¹⁵ "Twenty Two" refers to an elite group for school prefects, membership of which confers higher status than mere house prefectship. Such membership in "Twenty Two" is also considered by the students to be the pinnacle of achievement within the school system.

Private boys' boarding schools in the new South Africa: Exploring issues of racial identity

War Cry is unique in that it is the only one of the South African texts here studied that embraces the theme of race and racial integration. Although not ostensibly a play about race, the fact that the cast includes an Indian and a black character immediately brings the issue of race to the fore. In this regard, it should be noted that *War Cry* articulates the private school in post-Apartheid South Africa where issues such as racial integration and affirmative action are prevalent and exposed. *Old Boys* articulates the private school in the 1960s, a period when white South Africa had already begun distancing itself from other races and the international community. Compton James, on the other hand, writing in the early 1990s, chooses to ignore the impact of wider political concerns and focuses primarily on the microcosm of the private boarding school. In *War Cry*, the fact that Stuart Luthuli is the first black head of house in the history of the school is a point that he uses to his own political advantage:

Merrick: Why Luthuli?

Stuart: Because you were about to self- destruct
Butcher.

Merrick: I never asked you to lie.

Stuart: Of course you didn't, but you needed me. I
was the one bit of proof that would always
swing it around. I added substance to your
lies and Everett had no choice but to accept
the inevitable.

Merrick: I still don't think Everett believes it.

Stuart: Of course he doesn't. But we played his hand and made the decision for him. I mean what's he going to do, expel the first black head of house in the history of the school?
(59)

The fact that Stuart Luthuli recognizes his power as a talented black boy in a reputation driven institution, makes him the most powerful character in the play. The fact that he uses his power for questionable ends, articulates more about the specific characteristics of the institution rather than Stuart's character or race. Stuart's actions provide an excellent example of the value that these schools place on pragmatism and success rather than truth and integrity. This once again contradicts the stated ideology of the school, which claims to hold ideas such as truth and honesty in the highest regard. In contrast to Luthuli, Sid Govender prefers to suppress his racial identity with his white friends. Luthuli, however, deals with the white majority within the school in a different way. He is wise enough to know that he can rise above Merrick's racial slurs by flashing his prefect's badge and calmly maintaining his superior disposition. He acts in such a manner because he is able to rely on his entrenched hegemonic power within the institution itself. Despite Merrick's popularity with the boys, Luthuli knows that his power affords him a higher status within the power hierarchy of the school:

Stuart: You know for once, just for once I would like some support from this dormitory.

Merrick: But we hate you Stuart, how could we possibly support you?

Stuart: Merrick, when are you going to get over the fact that the black boy is head of house and the white rugby hero, who was tragically not

the white rugby hero, who was tragically not made a prefect, has to carry his own laundry on a Monday morning?

Merrick: Don't push me Luthuli!

Stuart: I will do what I like Butcher, because I am in control here. This whole school may think you're a hero but as far as I'm concerned, you are pathetic. And this little badge proves it... (14)

Stuart and Merrick both recognize the hierarchical power vested in Stuart. Merrick is angered by this power distinction and this fuels his hatred for Stuart. Their relationship is antagonistic with each character continually trying to outdo the other:

Merrick: Goodnight Mr. President...

Stuart: Shut up Butcher

Merrick: (*aggressive*) Come make me you spineless Kaf... (*he stops himself*)

Stuart: (*turning*) Come on Merrick, say it. Six letters, one word and for a few seconds it will make you the most powerful man in this dormitory. Come on, I'm sure you call me that behind my back anyway. Have some guts for a change Butcher and say it to my face! (14)

Merrick stops just short of racially abusing Stuart; however, his baiting does finally raise the anger in the sneering Luthuli. This indicates that Luthuli is dealing with his own insecurities about his black identity in a predominantly white elitist school. These insecurities are exaggerated by Merrick's subtle insinuations that it is Luthuli's skin colour that has led to his being made the head of house. The concern here with issues of race and affirmative action reflects the wider social reality of post-Apartheid South Africa, a function of the playwright's personal context.

It is difficult to pinpoint a particular private school policy with regard to race in an official or unofficial capacity. Private boys' boarding schools are by their nature and their economics elitist institutions catering for the children of the wealthy. These schools, however, have always claimed, at least in public, to be multi-racial in a typically liberal-colonial manner. Akerman is cynically doubtful about Michaelhouse's political leanings: "there is nothing in the play [*Old Boys*] about the way the cack¹⁶ was treated that was far-fetched. And what was that training people to do? It was teaching them how to deal with black people as slaves kicking them around" (Appendix C:5). This is an example of an institution reinforcing the hegemonic structures of the nation and corroborates the Marxist argument that education reflects and supports the needs of the bourgeoisie. This is paralleled in *Another Country*, which uses the school as a microcosm for the wider society, emphasizing the intense politicization of the English elite and the workings of the class system, which may be equated to some degree with Apartheid issues. The ambiguity of the private school attitude to Apartheid and race relations is succinctly documented in *Old Boys*:

Adrian: We still don't get a cent from the government. We didn't let the last lot tell us what to do and we certainly won't take orders from this lot. Independence comes with a price tag.

¹⁶ A cack is the term used to denote a new boy at Michaelhouse.

Julian: But we weren't exactly critical of the last lot. We even had a memorial service when Verwoerd was assassinated.

Adrian: Well he was the Prime Minister. We couldn't very well...

Julian: I remember the rector saying his death was a great loss to the country.

Adrian: Did he? Surely not. (*a beat*) Still that doesn't mean the school supported Apartheid. We admitted black boys long before it was fashionable, Julian. Anyway the new lot are making such a dog's breakfast of the education policy that we've got a waiting list for the first time in years. Standards are what matter. (11)

Such discussion reassert the subtle racism inherent in these institutions, ultimately contradicting the constructed ideology of these schools as liberal, and once again pointing the irony of a man like Desmond Tutu being an honoured speech day guest at Michaelhouse.

Private schools such as Michaelhouse are intensely insular worlds, completely and deliberately removed from the wider social perspective. The liberal reluctance of the private schools to become embroiled in the political activities of the time was articulated by the Anglican Bishop of Pretoria in 1979 when he stated that the role of the English private schools was to be "a creative and constructive minority poised between the two main power blocks of Afrikaner Nationalism and Black Consciousness" (quoted in Randall, 1982:167). This political neutrality maintained the schools' liberal appearance

yet did little actively to challenge the socio-political oppression of the time. Therefore, to ensure their continued existence, whilst at the same time appearing liberal and multi-racial, private schools engaged in a delicate balancing act within the greater socio-political sphere of South Africa and its Apartheid legislation.

Writing the past: memory and nostalgia

For Akerman, *Old Boys* is a play about memory and how one's remembered experiences at school can shape an individual's life. The British writer Cyril Connolly states: "the experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools, their glories and disappointments, are so intense as to dominate their lives and arrest their development" (Quoted in Mitchell, 1982:Frontispiece). It is no coincidence that this quotation can be found in the published version of *Another Country* and in the programme notes for the production of *Old Boys* (1996). The manner in which *Old Boys* is structured, channels the audience's focus into the system via the memory of the characters looking back at their schoolboy years. The character of Adrian Baynesfield is a perfect example of a school prefect who could never outgrow his own school-minded attitudes and personality. As a result, he is perpetually attached to the school, involving himself heavily in the old boys' community and in his own son's education at the school; however, unlike during his own schooldays, he is now devoid of the institutional power, which he used to possess. Baynesfield has become a man who desperately attempts to access the past, as articulated by Akerman:

The thing that interested me was memory – how does your memory function. It has now been thirty-one years since I left school and I have a good memory although it might be faulty on some issues. Memory has a censorship function that erases thing that it doesn't want to remember. Things that are too painful to remember. I wanted to look at two things: one was how events that happened to people at a

very young age lingered on and were in some way ever present and affected their lives as an adult. And how they remembered it. (Appendix C:4)

It should be noted that memory does not record the past in an objective manner but recreates a version of an event or social reality that is clouded by an individual's own subjective experiences, thereby becoming its own myth. This is exemplified by many old boys who block the negative memories of the school and remember and idealize the positive ones, thereby assisting in perpetuating the system. Akerman asserts this idea through the character of Julian: "Seniors bully cacks because they were bullied as cacks. Old boys who were miserable here send their sons here to make them miserable. It's called tradition." (Akerman, 2000:123).

Memory is also a key thematic motif in Marguerite Poland's novel *Iron Love*. Poland, however, recreates with nostalgia the atmosphere of St. Andrews College in Grahamstown prior to the World War One. This nostalgia is compounded, no doubt, by the death of most of her protagonists while fighting in the Great War. The novel (which has its origins in a photograph of the 1913 school rugby team) is itself a careful recreation of fact. The story is littered with references to objects of memory such as photographs, plaques and gravestones. In many ways, *Iron Love* serves as a counterpoint to the other texts studied in this dissertation in that it offers a somewhat heroic and idealized view of a private boys' boarding school. This indeed echoes Veblin's famous quotation about the battle of Waterloo being won on the sports fields of Eton (In Tiger, 1969:115). Poland explains:

The fifteen boys who gazed at me from the 1913 First Fifteen photograph in the school archives have been the source from which much of the story sprang. Those fine valorous young men embody the spirit of the time. Within five years, seven of them had lost their lives in battle. In

writing of them, I hope I have restored them to memory.
(1999:ix)

Poland paints a heroic picture of the characters and of the school itself, emphasizing the qualities of bravery, camaraderie, honour and faith. This image, that corroborates the ideal set out in the private school ideology, contrasts with most of the other texts in the dissertation many of whose characters are either weak, rebellious, pragmatically sly and manipulative, or any combination of the above.

Memory is an interesting thematic concern to analyze because it is heavily linked to an individual's subjective perception of a particular time or place. This is relevant when it is considered that these texts were all written some years after the writers themselves had left school. Therefore, the entire process of recreating the social reality by means of fictional representation is deeply connected to the manner in which memory has shaped certain events that may have occurred in the writers' youth.

Deconstructing the power hierarchies: Sport in the private boys' boarding school

The link between the private boys' boarding school and sport, with reference to masculinity and the formation of an identity, has been briefly explored in chapter one. However, it is interesting to compare the manner in which sport is dealt with in the various texts and how that refutes or reflects the sociological analyses of sport and the impact that it has on adolescent life in such institutions. White South Africa's obsession with rugby and, to a lesser extent, cricket, creates a unique platform from which to observe the power dynamics at work within these institutions. Being a gifted sportsman in a private boys' boarding school immediately elevates an individual's status amongst both boys and masters. In short, a gifted rugby player instantly receives respect and honour and, therefore, hegemonic control over his environment.

In chapter one it was stated that masculinity has been constructed in direct opposition to femininity. This has manifested itself specifically in the value given to sporting success. Sporting prowess encapsulates the notion of masculinity by testing the physical force, strength, and competitive edge of each individual. Talented rugby players, therefore, embody the ideal masculine traits within the institution and therefore, emerge as heroic. This instant respect and heroism immediately confers power on the sportsman and ensures his position of status amongst the boys in the institution. This hegemonic power is usually entrenched by the school in the form of a prefectship, as noted by Akerman: “When I was there, guys as thick as a plank were made prefects because they were gifted at playing with balls” (Appendix C:6).

Merrick Butcher in *War Cry* who, exceptionally, is not made a prefect, still carries immense power with the school itself. This is acknowledged by Anthony Bates:

nobody believes that he would sacrifice himself to get me.
That's why Everett is listening to him. He's the school
rugby hero, without him we lose this Saturday. Everett
cannot afford to expel him. (48)

Merrick's power is demonstrated by the fact that he successfully accomplishes his goal of ruining Anthony through promoting a clearly false lie and using his status to spread the rumours of the impending scandal. The point is that, certainly, were Merrick not the rugby hero, nobody would have believed his fabricated lie. Moreover, he is aware of this fact and the power that he has attained through his sporting achievement, and is not afraid to exercise that power in pursuing his intentions.

Private boys' boarding schools claim that each individual's social, academic, cultural and physical development is of prime concern. However, what emerges, both in the theoretical analysis and the fictional texts studied in this dissertation, is that those

individuals who are talented sportsmen are pushed by the school, whilst those who show talent in other areas are often virtually neglected. Besides the character of Charlie Fraser in *Iron Love*, no other sportsman in the studied texts emerges as sympathetic. However, Fraser's heroism is a product not only of his sporting prowess but also of his general moral fortitude and his courageous patriotism. All of the other major protagonists in the texts are intelligent boys who question the sports-oriented hegemony. The manner in which this obsession with sport manifests itself in the creation of character will be examined further in chapter three.

Privilege and power: The institution of prefects and boy government

Within the private school system, prefects are the senior pupils chosen to perform certain duties within the school. These duties are predominantly associated with boy government and the day to day running of the school. Prefects are rewarded for these duties with a variety of perks unavailable to other boys.

A key thematic device used in *Old Boys*, *War Cry* and *Another Country*, is the definite link between the bestowing of privilege via prefectship and personal betrayal. Akerman states that the "conferring privilege on one boy and not on another is a wonderful way of driving a wedge between friendships" (Appendix C:6). This is immediately obvious in *War Cry* with the fractured friendship between Anthony and Merrick, which has been shattered by Anthony's election to prefectship and Merrick's failure to be similarly rewarded despite his expectations to the contrary. Merrick reacts personally to Anthony's election and ultimately embarks on an extreme course of action to destroy his one-time friend. Merrick feels betrayed by Anthony's actions which he, somewhat irrationally, feels maneuvered him out of his rightful place and thus, fully justifies (to himself anyway) his shocking betrayal at the end of the play:

Anthony: What are you doing?

Merrick: What does it look like I'm doing?

Anthony: You're gonna smoke?

Merrick: Why not?

Anthony: *(at a loss for words)* But you can't.

Merrick: Why not?

Anthony: I'm a prefect!

Merrick: Are you? *(he lights a match)*

Anthony: Merrick, what the hell are you doing? (29)

It is interesting that Merrick uses the device of smoking to bait Anthony. Although smoking is officially considered a breach of the rules, it is also widely regarded as a petty offence and a mild form of rebellion. The character of Julian in *Old Boys* also smokes as a form of rebellion against the institution. In the instance of *War Cry*, Merrick has chosen to use smoking as the bait because it is a serious enough offence to warrant punishment, yet at the same time it is the type of offence that could quite easily be overlooked by a prefect if he so desired. This thrusts the decision onto the shoulders of Anthony Bates, keys into his own insecurities, and precipitates the crisis:

Merrick: *(blowing out the match)* I've told you before
I'm having a smoke, now would you just
relax.

Anthony: No I won't relax, I'm a prefect and you can't smoke in front of me.

Merrick: Well you didn't seem to mind last term.

Anthony: That's because I wasn't a prefect last term you cretin!

Merrick: Don't call me a cretin Mr. Prefect. And besides you don't believe in the rules.

Anthony: That doesn't matter.

Merrick: Of course it matters Mr. Prefect or should I call you Mr. Hypocrite?

Anthony: Don't call me that! (*Merrick lights another match*) Merrick stop! Just think about what you are doing....

Merrick: I have thought about what I am doing. (29)

Merrick's manipulation is particularly effective in that it forces Anthony to choose between upholding the rules of the school (in which he does not believe) and maintaining his own sense of personal integrity. Anthony is intelligent enough to recognize the ploy and that Merrick has trapped him in a proverbial catch 22 so that either way he loses:

Anthony: So this is the test? You wanna see if I've got the mettle to do this. You want me to make the choice.

Merrick: You can walk out the door right now, you don't have to watch me smoke.

Anthony: And you'd love that wouldn't you, I mean that would just prove everything. Here I am a fraud, a hypocrite. (29)

It is clear that the fact that Anthony has been elected a prefect has driven a wedge between the two characters. Merrick is using smoking as a means to expose the contradictions within the character of Anthony Bates and at the same time, to test the mettle of the newly elected prefect. Foucault emphasizes the fact that power is exercised at a cost (In Lotringer, 1989) and Anthony Bates exemplifies this. In having to exert his power to punish a friend who has broken a law of the school that Bates himself does not fundamentally believe in, Anthony is forced to compromise his own sense of personal integrity.

War Cry, however, is not the only play to use the bestowing of privilege as an inciting incident. The moment that the character of Julian Carlyle in *Old Boys* accepts the offer to become house prefect, he begins to diminish as a character and, as a consequence, ultimately betrays his cack Vaughan and, to a certain degree, betrays himself. Guy Bennett too, in *Another Country*, is betrayed by a prefect figure, the head of house, Menzies. This betrayal occurs when Menzies, after assuring Bennett that he will be elected into "Twenty Two" (the elite school prefect group), betrays him by appointing Devenish instead. In the context of the play, the importance of being elected into "Twenty Two" cannot be overstated as such an election not only guarantees the individual power within the institution, but also assures that individual of a prominent position and a successful passage into society once he has left the school. Bennett buys into this premise and is therefore emotionally distraught after his betrayal.

Although Menzies' decision eliminates the prospect of the bully Fowler being appointed head of house (his stated reason for his actions), it also serves fortuitously to exclude the rebellious Bennett whose overt homosexuality causes the house leaders considerable embarrassment. Once again, the hegemonic structures of the school are kept in place and a challenge to its status quo has been silenced. Menzies' betrayal takes on a greater significance when one considers that Bennett accepts completely the school's constructed point of view that an appointment to "Twenty Two" would have paved his way forward in life. Bennett articulates his belief in his conversation with Judd:

Judd: It's not the end of the world.

Bennett: Isn't it? When people like Menzies run the world and you want to be an ambassador in Paris? (*in imitation*) 'Bennett? Oh nice chap – quite amusing actually. We had high hopes of him once, but – oh you heard. Not quite one of us. Bogota, do you think? Perhaps not, no. Isn't Haiti coming up? That's about his mark. He never was in Twenty Two, you know. Only ever a house prefect'. (*He ends savagely*)

(Mitchell, 1982:98-99)

The desire to be a prefect is understandable; not only is it an obvious honour to be elevated amongst one's peers and thereby assume a predetermined hierarchical power position, but a prefect also receives numerous perks and luxuries, most importantly, a new boy to 'fag' and perform all one's mundane daily activities. This creates an air of luxury, carefully explored in *Old Boys*, where the prefects seemingly exist like colonial landlords. Robert Skidelsky states that while the institution of boy government was

originally developed as a pragmatic response to the problem of maintaining order and supervision in large boarding communities with inadequate and incompetent staff.... [it]evolved into a highly conscious technique for training leaders to run the empire.

(Quoted in Randall, 1982:20)

The fact that three playwrights have directly engaged with the issue of privilege and in each case have explored the betrayals that stem directly from that bestowing of privilege, indicates that associated with privilege is a complicated network of power hierarchies which are contested in the continual struggle for hegemonic control within the institution.

Constructing the subaltern group: Homosexuality and homophobia in the private boys' boarding school

Homosexuality is probably the most binding thematic concern between the various texts studied in this dissertation. One is immediately engaged by the fact that there is a marked difference in the manner in which homosexuality is treated in South African private boys' schools to the English public schools. Homosexuality in South African culture has been ruthlessly attacked and marginalized, and the resultant homophobia has obviously spread to most institutions where homosexuality is seen by the mainstream as completely taboo. Due to the fact that the struggle for hegemonic masculinity requires the constant assertion of one's masculine traits and the rejection of all that is feminine, any individual performing an action that could be construed as remotely feminine or 'moffie' is marginalized into the subaltern group. Hegemonic theory accounts for two categories of individual, those who control power and those who consent to their own powerlessness; however, within such institutions the reality is that there is a far more layered chain of command. For example, a cack who is a promising rugby player will be shown more

respect than an aesthetic choirboy of the same age although they exist in the same powerless stratum. Similarly, an effeminate matric boy will be ostracized and rendered absolutely powerless within the power structures of the school itself, despite his technical seniority. Therefore, it is evident that while there is a clear hierarchy of power, there is also similar hierarchy of powerlessness.

Compton James and Akerman utilize homosexuality in similar ways. Both their plays see the powerless character kissing a powerful character. In *Old Boys*, Vaughan kisses Julian on the mouth in a confession of his love for Julian and his own homosexuality. In contrast to this, *A Crowd of Twisted Things* sees Des trying to kiss Gibbo out of a confused search for his own sexual identity. These two playwrights have used homosexuality as their key inciting incident, which ultimately shapes the manner in which the climax in each play unfolds. The manner in which the kiss is dealt with in each play differs markedly. In *Old Boys*, Julian reprimands Vaughan, revealing the danger of admitting one's homosexuality:

That's the way to make your life miserable here. What people think of you is the most important thing at this school. If you give people a reason to suspect you're a bunny, you'll get mocked until the day you leave.
(Akerman, 2000:124)

The truth of this statement is illustrated in *A Crowd of Twisted Things* when Gibbo tells the other boys that Des attempted to kiss him and, even more controversially, has admitted masturbating over Rigter's underpants. The subsequent verbal onslaught that Des receives is painfully humiliating:

Jonno: Des, what did you see in ...uh ... Rigter's underpants?

- Des:** Shit Gibbo, you said you wouldn't tell anybody.
- Gibbo:** Look, my oath, it won't go any further. I swear.
- Jonno:** Why Rigter though? I mean, I thought you had taste.
- Rigter:** Hey!
- Des:** (*Starting to cry*) Please, guys. It was a mistake man.
- Jonno:** Don't worry. Rigter's not ready for a relationship yet. (18)

In Craig Higginson's novel *Embodied Laughter* (1998), the protagonist Marius, who is similarly unsure about his own sexual orientation, is also caught masturbating over another boy's underpants. The response to the act is, in this case, extremely violent:

Marius had seen a shape coming quickly towards him, and then there was a leaden crack that seemed to split his head into lightning. His head cracked against the floor and he tasted the cement, his tongue lolling. (1998:226)

This brutal example serves to point out the importance of an individual's reputation within the school. In the case of Marius, his action not only exposes the extreme homophobia prevalent in the institution but it also instantly shifts his power position from

the dominant hegemonic group to the subaltern group, thus revealing the enormous implications of being branded homosexual in such institutions.

War Cry, on the other hand, deals with homosexuality from a completely different perspective, by focusing on homophobia and the threat of a homosexual scandal. Merrick Butcher fabricates a story about Anthony Bates having a relationship with their English teacher Steven Ball. Merrick specifically chooses the issue of homosexuality as his instrument of manipulation because he is aware of the extreme homophobic response he will receive from the boys themselves, and from the senior masters who will fear the potential scandal.

Throughout the play, it is obvious to the audience that Anthony and Mr. Ball are not having a physical relationship; however, in the final scene between the two, Anthony kisses Steven on the lips, creating a level of ambiguity around their relationship. Although an intensely dramatic writing device that serves to provide the possible 'twist in the tail', it also forces the audience to make their own conclusions and possibly explore their own homophobia. In South African mainstream culture, kissing another man on the lips is not really regarded as correct masculine behaviour. Therefore, the manner in which the audience perceives Anthony Bates possibly shifts from support to suspicion, depending on the audiences' interpretation of what the kiss means. This serves as an exciting dramatic device that challenges assumptions and prevailing social norms and in the case of *War Cry*, this challenge to the school is also constructed as a challenge to the wider society in which the school functions.

There is a marked difference to be observed when examining works set in the English public school context. One is immediately struck by the high level of homosexual activity prevalent amongst the boys themselves. Both *Another Country* and *If* reveal a social reality where homosexuality is the norm rather than the exception. Physical relations among the boys are accepted if not openly advocated. The emphasis is on discretion and, as long as such interactions remain out of sight, they are not perceived as

threatening either to the individual or to the institution, as may be seen in the following extract from *Another Country*:

Menzies: I hope I can rely on you. The next few weeks are going to be absolutely crucial. We can't afford the slightest *hint* of scandal. You really are going to have to take a – take

-

Bennett: Myself in hand? (*Pause, moving about*)
The problem is I do so much prefer doing it with other people. Don't you?

Menzies: I don't believe in talking about it.

Bennett: It's not the impression I've got when we've done it together.

(Mitchell,1982:75)

Akerman believes that despite the homosexual nature of these schoolboy relationships, the individuals themselves are not necessarily always homosexual: "there is so much sexual ambivalence in a place like that as you must know. I mean some of those boys singing in the choir in their first year are so pretty and ambivalent, almost hermaphrodite" (Appendix C:7). He believes that the homosexual dynamic is fundamental to all single sex boys' schools and clearly articulates differing modes of adolescent behaviour (Appendix C:7-8). The fact that one's sexuality is constructed as being deeply connected to one's feelings of identity and masculinity, makes understanding issues around homosexuality, particularly in South African private boys' boarding schools, a priority. It should also be noted that homosexuality and the representation of homosexuality, make

excellent fodder for fictional dramatization because of the opportunity created for tension and conflict. For example, the final kiss between Anthony and Steven Ball, although making a possible statement about Anthony's sexuality, is perhaps more importantly an intensely dramatic moment and serves as a cunning means of concluding the play on a note of high tension. The use of homosexuality as a device of characterization will also be dealt with further in chapter three.

Conclusion

By appropriating elements from Aristotle's analysis of 5th century BC Greek tragedy, this dissertation has divided its discussion about the various fictional texts into the broad categories of theme and character. In this chapter, the various thematic concerns raised in the texts were analyzed with reference to the theoretical underpinnings discussed in chapter one.

The inherent violence of the private boys' boarding school in contrast to the serene image projected by its own ideology and mythology, is a notion with which most of the texts deal, to some degree or another. The traditional English civility of the private boy's boarding schools' outer image is shattered in the texts by the inclusion of graphic beatings and the extensive use of corporal punishment. This echoes the notion of Louis Althusser concerning the Repressive State Apparatus which was discussed in chapter one. It is also relevant when discussing Gramsci's theories of hegemony and hegemonic control whereby the final and most extreme manner of correcting individuals who challenge the ruling group's hegemony is through the infliction of institutionalized violence and brutality. It is also important to note that many of the fictional writers demonstrate this violence in full view of the audience and, whilst it may be argued that this serves dramatic ends, it cannot be ignored that this visual violence also serves to deconstruct the liberal humanist ideology espoused by these institutions.

Of all the studied texts only *War Cry*, embraces specifically the thematic concern of race. In South Africa, race has been instrumental in systematically stratifying society and therefore, it is surprising that so few of the South African texts offer more than a passing comment on the notion of race. In *War Cry*, the character of Stuart Luthuli is the first black head of house in the school's history. However, what is more interesting to note is the way he manipulates his own power position, as a black leader in the school, to suit his own ends. Another interesting contradiction about the school Michaelhouse is its supposedly liberal political stance, as exemplified in their inviting of Desmond Tutu as honoured guest to the 1996 school speech day, a mere thirty years after having a memorial service for the slain architect of Apartheid, Hendrik Verwoerd.

The thematic concern of memory and how memory affects fictional construction, is a notion that applies directly to Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys*. The play, by its nature, relies on flashbacks to the past in its weaving of a story that directly impacts on the present. The harsh nature of Akerman's recollections contrasts with Marguerite Poland's novel *Iron Love*, which takes a somewhat nostalgic view of a group of boys at St. Andrews College prior to the outbreak of World War One. It is argued by Akerman, however, that it is selective memory and nostalgia for the past that ultimately reinforce the school's hegemony and entrench various outmoded traditions and activities, thereby maintaining and strengthening the school's created ideology and mythology.

The struggle for hegemonic control within the institution relates directly to an individual's status and how that status manifests itself in a definite hierarchy of power. The ability to play sport, the instituting of privilege by means of prefectship, and finally, homosexuality, or displaying a lack of dominant masculine traits, are three elements that stratify boys into various levels on the hierarchy of power. Of major importance, however, is the notion that one's hegemonic position is never secure as there is a continual contestation for power which challenges the hegemonic group. The fluidity of the system and the continual need to reassert one's hegemonic masculinity make the private boys' boarding school an obvious site for hegemonic struggle.

The various thematic constructions analyzed in this chapter do much to debunk the ideology and mythology of private boys' boarding schools. Coupled with the theoretical underpinning of the sociological and philosophical analysis offered in chapter one, these fictional constructions stand as a severe critique of these institutions and the ideology that they espouse.

CHAPTER 3

CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHARACTER

Introduction

The creation of characters and the act of characterization through performance, are both extremely fluid manifestations that include the writer, the director and the actor in a dialectical relationship. Therefore, it is impossible to pinpoint a character without some degree of subjectivity on the part of the researcher. When a writer creates a character, he or she explores not only the emotional qualities that character will possess but also creates an imagined or real biographical history for that particular character. Another important point is that characters are constructed to serve particular functions within the play or story and are, therefore, not haphazard formulations that can be seen in isolation from the text.

That said, it is possible to delineate aspects of character that are identifiable and hence, stand up to analysis and debate. Chapter one mentioned that Harris (1995) clearly articulates various roles and stereotypes into which males may be placed. In opposition to this, Morrell (1994) rejects such an analysis stating that by imposing character types, one is merely offering a static account of identity and character in private boys' boarding schools. Ultimately, both perspectives have merit; however, to deny the fact that certain stereotypes do occur within these institutions would be to miss the point because clearly the school system promotes certain kinds of behaviour that may be interpreted as stereotypical characteristics. Stereotypical characters are often used on stage because of the high level of identification that such character types foster in an audience. *A Crowd of Twisted Things* is a play with predominantly stereotypical characters whilst *War Cry*,

on the other hand, works against type by offering characters that contradict the well-worn stereotypes.

This dissertation will use certain categories established by Harris (1995), but will also appropriate the notion of stereotypes to create a number of other categories. It should also be noted that Harris is not writing about any institution in particular; rather his ideas about masculine categorization have been appropriated for the purposes of this study. The purpose of this categorization is to create a framework within which the characters may be discussed rather than to impose a list of stereotypical characteristics onto any particular character. The categorization allows the researcher to analyze the different dynamics at work between the characters themselves and the hierarchies of power evident within the institution. Harris outlines a number of differing categories or types; however, for the purposes of this dissertation, only five categories will be interrogated, namely: the rebel, the prefect, the sportsman, the powerless and the teacher.

The Rebel: Resisting the system

Without imposing any distinctive character traits on any of the characters analyzed in this section, it would be accurate to assume that they all, to some degree, reject the espoused private school ideology interrogated in chapter one. They are all intelligent enough to acknowledge that these schools do not cater for every individual in a perfect, liberal and humane manner. The fact that many of the rebel characters expose what is wrong with these institutions, aligns them extremely closely to the writers themselves and, as such, they often appear to be mouthpieces for the authors. This is because much of the time the writer is writing with the specific intent to critique the system and, of all the characters, the rebel is most likely to articulate that discourse. Harris emphasizes the fact that there are many reasons for rebellion and hence, many different types of rebels:

Men rebel for a variety of reasons. Some who question authority because they feel the world is out to destroy them, rebel in order to survive. Others rebel because certain experiences have made them angry and hostile. Some rebel because they are concerned about justice. (1995:146-7)

All of these types are represented in the fictional texts studied here.

What unites all of the rebels in the various texts is the object of their rebellion, namely the private school system. A character such as Mick in *If* rebels against the violence of the institution whilst Anthony Bates in *War Cry*, Gibbo in *A Crowd of Twisted Things* and Judd in *Another Country*, act against what they consider to be the injustices of the system. In *Old Boys*, however, the character of Julian Carlyle rejects the system with a self-mocking sense of cynicism. His rebellion does not seem to emerge from a place of deep-seated anger but rather as a means of surviving in an institution that he intensely dislikes.

Anthony Akerman has frequently been questioned as to whether the character of Julian Carlyle is based on himself. He avoids answering the question by explaining that his characters are all versions of himself in some form or another. This emphasizes the importance of the creation of character from the perspective of the playwright and the manner in which his constructions shape the play as a whole. Julian essentially drives the action in *Old Boys*, and does not hesitate to set himself up as the non-conformist and the archenemy of the school system. The opening moment of the play finds him smoking in the prefects' room, a profoundly rebellious image in an institution where loyalty to and a belief in the system are essential to one's success and ultimately, one's survival. Akerman echoes this notion when he states:

A rebellious questioning attitude is something that people are quite nervous about in institutions like that. Institutions

like that really demand belief and loyalty to the system.

(Appendix C:6)

It is also important to note the manner in which the reader or the audience tends to respond positively to the rebel character. Since the system is constructed as the enemy, the rebel character becomes the hero, rejecting the evil of the system and is, therefore, sympathetic.

It does not take long for the head of house, Adrian Baynesfield, to try and buy Julian out and thereby silence him with the offer of a prefectship, which he accepts. Baynesfield recognizes the potential danger that Julian's rebellion represents to the house and attempts to quell this with the bestowing of privilege on Julian; after all, as the playwright says, "it's better to have a guy like Julian on the inside pissing out than on the outside pissing in" (Appendix C:6). It is Julian's decision to accept the position of prefect that essentially begins the slide towards the final collision between his ambition and his own value system. Although he accepts the position apparently on his own terms (one of which being that he does not have to witness floggings) and ostensibly "nails his colours to the mast," (Appendix C:6), he is deluding himself in thinking that he can accept the privilege without paying a heavy price for it. This echoes Foucault's belief that power is always gained and exercised at a cost (In Lotringer, 1989). This is a vital comment about the institution made by the playwright as he asserts the fact that there is no way to dupe the system and that, in the last instance, the ultimate hegemonic control remains with the system itself. Although Julian continues his rebellion in small ways such as smoking in the prefects' room, his actions sway between arrogant rebellion and a sense of self-mockery as he gradually realizes that the institution has systematically contained him. Akerman acknowledges that Julian's rebelliousness will never constitute a serious threat to the school since "the teasing putdowns to the system that Julian does are easily dealt with by the school in a liberalist tolerant way" (Appendix C:7). The institution easily smothers Julian's rebellion without the need for the application of any coercive force.

The entire system of fagging is an immediate challenge to Julian's liberal value system yet he accepts the luxury without recognizing what is obvious to the audience, namely, that he is merely undermining himself. When his cack Vaughan falls in love with him and, surprisingly, kisses him, it begins the first of many betrayals. The kiss, to Vaughan, is a sign of love and so, when he discovers Julian passionately embracing his sister in the prefects' room, he feels genuinely betrayed by Julian. He subsequently refuses to fag for Julian (a massive breach of the unwritten school code of conduct), and thus rejects the entrenched hierarchical power dynamic of the institution. It may be argued that Vaughan is the real rebel character in *Old Boys* because his rebellion is the only action that truly attacks the hegemonic traditions of the school. It has been stated in chapter one that respect and discipline are the pillars on which the system rests and in this context, Vaughan's refusal to fag constitutes a real threat to the institution. Meanwhile, Baynesfield coerces Julian into witnessing the flogging of Vaughan. Thus the cyclical system of violence and betrayal continues, and the rebel is contained within the institution. The shame, which Julian feels at betraying Vaughan and undermining himself and his own principles, paints Akerman's ostensible hero as weak and his perceived strength over the system as laughable. Adrian Baynesfield's pointed comment to Julian, "You are as much a product of this school as I am Julian, it made you what you are today" (Akerman, 2000:126), illustrates the point that Julian can never deny the role of the system in his own growth and development. It also asserts the belief that the institution outweighs the individual, a point that contradicts the liberal humanist notion of education which holds that it is the development of the individual that is of paramount importance. Thus, the reality of the characters' lived experience undermines the projected ideology of the school and its constructed mythology.

When questioned over his rebel character being ultimately undermined and, in some ways, destroyed by the system, the playwright's response is:

I suppose if I was doing a Hollywood movie, one would have to show how your rebel actually triumphed in adversity over the system and beat the system and was also

made head boy, but you know as well as I do that it just doesn't happen. (Appendix C:9)

In the context of understanding the way that hegemony operates, it is clear that Akerman's point of view is accurate in its assertion that the hegemonic order retains control because of the consent of its own members. With reference to Hollywood films, one could rather ironically note that both *Dead Poets Society* and *The Browning Version* conclude with the protagonists receiving standing ovations. However, it should also be noted that both of these protagonists are teachers and that their ovations occur only when they are exiting the system.

The character of Judd in *Another Country* has many similarities to Julian, in as much as they both construct themselves as being outside of the system. The form and nature of their rebellion, however, takes a different focus. Unlike Julian's ideals, which tend towards liberal humanism, Judd is a radical communist, expounding his contempt for the school system through his assertion of Marxist principles, exemplified by his secret reading of *Das Kapital* (Mitchell, 1982:32-34). The play's implication is clearly that the contradictions that Judd perceives in the school system are indicative of the wider socio-political and class stratifications inherent in England in the early 1930s, the period in which the play is set. The fact that Judd sees the school as a complete microcosm of society separates his character from Julian or Anthony Bates who perceive the institution as a system in itself rather than as the tool of a higher power. Judd rarely attacks the school as a single self-contained entity but rather places his attack in the context of the wider socio-political conditions of the time:

Even a crusty old Tory like Devenish, must be able to see that it's absolutely ludicrous for four hundred boys to line up and blub for a lot of people they never knew, and who only died in a businessman's war because they were too damned stupid to shoot their superior officers and start a revolution like the Russians. (Mitchell, 1982:14)

Although his fall from grace is neither as spectacular nor as obvious as Julian's, Judd is also lured with the bait of prefectship and, to some degree, denies his principles in accepting the position. He insists that he is only accepting the position to serve the common good of the whole - a profoundly socialist notion - namely, to avoid the possibility of Fowler's election to "Twenty Two"; however, his acceptance must be seen in relation to his earlier description of the prefect body as "a self-perpetuating oligarchy of mutual congratulation" (Mitchell, 1982:12). The ultimate irony is that the position offered to him is later withdrawn - too late, however, to avoid the compromise of his own beliefs. The example of Judd clearly reinforces Akerman's belief that such rebels offer little threat to the institution as their rebellion is so easily contained.

A Crowd of Twisted Things deals more specifically with the relationship between five boys in their final weeks at school and therefore, emphasizes each individual's struggle within the environment. The character of Gibbo is fiercely critical of the system; however, unlike Julian or Judd, he does not lay any claim to standing outside of the system and clearly articulates himself as a passive rebel more in the mould of a Gandhi than an anarchist such as the character of Mick in *If*. Unfortunately, his own inability actively to challenge the institution renders him a mere critic and, much like Judd and Julian, his opposition is easily silenced.

The character of Mick in *If*, by contrast, is a radical who fundamentally believes in violence as a means of rebellion and enforcing change. His anarchism does not stem from any specific ideological paradigm, such as Judd's, but rather from the perspective of a loner who does not fit the mould and lurks dangerously on the outside of the school's rules and society's broader code of conduct. Mick's rebellion begins with his arrival back at school for his final year with a scarf covering a moustache. This epitomizes the often banal nature of the rebel stereotype's action against the system and may be paralleled with the apparently ridiculous rebellions of Julian and Merrick. Mick's moustache and Julian's smoking, in themselves, are unimportant actions, yet they carry a greater symbolic importance in the context of the notion of rebellion. Mick's rebellion

becomes increasingly more violent and ultimately leads to the horrifying attack on the speech day parade (Sherwin, 1968:187-191). *If* is the only text studied here that ends in such an eruption and the character of Mick is the single exception to the rule as far as the containment of the rebel is concerned. This is primarily due to the fact that Mick stands completely and consciously outside of the system as opposed to the other rebel characters who seek to oppose the system from within and are, therefore, easily contained by it. Mick is not cowed by the system and his extreme violence illustrates his complete disregard for it.

In contrast to the aforementioned texts, *War Cry* is a difficult play to analyze with regard to character types because the characters are carefully and consciously structured against type. This authorial technique surprises the audience and offers them an alternative to the well-worn stereotypes of adolescent boys. Anthony Bates is the closest character to a rebel type in as much as he verbally challenges the realities of the system. He is painfully idealistic and believes profoundly in universal notions of truth, love and integrity. These notions place a high value on the importance of truth and hold that, in the last instance, the truth will always emerge. Bates fundamentally believes the liberal humanist ideal that people are essentially well-meaning and that good will always triumph over evil. His love of the school is premised on the basis that the school runs on similar principles. His naive belief in these humanist notions ultimately leads to his downfall as the pragmatic Merrick manipulates the system - and Anthony within it - to perfection. Anthony, unlike other rebellious characters, has a deep love for the school; however, this is shattered when he realizes that the school's purported belief in the ideals of truth, honour and integrity, is false and his trust in the institution, idealistic and naive.

The play begins soon after Anthony has been made a prefect and is still battling to come to terms with his decision. Although he maintains his principles to the end, it is the unfortunate contradiction inherent in his decision to accept the position in spite of his misgivings, that ultimately leads to his demise. Like Julian and Judd, Anthony has vocally attacked the institution of prefects. He is intelligent enough to stand outside of the system, yet his belief in the stated values of the school's ideology prevents him from

overtly rebelling against the system, and thus ensures his consent to the dominant hegemonic order. Unlike Gibbo in *A Crowd of Twisted Things*, Anthony's idealism is not born out of weakness and an inability to act on his principles. He states that he is no martyr but in a sense, he is, in that he is willing to suffer for his principles and his beliefs. Bates himself states to Mr. Ball, his co-accused (who is unwittingly caught up in something not of his own making):

This is becoming a power struggle and if we lose we're finished. I'll be expelled and you'll be fired for doing absolutely nothing wrong. I am not a martyr sir and I refuse to sit back and have everything taken away from me. Trust me sir, I will hurt someone to protect what's mine.
(48)

Whilst Anthony and Steven Ball have similar beliefs in the universal ideals of truth and integrity, it is Anthony who finally realizes that these notions are idealistic and do not pertain to, nor are supported by, the school itself.

Another strong link between some of the plays is the connection between the rebel character and the powerless character. Harris believes that rebels are essentially heroic characters as they stand up for the underdog against a dominant force, making these rebels not only respected but also attractive (1995:147). Julian's complex relationship with Vaughan in *Old Boys* has been mentioned previously; however, it is important to note that Vaughan is attracted to Julian in the first place, therefore, in some way dictating the direction which their relationship will take. Similarly Des, the powerless character in *A Crowd of Twisted Things*, tries to kiss Gibbo the rebel. Gibbo's response, however, is to hit Des and then tell the others. The link between the two character types often provides the impetus for the rebel's self betrayal. The relationship between Judd and Wharton in *Another Country* does not manifest itself in any form of homosexuality; however, there is a strong nurturing bond between the two. It is during their interaction

that Judd's appraisal of the school emerges and for the first time we see Judd express the depth of his emotions and his commitment to his belief system:

We all want to die sometimes. It's because other people have power over us, which they have no right to. Power to make us miserable. To stop us being ourselves. What you have to do, when they make you feel like that, is to say to yourself – they have no right, no right at all. I'm me. I won't be what they want me to be. They'll never get our souls. They'll never succeed in making us want to die.

(Mitchell, 1982:42)

Devoid of the political rhetoric, which he perpetually expounds, Judd chooses to speak to Wharton simply, in a vain attempt to inspire the young boy not to grant his consent to an unjust system. This displays Judd's true belief in socialism and, more importantly, his hatred for the political nature of the institution itself. It also reveals that beneath the political exterior, Judd genuinely feels sorry for Wharton and attempts to connect with him on a profoundly human level. The fact that this genuine reaching out fails to have any lasting impact testifies to the entrenched power dynamics of the system and the near impossibility of succeeding in rebelling against it.

Privilege and Deceit: A study of the prefect character

For Akerman, Adrian Baynesfield is the most beguilingly powerful character in *Old Boys*. The playwright emphasizes the importance of the subtlety in the relationship between Adrian and Julian. This subtlety is revealed through the complexity of their relationship, which veers between grudging respect and open hostility. Like the relationship between Merrick and Anthony in *War Cry*, Adrian and Julian have regressed from a place of friendship to one of subtle power play and a continuous struggle for

hegemony within the house. Akerman likens Adrian to the figure of Mephistopheles playing to Julian's Faustus, where he tempts Julian with the offer of a prefectship, which for Julian may be seen as selling his soul to the devil (Appendix C:6). Adrian's maneuvering leaves the audience in little doubt as to his complete cunning and intelligent reading of the situation in which he finds himself: such political acumen is essential to being a successful prefect within the institution.

Adrian's antagonistic attitude towards Julian is first revealed when he asks Louise to the matric dance in the full knowledge that Julian was intending to do the same. Adrian is by nature an intensely political animal; a similar idea is evident in *Another Country* in Judd's assertions that these schools are by their nature deeply politicized institutions. Like Mephistopheles, Adrian returns to collect in the end by crushing Julian's moral integrity through making him witness Vaughan's flogging. Essentially, Adrian embodies the institution, complete with all of its contradictions. His cunning, like the school's, is veiled in a guise of gentle urbanity masking a ruthless and violent core. He also shields his manipulations behind a presentable and largely pragmatic approach to school life. This mirrors the disparity between the real interior of the institution and the projected image as set out in the school's ideology.

Stuart Luthuli occupies an identical power position in *War Cry*, although he projects his power in a far less subtle manner than Baynesfield. Luthuli is intelligent but not exceptionally so; however, he uses his institutional power to great effect. The fact that he is the first black head of house in the school's history makes him appear somewhat invincible. In post-Apartheid South Africa, civil society has embarked on a rigorous path of affirmative action. Hence, talented individuals from previously disadvantaged communities have been propelled swiftly into positions of power within various companies and institutions. Luthuli has recognized his own position as a black South African holding immense power within a predominantly white school, and wields his power accordingly. His continual clashes with Merrick mark an obvious struggle for power. Merrick possesses a populist power illustrated by his immense popularity within the student body, achieved through his compelling personality and prowess on the rugby

field; by contrast, the teachers have instituted Stuart's power in the form of his appointment as head of house. Stuart, like Adrian, is a purely political animal. His decision to betray Anthony and thereby gain a modicum of power over Merrick is a purely practical and political one, made in an attempt to harness Merrick's popularity for his own good:

In five days time the school votes for next years head boy.
I need your power Butcher. You see those spoilt little
racist bastards will never vote for me. But they'll vote for
you. God knows if you asked them to vote for the devil
they would. On Friday we have assembly. I want you to
stand up and say a few words to the school. Naturally it
will be about this weekend's big game, but somehow you
will mention the fact that anybody who does not vote for
me is a traitor to the school. (59/60)

Luthuli is the ultimate victor in *War Cry* because he wins the struggle for hegemonic rule. He fundamentally believes that the end justifies the means and unlike Merrick, who operates from pure emotion and ego, Luthuli's moves are carefully thought out and executed. In his pragmatism, Luthuli may also be considered the perfect product of the private school system. His self-assurance and belief in the need to win at all costs, embodies the unspoken private school agenda, at least in the view of those who criticize it.

The prefect stereotype is generally less insidious in the English public school system as illustrated in *Another Country*. This is primarily because there are more prefect characters in the text and the threat of the rebel is more contained than in *Old Boys*, for example, where Julian appears as an initial threat to the status quo. Barclay and Delahay in *Another Country* are school prefects who have immense power in that particular institution. Like Baynesfield and Luthuli, they are first and foremost political animals. However, unlike Luthuli, whose primary drive is the systematic accumulation of his own

power, Barclay and Delahay are ostensibly committed to upholding the name of the school and do not seem to be driven by personal greed or lust for power. It should be noted, however, that as members of the elite group “Twenty Two”, they have already achieved the pinnacle of boy government within the school. Nevertheless, Mitchell pointedly drives their perspective home in the prefects’ response to Martineau’s suicide after being discovered by a teacher committing a homosexual act with another boy. Delahay’s immediate response is: “silly little fools, what did they want to go and get caught for?” (Mitchell, 1982:23). His second response to the tragedy is even more ironic:

If you ask me, it all comes from having masters who aren’t old boys. An old boy would have more sense than to go prowling around Phot. Soc. Dark room in the evenings. If you’d caught them you’d have had to report them to me or Barclay – someone in Twenty Two. That’s school practice. Men deal with men. Once masters get involved, it’s fatal. Old boys know that. (24)

One is immediately engaged by the fact that Delahay does not seem to care about the boy or his suicide but rather laments the scandal and considers how it could have been avoided. Like a politician cynically weighing up how a national disaster will impact on an election, Delahay once again highlights the importance of protecting the school’s reputation at any cost. Another interesting aspect is his obvious acceptance of the homosexual act itself. The fact that two boys were engaged in homosexuality does not surprise the prefect at all, only that they were caught by a master. It has been established earlier in the dissertation that this attitude pertains specifically to the English public school system but is still interesting when engaging with the hierarchies under discussion.

Despite the fact that *A Crowd of Twisted Things* does not emphasize the issue of prefects, the character Flash essentially performs a similar role, namely defender of the system. He by no means obeys the rules of the school, but is a staunch believer in its ideology. He frequently opposes Gibbo’s verbal attacks on the school:

If the system doesn't suit you then it destroys you! It's just the way it is. This place doesn't pretend to cater for everyone, so if you can't survive here then stay away. That's what you and your kind must realize! (20)

Realistically, one cannot really equate the character of Flash with Delahay, Luthuli or Adrian Baynesfield, because Flash is a self-confessed rebel against society. He is ultimately a self-destructive character similar to Spider in Paul Slabolepszy's *Boo to the Moon*. Flash, however, cannot be seen as a political character, in the same way that the aforementioned others are, in that he does not manipulate the institution to achieve his own good. A glaring contradiction in the character of Flash is that whilst he is a societal rebel, his rebellion does not extend to the school itself, in which he fervently believes:

Your folks agree to sacrifice their hold on you and hand you over to the system. I know that every parent prays that the system doesn't destroy their son. It is nothing more than a calculated risk, and if it pays off then your son need never look back. And to tell you the truth, people like you and Des are in the minority. Most of the people who come out of here do so in one emotional piece. What happened to you in the showers is not our fault, it's not the old boys fault. It's your parent's fault for sending you here and it's your fault for letting them! (20)

These sentiments are echoed by Anthony Akerman:

My father was unhappy there yet he sent me there because he thought he was doing the best for me and I suppose part of putting the play on was a way of forgiving my father

because he was as much of a victim as I was at this school.
(Appendix C:10)

If one equates the rebel character and his views with those of the writer, the prefect may symbolically represent the institution. With a combination of subtlety and brutality, entwined with the ability to manipulate others, the prefects articulate the complexities of the system and as a result, are never constructed as sympathetic characters. The fact that these prefects are created as sly and intelligent, pragmatic and completely aware of their own manipulations, articulates many of the writers' views on the institutions themselves.

The Sportsman: Humour, idiocy and privilege

Akerman describes the sportsman stereotype as “being gifted at playing with balls” (Appendix C:6). If one was looking for a male stereotype, this one would be the most obvious and, in South Africa, the most common. Harris establishes the fact that the difference between success and failure in sport crucially impacts on an individual's status within the institution and his feelings of masculine identity (1995:124). Akerman concedes that the character of Miles Carruthers serves a specific comic function within the play although he believes that despite the fact that Carruthers is not exceptionally bright, he is nonetheless a dangerous character. Carruthers' personality clash with Julian, although intensely humorous, takes on an ugly twist once Miles discovers Julian smoking and coerces him, with the help of Baynesfield, into witnessing Vaughan's flogging, which Julian finds morally reprehensible. The audience is deceived by Miles' stupidity at their own peril and ultimately it becomes apparent that this character possesses significant power within the institution because he is the sporting hero and has therefore, been appointed a prefect. The other function that the overtly antagonistic relationship between Julian and Miles serves, is that it enables the playwright to make the more important relationship between Adrian and Julian the dramatic focus. Miles' obvious lack of intelligence, and the fact that he is a prefect, should not be seen as contradictory

in any way, as the playwright explains: “when I was there, guys as thick as a plank were made prefects because they were gifted at playing with balls” (Appendix C:6). Akerman sets up Miles as a nasty, dimwitted, toast-eating lout, who spends his time reading comics in the prefects’ room and bullying cacks. This veneer of overt hyper masculinity covers a sneaky and malicious core, and the manner in which Miles attempts to catch Julian out reveals a character, in many - if different - ways, as menacing as Baynesfield. It becomes clear to the audience that the only talent that Carruthers possesses is his ability to play sport and the fact that he has so much power within the institution reflects the value that the institution places on sporting achievement.

The manner in which Miles skulks around trying to catch Julian is identical to the primary drive of Fowler in *Another Country*. Fowler is another dim-witted sportsman prefect who is determined to catch his peers performing some heinous misdemeanor in order to assert his own hyper-masculinity by exercising his institutionally granted power. Although not as idiotic as Miles, Fowler ultimately fulfills a similar function in that he feels that to act quickly and savagely is generally the best policy. His threatening manner and his desire to beat anybody who transgresses the rules, generally make him unpopular with his fellow pupils, although he is essentially considered to be a minor menace. However, this attitude proves to be a mistake when in the light of the outcome of the play and perhaps stands as a guarded warning that one underestimates these types of characters at one’s own peril. In *Another Country*, as in *Old Boys*, there is a clash between the sportsman and the rebel and the altercations between Judd and Fowler are similarly amusing:

Fowler: You can’t make up rules just like that.

Judd: Indeed not. Library is a democracy. Sixty-six and two thirds of eligible votes are required for any rule change. This one, I’m pleased to tell you was passed *nem. con.*

Bennett: *(still not looking around)* Which for those
 in the army class means unanimously.

Fowler: You're getting above yourself again,
 Bennett.

Bennett: My favourite position.

Fowler: Your uniform this morning was a disgrace.

Bennett: You thought I was a bloody disgrace, didn't
 you Devenish?

(Devenish refuses to acknowledge him)

Fowler: I've half a mind to ask Barclay for
 permission to beat you.

Judd: Well – you've half a mind. We can all agree
 on that.

Fowler: Right that's it. You needn't think you'll get
 away with this, either of you!

(Mitchell, 1982:20)

The humour of this engagement between the rebel and the sportsman is an important stylistic writing device. Not only does it demonstrate the intelligence of the rebel and the idiocy of the sportsman, but also provides welcome comic relief to the audience from the intensity of the drama itself. Ultimately, however, the stupidity of the sportsman

character is also a device for commenting on the system, rendering the system itself ridiculous for valuing these sportsmen at all.

The character of Rigter in *A Crowd of Twisted Things* once again reinforces the stereotype of the unintelligent sportsman. It is interesting to note that in each of the three aforementioned plays, the sportsman is an undeniably stupid character. Obviously, there is no dictate to state that every sportsman in reality is stupid; however, what is clearly indicated by the use of this device are the playwrights' views on what the institution values, namely sport and all the resulting traits that sport embodies. Rigter's standard response to anything that is beyond his realm of understanding is, "don't talk shit!" (8) Like Merrick Butcher in *War Cry*, Rigter is continually shining his rugby boots, a vivid motif for the sportsman in such an institution.

Once again *War Cry* proves a difficult text to analyze in terms of character stereotypes. Merrick Butcher is obviously a great sportsman and the key antagonist in the drama; however, unlike the traditional stereotype, he is highly intelligent, manipulative and confident. His controlling ease with masters and boys alike elevates him to a higher status than any of the other boys within the school. Unlike the sportsmen in the other plays, Merrick's sporting ability is coupled with intelligence, wit, articulateness and confidence. The clinical way in which he relates to the world is reflected in his views on success at the game of rugby: "If you're smart enough Al, you never have to gamble. You just find their weakness and go for the jugular" (25).

Sid Govender, although not a sportsman, fulfills the important comic function in the play. His friendship with Merrick is an uneasy mix of humour, reliance and abuse. Much of the humour arises from Merrick's verbal bullying of Sid whom Merrick uses as a verbal punching bag. Sid endures Merrick's abuse because, by maintaining a close association and friendship with Merrick, he is able to attain a certain status level that he would otherwise not have.

It is obvious that the sportsman character type performs a vital function in each of the texts. This type serves, to some degree, the function of the antagonist, although in most cases their antagonism operates as a foil for other more subtle antagonistic dynamics. They also provide the writer with a tool for comedy and a medium for exposing the more overt idiosyncratic discrepancies of the institution. The sportsman type also offers the playwright a possibility for exploring a character that is somewhat extreme and larger than life – the irony is that this is the type of character that the audience will recognize and with whom they might possibly identify. The mixing of extreme and stereotypical characters with more complex ones makes for interesting theatre, not only because of the diversity of the character constructions themselves, but also in the way that these different character types interact.

The 'Powerless': Exploring the hierarchies of powerlessness within private boys' boarding school

As the tag 'powerless' connotes, this type of character is situated in the subaltern group of the school power structure. Unlike the rebel, prefect and sportsman, who are widely understood and recognized male stereotypes, the category of the powerless embraces a number of characteristics and identity forms. Harris does not identify this type, but rather stratifies those without power into smaller groupings such as the "nerd" and the "gay" (1995). However, for the purposes of this dissertation, the broader group of boys without power in the institution will be termed the powerless.

All the texts contain characters that are relatively powerless in the institution; however, the reasons for their inclusion tend to vary depending on what form of powerlessness the writers choose to identify. Another important aspect is the direct link between this type of character and homosexuality. It has been mentioned earlier that part of the

exclusionary process in private schools is the stringent demonstration of an individual's masculinity. Boys who are effeminate, homosexual, aesthetic, and who have not asserted their own masculine identity, are frequently marginalized within the school and rendered powerless. This is clearly articulated in the texts.

The first grouping in the subaltern group is the new boy. At Michaelhouse, new boys are called "cacks"¹⁷. Cacks are expected to obey orders and behave in a submissive nature at all times. They are also expected to fag for older boys. This stratification is imposed on the boys by the institution itself and every new boy has to endure the process for one year. It is a temporary form of powerlessness and serves to reinforce the hierarchy of the school's power structures. Being a new boy ultimately positions the pupil as a victim on the lowest rung of the ladder within the institution's power hierarchy. The schools themselves maintain that being a cack is a fundamental part of a boy's development. They maintain that such servitude instills qualities such as respect and discipline, the twin pillars of the school's ideology, into each individual. Randall, on the other hand, questions the private schools' assertions that fagging is a positive and necessary element of private school education:

This seems to suggest that fagging is actually a conscious creation based on sound educational principles, rather than a somewhat ridiculous relic of the feudal past, open to abuse and of very dubious educational value. (1982:21)

This opinion is echoed in *Old Boys, If* and *Another Country* where the texts themselves offer a stern critique on this subtle form of enforced slavery.

Vaughan Cockburn is a perfect example of an individual who occupies this powerless position and, from the outset, it is obvious to the audience that Vaughan has the identity of the cack thrust upon him, dictating not only his actions but also his speech. He also becomes the victim of a manipulative power struggle between Adrian and Julian and is

¹⁷ Cack literally means "scum of the Earth".

ultimately flogged as a result of it. Vaughan does, however, take the most courageous step in the play by refusing to fag for Julian after Julian's seeming betrayal. This is acknowledged by Akerman himself:

Vaughan takes the most radical position of the play by refusing to listen to him [Julian]. The intellectual teasing rebellion to the system of Julian is coped with by the school with a certain degree of liberal tolerance, but a first year boy who refuses to fag – you just can't have that! You've got to kill the guy! It's unacceptable because it challenges the foundations on which the school is based - respect and discipline. (Appendix C:7-8)

Akerman likens the character of Vaughan to another dramatic antecedent namely, the Greek character Antigone. (Appendix C:8). Both challenge the existing power structures in the face of overwhelming odds and stand up for the rights of the individual against a domineering system. The fact that this leads to their respective downfalls, reveals the immense strength that institutional power has over the individual. The violence of Vaughan's punishment illustrates the Althusserian notion of the Repressive State Apparatus, as the last resort of the institution is to contain any form of rebellion through the use of institutionalized violence. The intensity of the punishment itself reveals the enormity of the threat to the institution, whereby consent has no longer been given to the ruling group and hence, the use of institutional coercion is enforced.

Akerman does not in any way construct Vaughan as a sweet, innocent boy; in fact, he embodies the role of the predator in kissing Julian. This is a deliberate choice on the part of the writer to invert the audience's expectation of the powerless character. The entire issue of homosexuality in private boys' boarding schools is thereby brought to the fore in spite of the manner in which the school denies its existence. The fact that Julian responds

to Vaughan by kissing him back, emphasizes the fluidity between homosexuality and heterosexuality amongst adolescent boys in such a cloistered environment.

On the other hand, the character of Wharton in *Another Country* reinforces the powerlessness of new boys in these institutions. His status is almost identical to Vaughan's, although he refuses to challenge the system in any manner. Although not identified as homosexual, Wharton still exists in a perpetual state of terror and his simple acceptance of abuse from older boys is an example of the consent granted to the dominant power.

The second grouping in the subaltern or powerless category is the older boy who has been rejected and marginalized by the dominant hegemonic group. In contrast to the new boy grouping, that is a status shared by a large number of boys, the second grouping is often a result of a personal rejection of an individual's masculine identity by his peers. While it is not the only reason for this marginalisation, older boys are frequently marginalized within the institution because of their inability to assert their own masculinity. Most frequently, this marginalisation occurs as a result of an individual being branded a 'wimp' or a 'queer.' The reason for this rejection is the obvious group homophobia: "men tend to be homophobic, which means they fear sexual contact with other men, do not want to be considered gay and as a result are terrified about establishing close ties with men" (Harris, 1995:107).

The character of Des in *A Crowd of Twisted Things* is a perfect example of a boy who is shunned and humiliated by a powerful peer group. Initially, this rejection is the result of his constant whining and reluctance to act in a rugged fashion; however, his humiliation becomes more acute after his possible homosexuality is revealed. Des himself is confused about his own sexuality and identity:

I'm too weak willed to fight against them, just like I'm too weak willed too fight against you. I can't hit you, cause you're twice my size and you're the sort of person who

would enjoy hitting me anyway. I don't know if I'm gay or not, I don't know what I am. (21)

In sharp contrast to Des's weak submission, the character of Marius in *Embodied Laughter* (Higginson, 1998) acknowledges his homosexuality and is shunned for it. He, however, appears at an after school party to face his enemies and thus demonstrates his courage. This immediately brings the question of what constitutes true courage to the fore. Courage is widely regarded as a manly trait yet in *Embodied Laughter* it is, ironically, the least 'manly' boy who demonstrates the most courage. This once again constitutes a critique of the hegemonic masculinity of the system and the narrow masculine parameters in which the school operates. Ultimately, only the fact that Marius's homosexuality was discovered on his last day at the school saves him having to endure the isolation of the powerless group.

War Cry, on the other hand, articulates the plight of a boy who is accused of being homosexual whilst appearing to be heterosexual. Anthony Bates is one of the only characters in the studied texts to straddle more than one category. He is ostensibly a rebel of sorts in that he questions the legitimacy of the institution itself. Ironically, he is also a prefect and a powerful student in the school. Merrick's fabricated story about a homosexual relationship between Anthony and Steven Ball is the catalyst for Anthony's descent from an intelligent yet questioning prefect into the ranks of the powerless. His expulsion and final rejection by his peers places this proud character into the subaltern group. In this particular case, homosexuality is the weapon with which Anthony is defeated in the system. It is, however, important to note that his peers reject him because they buckle under Merrick's power rather than because they actually believe Merrick's lie that Anthony is homosexual.

It is difficult to articulate exactly why the weaker characters in these texts tend to be branded as homosexuals. It seems that this is a deliberate choice on the part of the writers primarily because it provides for dramatic interest and tension. Mostly these

types of characters are branded homosexuals due to a lack of overtly masculine behaviour, or a general lack in personal and masculine identity or conventionally accepted masculine traits like strength, physical prowess and sporting ability, rather than because they are in fact homosexual. The issue is clouded, however, by characters such as Vaughan, Des and Marius, who actively engage in acts of homosexuality. This possibly reinforces the homophobic notion that aesthetic boys who do not engage in rugged activities have a tendency towards homosexuality. Ultimately, the responses to each character in this category highlight the extreme homophobia that exists in private boys' boarding schools and the manner in which an individual's personal identity and sexual orientation impact on that individual's power within the institution.

The Teacher: An analysis of the teacher figure in the private boys' boarding school

Although this category is not a distinctly identifiable grouping with regards to private boys' boarding schools, and Harris elected not to analyze this grouping or stereotype, it is still interesting to investigate the manner in which teachers are represented in the various texts. Although some of the texts exclude teachers and feature only pupils, there are three texts, which, to a large degree, centre around the characters of teachers and headmasters. The 1994 screen version of Terrence Rattigan's play, *The Browning Version*, articulates the world of Classics teacher, Andrew Crocker Harris and Tom Schulman's *Dead Poets Society* (1989) introduces the inspirational English teacher Mr. Keating. Steven Ball in *War Cry* is another teacher who radically contradicts the stereotypical authoritarian teacher model.

Andrew Crocker Harris is fondly known as the "Hitler of the lower 5th" for his strict abrupt manner and harsh punishments. A teacher nearing the end of his career, he has somewhat unfairly been pushed into retirement by the principal and school board, primarily due to his lack of popularity amongst the staff and boys. Unlike Keating and

Ball, Crocker Harris is a somewhat unsympathetic character with a rigid teaching regime and an unsatisfactory marriage. The film chronicles his last few days at the school and the manner in which a young pupil named Teplo rekindles his inspiration for teaching. His hard-edged exterior melts to reveal a troubled, complicated man with a deep passion for teaching. His farewell speech to the school is an apology for not inspiring the boys as a teacher should. This reflects on the institution itself and the manner in which it forces teachers into a rigid, authoritarian teaching technique, in direct contrast to the stated aims of the private boys' boarding school ideology.

In contrast to Crocker Harris, Keating is a revolutionary teacher whose motto "Carpe Diem" inspires the boys in his English class to rebel against tradition and literally, seize the day. His extreme teaching methods border on the absurd, yet ultimately serve to shatter the strict hierarchical transmission of learning and knowledge. Keating inspires one of his students, Neil Perry, to follow his dream of becoming an actor and to stand up to his authoritarian father. This leads tragically to Perry's suicide and Keating's expulsion from the school. Steven Ball, nicknamed Scrotum by the boys, has many similarities to Keating, in particular his enthusiasm and zest for life. His lessons take the form of a lively kind of debate and he clearly inspires the boys to engage in their own thought processes. His special friendship with his top English student Anthony Bates, ultimately leads to Bates' demise. Like Keating, Ball becomes embroiled in a potentially dangerous scandal; however, in the final instance, he betrays Anthony and his own value system and accepts a promotion whilst Anthony is expelled. Ball's betrayal occurs under great pressure from the school head Gerald Everett and he finds himself too weak to defend Anthony against the might of the institution despite his stated intentions:

Anthony if they believe him, I'll make sure this school's name is dragged through every mud pit in Africa. I'll show Everett a scandal with a capital S. *(pause, he turns to Anthony)* You forget that I also have power in this place and Everett knows that. He cannot afford to throw me out

because he knows I'm dangerous. (pause) Anthony, I'm
not going to let anything happen to you. (48)

These brave words prove ephemeral in the face of the coercion and persuasion exerted by Everett in his effort to contain the potential scandal and this reinforces the ruling hegemony and prevailing status quo. Ball's failure is particularly poignant because of his promises to Anthony and constitutes yet another betrayal caused by the system itself.

An interesting point of discussion is that in each text a teacher inspires a single boy and strikes up a relationship with that pupil and in each case, the pupil impacts on the way in which the teacher engages with his world. In the case of Keating and Ball, the results of the relationship are disastrous for both teacher and pupil. In addition to the personal relationships explored, these two teachers also offer a new and exciting manner of teaching and urge their pupils to challenge their limits and engage more fully with their world. This, on a more insidious level, constitutes a threat to the system and must be contained. Keating's expulsion and Ball's betrayal of Anthony signal a return to old order and the destruction of any challenge to the status quo.

Another point worth highlighting is the unsympathetic light in which the headmasters in the various texts are represented. Like the prefect characters, the headmasters represent the institutions and are thus, in the context of a critique, painted as malicious, unfeeling men, consumed by issues such as tradition, punishment and school reputation. The headmasters in both *Dead Poets Society* and *War Cry* are political animals, seemingly unfeeling and severe, and are deliberately contrasted with the humane and emotional characters of Keating and Ball. The playwrights, to emphasize the repugnance the audience should feel towards the headmasters and the systems that they represent, carefully construct these binaries which may or may not reflect reality. These headmasters exemplify a system that places a higher value on tradition and reputation than on creativity and excellence. This is evident in *War Cry* when the headmaster Everett threatens Steven Ball:

Steven think carefully, you leave – you may never be employed as a teacher again. You lose your house, your salary, your pension and most importantly your reputation. You will be forever branded a pervert and a homosexual, is that what you want? (65-66)

Clearly, Steven Ball's ability and success as a teacher are not considered important in the context of a failure of reputation.

Conclusion

It has been established that character construction is a crucial element of dramatic fiction. Not only do characters illustrate the plot or story, they also reflect the various paradigms and perspectives of the author. In the instance of the representation of the private boys' boarding school on stage, the playwright utilizes characters to present specific stances in relation to the institution. This is most evident in the clashes between the prefect character who represents and advocates the system itself, and the rebel character who challenges the system and questions the overall legitimacy of the institution.

The use of stereotypes and the strong links between the types of characters that have been created, enhance the researcher's ability to understand the various frameworks of power inherent in these types of educational institutions. It is also clear that there is a correlation between the type of character created and that character's ability to exercise power within the hegemony of the institution. An important example of this is the sportsman character type whose power is derived simply from a talent for playing sport.

Finally, it is evident that although these characters are fictional constructs and are created in the imagination of the writer, they have the ability to deconstruct the existing

propaganda of the private boys' boarding school, and thus exist as a vital weapon in the armoury of the writer of dramatic fiction.

CONCLUSION

Theatre, and by extension dramatic fiction as a whole, seems, at the outset, to be an awkward means to choose for critiquing a particular social reality. Not only are these dramatic constructions fictional, but they have also been created through a long and subjective process that essentially articulates one particular individual's view or dramatic ideals. It is nigh impossible to ascertain where actual events end and dramatic license begins, or whether the characters themselves are based on actual people or are simply the fictional creations of the writer.

Despite the restrictions of fiction, however, it is nonetheless accurate to state that theatre can be, and has been, used to engage in social critique to great effect. This is evidenced here clearly in the works produced in South Africa since 1994 that articulate the social reality of the private boys' boarding school. Two stage plays, namely *Old Boys* by Anthony Akerman and *War Cry* by John van de Ruit, made a major impact on the Kwazulu-Natal theatre scene. More importantly, however, they raised questions about private boys' boarding schools that hitherto had been largely ignored on the South African stage. These plays, in addition to other South African fictional works centering on such institutions, form a textual body of work from which an effective critique of private boys' boarding schools emerges. Therefore, the title of this dissertation refers to the texts that are written by old boys one of these elite private schools, who are reflecting on their experiences there, whilst at the same time constructing a dramatic critique of these institutions.

However, to limit the discussion merely to South African stage plays that engage with these institutions greatly restricts the potential scope of the analysis. Therefore, in order to broaden the discussion, various other texts that embrace different media and contexts

have been included. Of these texts, Julian Mitchell's *Another Country* stands out as a seminal dramatic work in this field, as it articulates the English public school system, the system from which the South African private school system is descended.

The majority of the texts studied in this dissertation reject the entrenched mythology and espoused ideology of the private boys' boarding schools and project these institutions as complex microcosms of the broader society, complete with a myriad of power hierarchies where the contestation for hegemonic control is ongoing and cyclical. The work of various Marxist scholars and more particularly, Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and Michel Foucault's analysis of institutional power hierarchies, provide an effective theoretical underpinning for the ideas and concerns revealed in the dramatic texts themselves. The fictional texts and the theoretical underpinnings alike, seem to reject the liberal humanist thrust of these schools' ideology; in particular, the notion that these institutions purportedly facilitate the complete development of each individual in the tradition of liberal humanist education, is revealed, as idealistic, and theorists and writers alike identify the social reality of such institutions as harsher and more pragmatic than the projected ideology would suggest.

Notions of masculinity and more specifically, hegemonic masculinity, are reflected in the various fictional writers' constructions of character. These character constructions often take the form of stereotyped character groups such as: the prefect, the rebel or the sportsman. Although not every character within these groups is stereotyped, each character group identifies its members in a similar way. This is best exemplified in the case of the sportsman whereby the individual is often painted as dim-witted, and in some cases downright stupid, whilst still possessing significant power within the institution by virtue of sporting prowess. This reflects the theoretical body of work on masculinity that asserts an emphasis on the physical and on the importance of sport in the struggle for hegemonic masculinity. The plays themselves clearly articulate this hegemonic struggle as members from each character group jostle for power and continually attempt to seize and exercise hegemonic control over their immediate environment. The character group of the 'powerless', clearly demonstrates the hegemonic nature of the institution, and the

delicate balance between coercion on the part the ruling group and the consent to be ruled on the part of the subaltern group. In connection to notions of hegemony it is important to note that rebellions against the system are almost always contained by consent or quelled by coercion. The character of Vaughan in *Old Boys*, is an excellent example of a member of the subaltern group refusing consent to be ruled and directly challenging the ruling group's (in this case the prefects') hegemony. His brutal beating exemplifies the coercion of the ruling group in its suppression of his rebellion, and the subsequent return to the status quo.

The crucial balance between dramatic and fictional study and the broader theoretical perspective makes this exploration far richer than a mere sociological analysis or interpretive dramatic study. The underpinning of the key dramatic concepts, such as theme and character creation, with the theoretical work of Gramsci and Foucault facilitates the development of a unique form of critique that incorporates the solidity of sociological and philosophical analysis whilst still allowing for the subtlety and creativity that is to be found in explorations of dramatic fiction. Donaldson highlights the importance of playwrights in illustrating and critiquing the social reality of gender and gender relations, a central concern in a study related to masculinity and its ramifications in private boys' boarding schools:

Playwrights form part of the organizing intellectuals.
These people regulate and manage gender regimes,
articulate experiences, fantasies and perspectives, reflect on
and interpret gender relations. (1993: Introduction)

Finally, the purpose of the theorists and the writers of dramatic fiction alike, in attempting to deconstruct and challenge the private school mythology, is not to destroy the private boys' boarding schools themselves, but to highlight the contradictions within these institutions and within their constructs of masculinity, thereby, perhaps, facilitating an awareness and subsequent resolution of the problems associated with these

contradictions. Of all those who critique these institutions, none are better equipped to accomplish a reconstruction of meaning than those writers whose personal experiences afford them the opportunity to stand on the inside of the private boys' boarding school and write out to the broader society.

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APPENDIX A

WAR CRY

Written by John van de Ruit

PERFORMANCES

September 1999

Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre

February – March 2000

Natal Playhouse Loft Theatre

September 2000

Hilton College Theatre, Hilton Festival

WAR CRY

By

John van de Ruit

John van de Ruit
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CAST:

Anthony Bates
Merrick Butcher
Sid Govender
Alan Greenstein
Stuart Luthuli
Steven Ball (Scrotum)
Gerald Everett

War Cry was first performed in September 1999 at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, Durban, with the following cast:

Anthony Bates	John van de Ruit
Merrick Butcher	Ben Voss
Sid Govender	Santhiran Moonsamy
Alan Greenstein	Tyron Akal
Stuart Luthuli	Rakau Boikanyo
Steven Ball (Scrotum)	Patrick Kenny
Gerald Everett	Bruce Piper

Directed by	Tamar Meskin
Designed by	Mervyn McMurtry

War Cry was subsequently performed in February 2000 at the Playhouse Loft, Durban, with the following cast:

Anthony Bates	John van de Ruit
Merrick Butcher	Ben Voss
Sid Govender	Santhiran Moonsamy
Alan Greenstein	Tyron Akal
Stuart Luthuli	Rakau Boikanyo
Steven Ball (Scrotum)	Timothy Wells
Gerald Everett	Peter Gardner

Directed by	Tamar Meskin
Designed by	Mervyn McMurtry

ACT I

SCENE 1

The Dormitory

The stage is in darkness, we hear the sound of Anthony playing his harmonica. At first it sounds as if he is playing random notes, however these notes soon form a chorus and then a melody, it is a lonely, haunting sound. The lights come up to a dim light indicating darkness, yet light enough for the action to be seen. Anthony is sitting up on his bed, the others are all trying to sleep.

There is a loud groan:

Sid: Hey shut that bloody thing up man.

(Anthony continues playing)

Alan: Don't lose your day job china.

(still continues)

Sid: How's this cowboy music.

Alan: Depressing shit.

Mer: Would someone please shut the musician up!

Ant: *(stops playing)* I think there's a serious lack of artistic appreciation in this dormitory.

Sid: If that's art, then my mother's a monkey!

Mer: That would account for a few things...

Anthony continues playing

Sid: Ant man I'm trying to sleep.

Al: Give it a break maestro

Ant: *(stopping)* You guys are quite a tough audience.

Mer: Only audience you're likely to get my friend.

Ant: I think you all need a little lesson in the appreciation of art.

Sid: I've told you, that isn't art.

Ant: Then what is art Sid?

Sid: Stuffed if I know, but that's not art.

Mer: Ant pass here, I'll show you art. *(He makes a failed attempt at playing the instrument)*

Ant: Now that's definitely not art.

Mer: Well let's put it to the vote, what does the audience say?

Al: You don't need an audience for it to be art.

Sid: What?

Al: Art is art, there's no need for an audience...

Mer: Here we go.

Ant: Then who's the judge as to whether it's art or not?

Al: The artist

Sid: Jeez you okes can only talk crap...

Al: *(continuing)* See for you, art is music, for Merrick it could be rugby, but for me, art is a state of mind, it is complete control ...

Mer: Rugby's got nothing to do with art, it's a bloody war... *(he makes a failed attempt at mastering the instrument)*

Ant: Ever heard of the art of war?

Sid: So what's art for me?

Al: Probably cutting your toenails in a straight line. *(they laugh, Merrick is making a loud noise on the harmonica)*

Sid: Jesus Merrick it sounds like you're strangling a cat.

Mer: I used to play this like a real muso, ask Ant.

Sid: Crap man

Mer: My oath, in fourth form we spent the whole holiday practicing this thing.

Ant: And after 2 weeks, you could still only play *Three Blind Mice*.

Mer: You lying bastard, I could also play *The Piano Man*.

Al: On the harmonica? That sounds a bit Irish.

Sid: Hey my Granny was Irish.

Ant: That would also account for a few things...

Al: But guys, we still haven't solved the question of, what is art.

Sid: Who cares?

Mer: Ja who gives a shit Greenstein.

Ant: Art is just a label Al. It's something that pretentious people pin to pretentious things to make them seem significant.

Sid: So you saying there's no such thing as art?

Ant: Of course there is, but it isn't the same thing as indulgence Sid. You see we all believe that art can only be created by cocaine snorters and people with purple hair and tie-dyed shirts. The problem is that we miss the really good stuff. We miss the real art.

(pause)

Sid: *(highly confused)* Which is what?

Ant: You won't know until you find it. And even when you do find it, there's no guarantee that it will be art for anyone else – it's completely subjective

Al: But that's my point, art is totally relative and without meaning.

Ant: Of course it has meaning. If it had no meaning it would be totally pointless!

Mer: I think the mere act of defining art is pretentious.

Ant: That's why I'm not defining it.

Mer: You're full of shit Bates, you know that?

Ant: I hope you're not trying to define me Butcher. Some people might construe that as hypocrisy.

Mer: No, hypocrisy is when you privately covet something that you have always publicly despised.

Ant: You mean like being a prefect?

(Sid who has been staring out of the window jumps up excitedly)

Sid: Hey there's a shooting star.

(Al jumps over to Sid's bed and looks out the window)

Sid: Na you've missed it, it was one of those bright red bastards.

Al: You know that those things are meant to be dangerous.

Mer: Al, they're gigantic clumps of burning rock hurtling towards Earth at a thousand times the speed of sound. I don't think it takes a NASA scientist to work out that they're dangerous.

Al: No I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about spiritual powers. Did you know that if you watch a meteorite for longer than three seconds, they start to unravel the fibre in your brain.

Sid: Crap man!

Al: It's a proven fact Sid, three seconds and you're on your way to the Happy Hills home for the cranky!

(slight pause)

Sid: *(concerned)* How long did you think I ...

Al: No you'll be fine Sid, you didn't have any fibre in your brain to start with anyway!

Mer: You know Greenstein, I have never met anybody in my life, who talks as much complete bullshit as you.

Al: Look I'm just telling you what I read. Whether you obey the warning is your own concern.

Mer: Where do you get all this mumbo jumbo, freaky shit from?

Sid: Ja, like that story you were going on about the other day.

Al: What story?

Sid: I dunno, I wasn't listening. Something about a butcher with one arm...

Mer: I've heard that one. That's when that butcher sold his arm by mistake!

Al: No man that's another story altogether...

Ant: What the hell are you guys talking about?

Al: Okay, this guy's having a big party, so he decides he wants a sheep on the spit. So off he goes to the butchery to pick it up. Anyway he goes into one of those huge freezers at the back of the shop to select the sheep he wants. So in he goes and starts going through the carcasses. Now as he gets to the one he wants, "click", the door locks behind him. He starts banging on the door, shouting for the owner, but the freezer's soundproof, nobody can hear him scream. So now he starts to panic, he's in this freezer with dead animals and it's closing time, he can see the butcher locking up but there is nothing he can do, the butcher doesn't hear him, locks the shop, goes home. The next day the butcher opens up the freezer and there's this guy, stone dead, as hard as a rock. *(pauses for dramatic effect, the others think this indicates the end of the story)*

Mer: To be honest that doesn't really surprise me Al.

Ant: Pretty much standard behaviour when locked in a freezer I'm afraid.

Sid: Is there a reason for this story or is it just...

Al: The reason is, the freezer in which the guy was locked had been disconnected, it wasn't even on. The temperature never got below 18 degrees, but his mind convinced him that it was freezing. He talked himself into his own death. *(concludes proudly, as if he has proved something significant)*

Sid: Jeess that's freaky!

Mer: Wherever he is, he must be feeling like a real doos.

Al: Power of the mind guys, power of the mind.

Ant: You really believe that?

Al: What?

Ant: That it's all in the mind

Al: Absolutely, the only reason you can't do something is up here. (*indicates his head*)

Mer: Jesus you can talk shit sometimes

Al: You're always your own worst enemy

Mer: That is such complete unadulterated crap

Ant: Why Merrick?

Mer: Your enemy's out there, not in here (*indicates his head*)

Ant: What enemy?

Mer: Everyone's got enemies.

Ant: Oh really?

Mer: Of course they do.

Ant: Everything's black and white hey Merrick?

Mer: Absolutely

Ant: Easy game, right?

Mer: You said it.

Ant: (*subtle mocking*) Wait, let me guess, you look out the window and see your enemies lurking in the shadows... No wait, they could be under your bed ...or in your locker. Have you checked in your trunk lately Merrick?

Mer: That's exactly where they are... (*a beat, Merrick is a little rattled by being made to look foolish, he changes the subject*) Hey Al, I've got a story you may just be interested in.

Al: About what?

Mer: The supernatural

Al: Bring it on.

Mer: Now my oath this sounds weird, but it's no bullshit. *(He pauses for effect)* I went for a smoke just after lights out.

Al: Tonight

Mer: Ja

Sid: Hey Merrick don't forget we have a newly elected prefect in the dorm.

Mer: Oh of course, I'd better watch what I say

Ant: Look guys I've told you before, I don't care if you smoke.

Mer: Makes you wonder why they made him a prefect

Sid: Probably because Scrotum thinks the sun shines out his arse.

Ant: Look how many times do I have to tell you, I didn't ask to be a prefect, I didn't particularly want to be a prefect, and as far as I'm concerned you can smoke as much as you like as long as it isn't in front of me.

Mer: Well that's most gracious of you.

Sid: So if you didn't want to be a prefect, why didn't you turn it down?

Ant: *(pause)* Because I decided not to.

Merrick looks disparagingly at Anthony, shakes his head and then continues his story

Mer: Anyway as I was saying, I went to the chapel for a smoke

Sid: *(outraged)* You can't smoke in the chapel

Mer: Why not?

Sid: Because...because... its the chapel!

Al: Sid it is your God given right to smoke wherever you like

Mer: Al's right Sid, you can smoke anywhere you want as long as it isn't in a library, a cinema, a theatre, an office, a restaurant or in any public or private place.

Sid: You can't smoke in a church!

Mer: Okay Sid, give me one reason why I can't smoke in a church.

Sid: Well for one it's against the rules.

Ant: What rules?

Sid: The rules

Ant: And who made the rules Sid, God or the school?

Mer: Does it make a difference?

Ant: I think it does.

Mer: Why?

Ant: Because some rules were made by God, and others were made by petty old British colonials a hundred years ago.

Mer: So you're saying you don't believe in the rules of the school

Ant: Some of them

Mer: I'm sure you'll make a great prefect... *(Anthony glares at Merrick, Al defuses the situation)*

Al: Merrick can we cut to the chase?

Mer: Where was I?

Al: Having a smoke in the chapel

Mer: So I was just sitting there thinking, enjoying my twak in the dark, watching the smoke spirals go up. *(becomes more serious and intense)* And then suddenly the smoke changed direction, like somebody was blowing it. I had this weird feeling like somebody was there. So naturally I thought that someone had come in or opened a window or something. The thing is, all the doors and windows were locked, there wasn't a soul in the place. *(brief pause)* So you tell me where that draft came from...

Sid: Maybe you farted.

Mer: *(he stares at Sid disparagingly)* Anyway, I carried on with my smoke, *(Anthony starts playing his harmonica under the story, the music is dark and creepy, Merrick is the master storyteller, intense and unhurried)* but I could feel something was off, just strange. You know that feeling when you're being watched, but there's nobody there... Just weird. Every now and again the smoke would blow in a different direction. I didn't think too much about it, I mean I thought there might have been a hole in the roof or something. But then I heard the organ...

Sid: What

Mer: At first I thought I imagined it, but then it came again, just one long note baaaaaaaaaaaaa ... I tell you I just bolted. But as I was running I could feel this freezing draft behind me, something was chasing me... *(By now Anthony's musical accompaniment has gathered pace and volume, he is clearly enjoying himself)*

Sid: Shit a brick

Mer: I know I was alone in that chapel.

Al: Obviously not

Mer: Well lets just say I was the only living being in there... *(Anthony's creepy music continues)*

Sid: Bates, stop that crap, you're starting to scare the shit out of me... *(Anthony starts laughing, stops playing)*

Ant: What a soundtrack.

Sid: Guys lets talk about something else.

Al: Do you think it could of been...

Sid: Who?

Mer: Who else?

Sid: Who?

Al: It must have been

Sid: Who for shit's sakes?

Mer: Mcarthur!

(Merrick and Al jump on Sid with a blanket, making ghostly noises)

Sid: Shit!

Mer: I reckon it was him.

Ant: The ghost of Mcarthur has come to get you Merrick...

Sid: You swear you aren't taking the piss out of me?

Mer: On my mother's life

Sid: You don't like your mother

Mer: On my life

Sid: Jeez, okes, I hate this shit. Bates doesn't this scare the shit out of you?

Ant: I think it's great, brings a bit of character to the place.

Mer: Yip it was Mcarthur alright.

Al: They say he never sleeps.

Sid: Who?

Al: Mcarthur.

Ant: What a life, the eternal insomniac. I wonder what he does in the day, poor bloke must be bored out of his mind.

Sid: Ghosts don't come out in the day, they hate sunlight.

Mer: That's vampires you asshole.

Al: By night he just paces the school, up and down...up and down...

Ant: Well quite clearly tonight he was in chapel.

Sid: Jesus that's spooky. Wasn't he a housemaster?

Al: 1930's

Mer: Committed suicide in 1937

Al: Hung himself in the chapel

Mer: I heard he threw himself in front of a train

Al: Na, that was somebody else, a homesick first year, somebody called Larkin...

Ant: Where do you get all this from Al?

Al: Archives.

Sid: So why did he commit suicide?

Al: Nobody knows

Mer: Ten to one he was a flamer!

Al: Well whatever happened was too hectic to get out, so it was all hushed up. The archives merely say that he was found hanging in the chapel on the 4th of December 1937

Sid: So who found him?

Al: Rumour has it he was discovered half way through the Sunday service. One of the boys got bored of the sermon and looked up at the roof, and saw him hanging there...

Sid: Jesus that's siff...

Al: The chaplain at the time, a guy by the name of Simpson apparently had such bad eyesight that he thought the dead body of Mcarthur was part of the Christmas decorations.

Mer: Must have livened the place up a bit.

Al: Apparently not, there was only one small column in the paper saying that a master had died and that's all. There's nothing left in the archives.

Ant: So everything was hushed up?

Al: Of course

Ant: I tell you this school doesn't like a story, they just cover it up.

Mer: That's how the place works.

Sid: The press are waiting for a scandal, if they don't hush it up...

Ant: But the truth will always come out.

Mer: Truth's got nothing to do with it, this school runs on reputation.

Ant: Reputation is just superficial crap Merrick and you know it. If there is stuff going on in here, it will eventually come out.

Mer: Not necessarily.

Ant: It has to

Mer: Look at Mcarthur, that was sixty years ago and still nobody knows what happened.

Ant: So you're honestly saying that the truth's irrelevant?

Mer: It's unimportant, if you convince the world this place is paradise, then it's paradise, the truth is neither here nor there.

Ant: I disagree, if your leg has gangrene and you convince everybody it's fine, you still have gangrene.

Mer: Not if you convince yourself.

Ant: Of course you do

Sid: Who's got gangrene?

Mer: Ant you have no idea how this place works.

Ant: I do, and I don't like it.

Mer: Some prefect you're gonna make.

Ant: Well if that's the system then I don't buy it!

Mer: That could be a big mistake...

Ant: Why you so scared of the truth Merrick?

(Merrick stares at Anthony and then changes the subject)

Mer: What do you say Al?

Al: I dunno, all I know is that as long as Mcarthur's story stays hidden, his ghost will never rest.

Mer: Well he could be here for a while.

Al: Poor bugger must be a bit bored - no wonder he's playing the organ...

Mer: Hey Ant you'd better watch he doesn't steal your harmonica it looks like Mcarthur's ghost could be starting up a band! *(They laugh at this as Stuart Luthuli, the head of house enters, with much bravado, bristling with irritation. It is clear that he has been lurking at the doorway for some time.)*

Stu: Jesus guys its past One in the morning

Mer: His royal highness the king of Larson House

Stu: Merrick, I'm not in the mood for your crap. Its too ...

Mer: *(standing)* All rise for his excellency, the head of house now presiding

Stu: Are you quite finished?

Mer: *(Nazi Salute)* Ja Führer

Stu: So tell me what scintillating topic of discussion is it tonight, girls, sex, or have we resorted to telling ghost stories?

Al: Freedom of the mind actually

Mer: Something you wouldn't know about Luthuli.

Stu: Wow you're in good form tonight Butcher - in fact you've got me rolling in the aisles. Maybe you should write a movie.

Mer: Actually we were discussing that earlier, we have this idea about a disgusting homosexual who lurks in public toilets and flashes at people on the urinal. I think you'd be perfect for the part!

Stu: Only you would shoot a movie in a men's toilet Butcher.

Mer: Well, when your lead actor is a great big floating turd, you have to make a few allowances.

Stu: You know for once, just for once I would like some support from this dormitory.

Mer: But we hate you Stuart, how could we possibly support you?

Stu: Merrick, when are you ever going to get over the fact that the black boy is head of house and the white rugby hero, who was tragically not made a prefect, has to carry his own laundry on a Monday morning.

Mer: Don't push me Luthuli!

Stu: I will do what I like Butcher, because I am in control here. This whole school may think you're a hero, but as far as I'm concerned you're pathetic. And this little badge proves it. *(Merrick is seething but manages to restrain himself)* Now if I hear one more noise out of this dormitory this evening, I'll be having a quiet chat to Scrotum after breakfast. So as always the choice is yours, shut up or get three hours of hard labour tomorrow. Oh and Anthony we haven't made you a prefect so that you can sit around telling ghost stories – you're expected to set the example, so kindly do so. *(turns to exit)*

Mer: *(shouting after him)* Goodnight Mr President...

Stu: Shut up Butcher!

Mer: *(aggressive)* Come make me you spineless kaf...*(he stops himself)*

Stu: *(turning)* Come on Merrick, say it. Six letters, one word and for a few seconds it will make you the most powerful man in this dormitory. Come on, I'm sure you call me that behind my back anyway. Have some guts for a change Butcher and say it to my face!

Mer: Sleep well my Lord.

Stu: Thank you Merrick I intend to. *(Stuart exits)*

Mer: Jeez that idiot can get up my nose. How's the way he carries on - you'd think he ran this place

Al: Ag don't stoop to his level man.

Sid: Merrick just leave all this race shit out of it.

Mer: He brought it up Sid.

Sid: Ja he's a wanker man.

Mer: I think I may be forced to poke his eye out with a pencil in English tomorrow.

Al: I wouldn't waste the pencil

Sid: Oh shit!

Al: What?

Sid: English!

Al: What?

Sid: I haven't read *Catch 22*

(They all groan in unison)

Mer: Scrotum's gonna take you apart mate.

Al: And he'll start with the scrotum

Sid: Shit I don't even have the book here. Hey Al please can I borrow yours

Al: Now?

Sid: I've got five hours till breakfast

Ant: Sid you can't read now it's two in the morning.

Al: Where you gonna read, everything's locked up?

Sid: I'll read on the bogs

Mer: Sid if you read the whole of *Catch 22* on the bogs you'll have piles like you've never seen before.

Sid: *(worried)* You reckon

Mer: You'll never shit again mate.

Sid: Serious? But what the hell else can I do?

Mer: You could start praying...

Sid: Ant, help me man, you're big buddies with Scrotum.

Mer: What do you mean big buddies? They're practically married.

Ant: That's hysterical Merrick! *(irritated)* What do you want me to do Sid?

Sid: I dunno you're the clever one.

Ant: Alright I'll give you a run-down at breakfast.

Sid: Shot Ant, I owe you one.

(They all begin to climb into bed)

Mer: Well cheers buggers I'm hitting the sack.

Sid: Sleep well ous

Al: Hey anybody runs into Mcarthur during the night, wake me up - I wanna have a few words with the old bastard

Ant: Will do Al, will do...

Pause; the others have settled into bed, he reflects, after a pause he leans into his locker, takes out his harmonica and begins playing. The light fades to blackout.

SCENE 2

Steven Ball's (Scrotum) office

Scrotum is seated behind the desk. Across the desk there are five chairs. The office is also the scene for his English classes. He is rather engrossed in his newspaper. Anthony enters with a short knock.

Ant: Morning Sir

Scr: Ah morning Anthony, how's my new prefect?

Ant: I'm alright.

Scr: *(offering him a sweet from a bowl)* Sweet?

Ant: Just brushed my teeth

Scr: How you doing?

Ant: Fine and you?

Scr: Alive and kicking as always. Desperately trying to hold onto my sanity.

Ant: I know the feeling.

Scr: Really? Sanity is not a word I would associate with you Mr. Bates.

Ant: You're right sir, I think I should accept the fact that I am totally insane and move on from there with a clean slate.

Scr: Well it would be the crazy thing to do.

Ant: Sir I truly believe this world will only reach a harmonious state when everybody accepts that they are crazy and stops pretending otherwise.

Scr: That's an interesting thesis Anthony. Care to elaborate?

Ant: Alright let's say that at least half the Earth's population is crazy. Now of all those people, only a minor percentage are certified madmen or women. Now the problem is when those nutters, who believe themselves to be normal take up a position of authority...

Scr: Such as?

Ant: Presidents, politicians, prefects, headmaster's of elite private schools.

Scr: I hope you aren't alluding to our dear friend and headmaster Mr. Everett?

Ant: *(with sarcasm)* Definitely not Sir.

Scr: And prefects?

Ant: What about them?

Scr: You tell me.

Ant: Well I for one wouldn't have chosen a madman as a prefect.

Scr: What about a boy feigning madness. It's *Hamlet* all over again isn't it.

Ant: Not *Hamlet* sir, I'm talking about *Catch 22*.

Scr: Ah my favourite novel, and by a strange quirk of fate, one of your set works.

Ant: I'm not talking about the novel sir, I'm talking about a Catch 22.

(slight pause)

Scr: Go on

Ant: Well, it's the feeling of losing either way. The devil and the deep blue sea.

Scr: Is that where you are?

Ant: I'm not sure, but I've lost something.

Scr: What?

Ant: I don't know. Maybe my integrity.

Scr: Bullshit! That is absolute bullshit and you know it. You have more integrity than everybody in this place, and I mean everybody. Perhaps what you're losing is your self-belief.

Ant: Sir you know as well as I do that I've always stood out against petty authority, and look at me now – a prefect

Scr: But you're forgetting why you chose to be a prefect.

Ant: Oh come on sir, nobody believes that crap about changing things from the inside. To them it looks like...

Scr: You've never given a damn about what people think before, so why should you start now?

Ant: I don't know, maybe I'm doubting my own motives.

Scr: Well don't, you've made your decision. Now do what you planned and be a revolutionary prefect.

Ant: But will I have anybody to lead, nobody believes in a hypocrite.

Scr: You sound like Merrick.

Ant: Perhaps Merrick can see the weeds from the grass.

Scr: I think he only sees the weeds.

Ant: Why did you make me a prefect?

Scr: You know why and I'm not going to insult either one of us by defending my position.

Ant: Tell me how can I turn to Merrick and say, do this or do that, when I don't even believe in the rules.

Scr: It's never about rules Anthony, it's about what's in there. *(He thumps Anthony's chest)*

(Anthony nods wearily, Scrotum embraces him)

Scr: You'll be fine, trust me.

(Merrick enters and sees them finishing their embrace)

Mer: Sorry to interrupt the party gents

Scr: Oh Merrick... Morning, uh sweet *(offering)*

Mer: Great, jellybabies my favourite. *(he takes one)* Oh sir before the others arrive, please ask Sid for a socialist critique of *Catch 22*

Scr: Sid?

Mer: Trust me sir he's got a few sharp ideas.

Ant: Sid the socialist and Merrick the Marxist, sounds like an interesting combination.

(The others shuffle in, led by Stuart, as self-important as ever, followed by a scruffy Alan and finally Sid who makes his way rather sheepishly to his chair. His fear and embarrassment should be obvious to all)

Scr: Morning boys

(The three chorus their goodmornings)

Scr: Sweet *(they each take a sweet, Alan tries to take four)* One Alan!

Al: Sorry sir

Scr: *(pacing)* Alright Stuart, we'll start with you, tell me something, anything about *Catch 22*.

Stu: Well firstly, it's a book about war.

Mer: That's brilliant Stuart, absolutely brilliant, now did you think that up yourself or did your mother help you in the holidays?

Stu: Shut up Butcher, your mother's a *Catch 22*

Mer: Hey tune my mother, I'll break you Luthuli!

Scr: I like this energy guys I like it, it's been a long time since Merrick got so fired up over a novel. Now Alan, I've been waiting all morning to hear some of that Greenstein logic. Tell me what is the core, the guts of the book?

Al: Sir I know that everyone's gonna laugh, but I think it's about the power of the mind. *(there is an uproar of laughter and mocking jibes)*

Scr: I agree completely with this man. *(Alan jeers at the rest of the class)* Anthony, in one sentence, what is Heller expressing about war?

Ant: The futility of war and the rise of the madman

Scr: Alright our learned friend Mr. Bates reckons it's about the rise of the madman. I can see Merrick shaking his head, do we have an argument brewing?

Mer: I think it's bullshit!

Scr: What's bullshit, the book or their comments?

Mer: Their comments. It's obvious the book's about weakness and cowardice!

(The atmosphere is loud and intense, Scrotum has the knack of keeping the excitement level high whilst maintaining control)

Scr: Well, well, well, Merrick says your comments are bullshit gentlemen. Are you going to take that lying down?

Mer: He's showing the link between fear and cowardice and how that leads to defeat.

Ant: I disagree, he's showing us how war destroys your mind, plain and simple.

Mer: Crap, they're cowards, terrified of dying!

Ant: But that's the whole point. They don't want to die in a war started by some power hungry megalomaniac.

Mer: Sounds a bit like you Bates.

Ant: Well would you die fighting for me Butcher?

Mer: Not anymore.

Ant: I think you've just proved my point Merrick.

Mer: All I've proved is that absolute power corrupts. What do you say Luthuli?

Stu: I say you'll never experience absolute power Merrick.

Scr: Gentlemen, I would just like to remind you that this is my classroom and not a bingo hall. So if you want to bicker like a bunch of old ladies then do it in your own time. Now we were talking about war's ability to destroy the mind.

Al: But sir that's my point exactly! The war is fought in there (*pointing at his head*) not on the battlefields!

Mer: Ah Jesus, not this again!

Al: It's the truth Merrick everything goes on in their heads, look at any of those characters!

Mer: That's fear, that's weakness! Those guys are sellouts!

Scr: Aha, but doesn't every man have his price Merrick?

Mer: Not if you're fighting a war.

Ant: Why do you think wars happen in the first place?

Mer: Wars happen because the men who can't be bought, have to be destroyed.

Ant: Men are only destroyed when they sell out Merrick.

Mer: I think you're being naïve Anthony.

Ant: Rather naïve than cynical.

Mer: Real not cynical.

Scr: My next question gentlemen, is war not the game of the weak?

Mer: On the contrary sir, it's the game of the brave.

Ant: War's not a game Merrick.

Mer: Of course it is, it's Russian roulette with big teams.

Ant: Then you tell me this, why does every man in this book go crazy?

Mer: Because every man in that book is a coward.

Scr: But aren't we all cowards sometimes Merrick?

(pause)

Mer: No.

Scr: Well then you're a lucky man. Alright Sid, you've been rather quite, tell me about your socialist critique of the novel.

Sid: Er...what?

Scr: Merrick tells me you have a socialist critique prepared.

Sid: *(Sid jabs Merrick in the ribs with his elbow)* No sir he's lying.

Scr: Alright tell us something else.

Sid: Merrick's sister has big cans! *(Merrick jabs Sid in the ribs, more laughter and mocking jibes)*

Scr: Well that's good to hear Sid but could you relate that to *Catch 22*?

(There is another outbreak of laughter, it is apparent that Sid doesn't know what to say)

Scr: Sid have you read the book?

Sid: Yes sir. My oath to God

Scr: Alright then answer this question, why did the character of Yossarian commit suicide at the end of the novel?

Sid: *(stumped, he then takes a flyer)* Because he was sick of war.

Mer: He didn't kill himself you idiot!

Scr: Listen to me Sid, if you haven't read the book then you haven't read the book, but don't lie to me. I've been your English teacher for three years and you know that lying is the one thing that I cannot tolerate.

Sid: Yes sir, sorry sir. *(the bell rings)*

Scr: Alright that's it for today. Tomorrow we will look at the character of Yossarian, who he is and why he acts the way he does. And Sidney read the book.

Sid: Yes sir

Scr: Thank you gents *(they start to exit)* Merrick! *(he turns to look at Scrotum)* You know sometimes the strong guys are weak.

Mer: Never be weak sir.

Scr: A man called Ferdinand Foch once said "None but a coward dares to boast that he has never known fear".

Merrick pauses as if to say something, changes his mind and walks out. The lights fade to black.

SCENE 3

The Dormitory

Merrick, Sid and Al

Sid: Jussus Merrick I can't believe you set me up like that.

Mer: Look it's not my fault you didn't read the book.

Sid: Ja but you didn't have to tell him!

Mer: I didn't tell him, it was bloody obvious.

Sid: And what the hell is a socialist anyway?

Al: Long story Sid

Sid: Check now I've lost my shares with Scrotum.

Al: I don't think you had many to start with Sid.

Mer: Yip, Bates is definitely the major shareholder round here.

Sid: I promise you Anthony so much as opens his mouth and Scrotum says excellent, excellent!

Mer: You reckon there's something going on there?

Sid: What you mean?

Mer: You know, like a bit of bandy-dozy...

Sid: Na - I don't reckon Scrotum's a fag.

Mer: Lives alone, teaches English, gives us sweets?

Al: No ways, not a chance.

Mer: Although it would account for Bates' meteoric rise to prefectship. You know sexual favours...

Sid: He just loves him cause he's top of English.

Mer: I'm still not convinced.

Sid: Look Scrotum may be a bit of a twat, but I don't reckon he's a fruit.

Mer: With a nickname like scrotum- you can never be too sure.

Al: Just because the poor man had the misfortune to be named Steven Ball, that doesn't mean he's a pillow biter.

Mer: It doesn't rule him out either.

Sid: That's true. Actually now that you mention it...

Al: Ah come on Sid you're just bitter because he shat on you for not reading the book.

Sid: Crap, I've never liked him.

Al: Well you never mentioned it last term when he was giving you hours of extra lessons.

Sid: That was last term.

Al: You're being fickle Sid.

Sid: Ja well who gives a stuff.

Mer: Well as far as I'm concerned you're guilty until you're proven innocent, and at the very least he's a potential fag.

Al: How can you be a potential fag, either you're a fag or you're not.

Mer: Easy... and Bates is another one who could be a bit dodgy.

Al: Please, you guys are homophobic.

Sid: Bloody right... *(Merrick has taken out his boots and begins to polish them, they watch him for a while)* You nervous?

Mer: Na

Sid: They reckon there's gonna be ten thousand people there.

Mer: The more the merrier.

Al: I'd be shitting myself.

Mer: What about the power of your mind Al?

Al: Stuff power of the mind, that's playing rugby in front of ten thousand people. And ultimately it will all come down to the bounce of the ball. If it pops up for you, you're a hero, if it doesn't, you're zero.

Mer: If you're smart enough Al, you never have to gamble. All you have to do is find their weakness and go for the jugular.

(A beat, Sid glances at his watch)

Sid: Shit the tuckshop's closing,

Al: And you owe me a cheeseburger!

Sid: We're gonna have to send it. Merrick you coming?

Mer: I'm fine.

Sid: Can we get you something?

Mer: Nothing.

Sidney and Alan exit to the tuckshop, Merrick continues to shine his boots. He polishes them with the utmost care, dabbing them with polish, rubbing them with a cloth then shining them with a shoe-brush. He then stops and carefully examines them, rubbing isolated spots, Anthony enters, but lingers at the door watching Merrick, after some time Merrick senses his presence, stops polishing and looks up at him. There is a brief moment as they size each other up.

Mer: Where've you been?

Ant: *(reluctantly)* Prefects meeting

Mer: *(wry grin)* Oh right *(pause)* Interesting?

Ant: What?

Mer: I said, was it interesting?

Ant: Not really

Mer: So I'm not missing much

Ant: No

(pause)

Mer: You know Ant, there's nothing wrong with being power hungry. I think you need to be hungry to make it in this world.

Ant: Which world?

Mer: In here. In this school. You may say it's archaic, but it's essentially run like a big business. In actual fact it's very similar to the real world, just a smaller version.

Ant: Then why do you despise me for accepting a position of power?

Mer: Because you set yourself apart. You've spent so much time creating this image of you being the bastion of truth, the school Messiah, and everybody has bought into it. There are people in here who think you are perfect. Shit I even thought you

were perfect! But there's a catch, there's always a catch. A weakness. And you've been exposed.

Ant: As what?

Mer: As a complete fraud.

Ant: That is such bullshit Merrick. This isn't about me, it's all about you. You're not a prefect and it burns your guts and you're using me as the scapegoat because you don't know who else to blame.

Mer: You are to blame.

Ant: Do you really think the school rugby star ever gets overlooked. You're not a prefect for a reason. I don't know what that reason is, but it has nothing to do with me.

Mer: So now you're trying to appease your own conscience by shifting the blame to me.

Ant: Look Merrick, you know me, and you know that I am against the whole idea of prefects. I hate pettiness and petty rules. So when I was offered a prefectship, I was faced with a decision that I didn't want to make. I could refuse or I could accept and try and make a difference.

Mer: Isn't choice the funniest thing.

Ant: Sometimes it's cruel. *(taking his harmonica out of his locker)* You mind?

Mer: Go ahead *(Anthony begins to play, Merrick shines his boots; after a while Merrick stops polishing his boots and watches Anthony intently)* You know it's very good.

Ant: *(stops playing)* What?

Mer: It's very good, the sound...

Ant: I can never work it out

Mer: What?

Ant: If it makes me feel happy or sad.

Mer: Probably both.

Ant: Keeps me sane.

Mer: I know... *(pause)* You must teach me again, I think I've lost it.

Ant: Remember that holiday?

Mer: Two weeks straight of playing the harmonica.

Ant: Jesus we were crazy.

Mer: The only reason I came on holiday with you in the first place, was because I liked your sister.

Ant: And you ended up ignoring her and playing the *Piano Man* for two weeks

Mer: She had bad body odour anyway.

Ant: Tell me about it.

(a beat)

Mer: It was a good holiday...

There is a pause, they both reflect for a moment, Merrick resumes the shining of his boots and Anthony plays a melody. This moment should not be rushed. After some time Merrick reaches into his locker and takes out a small pouch, he opens the pouch and takes out a ball of newspapers. Slowly he reaches inside and retrieves a pack of Camel cigarettes and a box of matches. Anthony is no longer watching him, engrossed in the music. There is something quite obvious and deliberate in the way Merrick prepares for his smoke, carefully choosing the cigarette, then wrapping the box back in the newspaper. Anthony looks at him, but doesn't realise what he is doing until Merrick places the cigarette in his mouth. He stops playing suddenly.

Ant: What are you doing?

Mer: What does it look like I'm doing?

Ant: You're gonna smoke?

Mer: Why not?

Ant: *(at a loss for words)* But you can't!

Mer: Why not?

Ant: I'm a prefect!

Mer: Are you?

(Merrick lights a match)

Ant: Merrick what the hell are you doing?

(Merrick blows out his match)

Mer: I've told you I'm having a smoke, now would you just relax.

Ant: No I won't relax, I'm a prefect and you can't smoke in front of me.

Mer: Well you didn't seem to mind last term.

Ant: That's because I wasn't a prefect last term you cretin!

Mer: Don't call me a cretin Mr Prefect. And besides you don't believe in the rules.

Ant: That doesn't matter

Mer: Of course it matters Mr Prefect or should I call you Mr Hypocrite?

Ant: Don't call me that! *(Merrick lights another match)* Merrick stop! Just think about what you're doing...

Mer: I **have** thought about what I'm doing.

Ant: *(realising the trap)* So this is the test? You wanna see if I've got the mettle to do this. You want me to make the choice.

Mer: You can walk out the door right now, you don't have to watch me smoke.

Ant: And you'd love that wouldn't you, I mean that would just prove everything. Here I am a fraud, a hypocrite. In fact I resign. You be the prefect *(throwing prefect badge at him)* take it, come on it's all yours Mr Prefect - lets give you a big round of applause. Look how big Mr Prefect is ... *(he pulls the cigarette out of Merrick's mouth and puts it in his)* Come on Mr Prefect, now what you gonna do, are you going run me in or be a coward and turn the other way? I think you've got no balls Mr. Prefect, I think you're gonna run. You're gonna run with your tail between your legs. Because you're gutless!

(Merrick pushes Anthony out of his face. Anthony stumbles and recovers quickly)

Ant: Come on Butcher, show me what a big man you are.

Mer: I'm not going to hit you Anthony, I'm gonna fucking destroy you. *(he fumbles for another cigarette, lights it and then takes a deep drag and blows smoke in Anthony's face, Anthony watches him unflinchingly)*

Ant: *(almost a whisper)* Fuck you Merrick

Mer: *(after a pause)* Don't play with fire Anthony.

Anthony exits, Merrick takes one more drag of his cigarette and then stubs it out on Anthony's locker. He picks up Anthony's harmonica and plays loudly and without tune. The light fades to darkness.

SCENE 4

Scrotums office

Scrotum is working at his desk, Anthony storms in without knocking.

Ant: Why was Milo not court-martialed for dropping bombs on his own men?

Scr: What?

Ant: In *Catch 22*, Milo bombed his own men after making a trading deal with the Germans. Why wasn't he court-martialed?

Scr: You tell me?

Ant: Because it's a catch 22. If he doesn't bomb his own men, there's no food for the troops and if he does he kills them anyway!

Scr: Anthony what are you talking about?

Ant: Catch 22 sir, there's always a choice but either way you lose.

Scr: Anthony, speak to me.

Ant: I can't sir, it's catch 22. I speak to you I lose, I keep silent I lose.

Scr: As you said, there's always a choice.

(pause)

Ant: You know it's funny sir, we spend so much of our time with people, but when the crunch comes you always seem to be alone.

Scr: Perhaps that's something of your own choosing.

Ant: Perhaps

Scr: You know sometimes we build things up into insurmountable problems and in the end they hardly make a ripple.

Ant: Trust me sir, this will not be a ripple.

Scr: Sounds like you've already made your decision.

Ant: I have, I'm just scared of what's going to come.

Scr: Don't be, if your decision comes from the right place, you have nothing to fear.

Ant: Choice is cruel sir.

Scr: Of course it is, but at sometime in our lives we are all faced with a moment of choice. That's when you have to be strong.

Ant: Sir, do you think there's always a catch?

Scr: Where?

Ant: In life, do you think there's always a catch?

Scr: I think that's sadly cynical.

Ant: Me too.

(pause)

Scr: Anthony, do you have something to tell me?

Ant: Yes sir

Scr: What is it?

Ant: I wish to report Merrick Butcher for smoking in the dormitory

(Scrotum's face drains of colour as Anthony exits)

SCENE 5

The Dormitory

Alan and Sid are clustered around Merrick who is relating the story to them. Throughout the scene Merrick's demeanor is strangely calm in comparison to Sid's feeling of outrage and Alan's confusion at the event that has just happened.

Sid: I don't believe it, I just can't believe it - he bust you.

Al: Jesus, maybe he's not as bright as we think.

Sid: How's his mind, Saturday's the big game and we've lost our best player. Shit, if we lose...

Al: He'll be crucified.

Sid: How long you banned for?

Mer: Month

Sid: That's basically the whole season.

Al: I always thought he was so genuine.

Sid: It's amazing what being a prefect does to you.

Al: What else?

Mer: Lost all privileges, gated till the end of the year and final warning.

Sid: So how did he bust you?

Mer: He didn't.

Sid: What?

Mer: He didn't bust me.

Al: What are you talking about? Of course he bust you.

Mer: I asked him.

Sid: Asked him what?

Mer: If I could smoke.

Sid: And what did he say?

Mer: Yes

Al: He said you could smoke?

Mer: Yip

Sid: And then?

Mer: Then we spoke for a while, he played his harmonica and then went off to work.

Al: Then he ran you in?

Mer: Must have.

Sid: So he didn't warn you or give you any idea or nothing.

Mer: Not a thing.

Sid: What a snake!

Al: Shit, I can't believe it!

Mer: Well believe it mate...

Al: So what you gonna do?

Mer: What can I do?

Sid: I say we kill him, my oath to God I'm gonna find him right now and ... (*Stuart Luthuli has been lingering in the doorway*)

Stu: You touch Bates and I'll have you expelled before you can even reach for your balls Matthews.

Mer: Ah it looks like the head of the wanking society has arrived.

Stu: That's not very funny Butcher, I think you may be losing your touch.

Mer: That's why I'm not head of the wanking society.

Sid: What do you want Stuart?

Mer: Ja what is it Dingbat

Stu: Oh I just popped along to see our new house rebel.

Al: Stuart, we don't need this now.

Stu: *(relishing the moment)* Hey Merrick, I heard your rugby season just went up in smoke. *(he cracks up laughing)*

Mer: Wow you're a funny man Luthuli

Stu: I thought we were going to see you burn it up on Saturday. *(cracks up again)*

Mer: Stand by, it looks like he's on a roll guys!

Stu: No more rugby matches for you Butcher. *(falls about laughing)*

Mer: No, it looks like the roll has come to an abrupt end. He is now officially scraping the pot.

Stu: Oh no you're the one who's scraping the pot my friend.

Mer: *(viciously)* Don't you ever fucking call yourself my friend!

Stu: It was a figure of speech Butcher. No need to lose your cool.

Al: Stuart just leave, you're only making this worse.

Sid: If you've got nothing else to say here Stuart, then leave!

Stu: *(playing along)* Now I'm sure there was a reason for me being here...

Mer: You mean besides pissing me off!

Stu: Mind you that's a good enough reason in itself.

Mer: Get out Luthuli!

Stu: Don't tell me what to do, this is my house!

Mer: Get out!

Stu: I will go when I am ready to go!

Mer: (*Merrick is now face to face with Stuart*) Get out or I'll break you Stuart!

Stu: You did a very silly thing Merrick - you gambled and you lost. And now I'm going to sit back and watch you destroy yourself. You see I know you Butcher, you'll do something, and when you do, I'm going to be there, laughing.

Mer: I never lose, Luthuli.

Stu: Only an idiot believes that he'll never lose Merrick. (*exits*)

Sid: Now that oke is a serious waste of oxygen!

Mer: Jeez, he gets up my nose

Al: He's a wanker man, just ignore him.

Mer: Now how in the hell does a prick like that ever become a head of house, I mean what is wrong with this place?

Sid: Alright Merrick, how we gonna get Bates?

Mer: You'll see.

Al: Don't touch him Merrick, it's not worth it.

Mer: I'm not going near him.

Sid: So what are you gonna do?

Mer: You'll see.

Sid: To hell with it, I reckon we wind him!

Mer: Sometimes Sid, subtlety can be far more vicious.

Al: I don't think I even want to know what you're thinking Merrick.

Sid: I'm with you Merrick, let's take him down. Jesus, he's betrayed you, his friends, his school, he deserves what's coming to him!

Al: Sid just relax. Thank god you aren't in charge of nuclear weapons - we'd have world war three every time you had a spoon of sugar in your coffee.

Sid: Well if you were in politics, **nothing would ever happen!**

Al: Sounds about right...

(Anthony enters, moves to his bed and begins reading Catch 22)

Sid: Hey Bates you feeling proud - feel like you've done your duty? *(pause)*

Ant: *(quietly)* I did what I had to do.

Sid: What? Betray the school?

Ant: I think it was Merrick who betrayed the school Sid.

Sid: Well you ran him in...

Ant: Well if you're stupid enough to blow smoke in a prefect's face, then it shouldn't come as a surprise should it!

Sid: Jesus he's your friend man!

Mer: Guys, go downstairs

Sid: Noways, I wanna get some answers from this bastard!

Mer: Sid go downstairs!

Al: Sid let's go. *(Sid reluctantly agrees, they exit. Merrick walks up to Anthony)*

Mer: Congratulations - I must admit you surprised me.

Ant: Is that right?

Mer: Yip... maybe you're a good prefect after all. I'm actually quite impressed.

Ant: What's the Catch Merrick?

Mer: What do you mean?

Ant: There's got to be a catch. I know you too well and you aren't stupid.

Mer: So what makes you think there's a catch?

Ant: You never gamble Merrick.

Mer: There's always a first time.

Ant: I know there's a catch Merrick. Why else would you throw away your whole rugby season.

Mer: Just remember Anthony I never lose.

Ant: I think you've lost already.

Mer: But we've only just started -we've only just fired the first shots of the battle.

Ant: This isn't a war Merrick.

Mer: You started this Bates and believe me this will be a war!

Ant: Alright hit me now- I won't even stop you.

Mer: I'm not gonna hit you, I'm gonna destroy you...

Ant: Destroy is a big word Merrick and you may just find that I'm stronger than you think.

Mer: Well, time will tell *(He begins to leave, then hesitates)* Oh Bates I have a quote for you: "A man can never be too careful in the choice of his enemies". *(exits)*

Ant: Oscar Wilde

Shakes his head, there is a feeling of unease about him now, he walks around the dormitory as if a little disorientated, he then returns to his bed, takes his harmonica out of his locker and begins to play. The light fades.

SCENE 6

Everett's office

A knock at the door

Eve: Come

Merrick enters

Mer: Sir I wonder if you have a minute?

Eve: Sit Merrick (*brief pause*) not in more trouble I hope?

(Pause, Merrick ignores his comment)

Mer: Sir what do you know of a Catch 22?

Eve: Fine novel, I believe it's your set work.

Mer: I don't mean the book sir. I mean the concept of a Catch 22.

Eve: Ah you mean like having to suspend your star rugby player before the most important game of the season?

Mer: Exactly

Eve: If you do not punish him for smoking you set a nasty precedent ...

Mer: However, if you do, you seem certain to lose the game and with it the school's reputation.

(a beat)

Eve: Yes I am aware of Catch 22.

Mer: Sir, what would you say if that player told you he was falsely accused?

Eve: I would say he's lying to save his own skin.

Mer: And what if he knew something that could potentially free him from his predicament.

(pause)

Eve: Such as.

Mer: Something extremely dangerous to this school's reputation.

Eve: I'm listening.

Mer: What if he told you he was covering something up, something huge. Something the press would love to splash all over their front-pages

(a beat)

Eve: *(icy)* I hope this boy knows better than to blackmail his headmaster.

Mer: I'm sure he does sir, but you must understand that the boy now finds himself in a tricky situation.

Eve: Go on.

Mer: Well it's a Catch 22 sir.

Eve: I don't follow.

Mer: Well if he keeps the secret, then he is in some way condoning the action that he despises. But if he tells his headmaster, then he is breaking a code of conduct, which makes him disloyal.

Eve: Loyalty is a highly overrated virtue Merrick.

Mer: But nevertheless there is a compromise the boy has to make. It's a Catch 22 sir.

Eve: Welcome to the real world Mr. Butcher.

(pause)

Mer: Sir, Mr Ball and Anthony Bates are having a homosexual affair.

Eve: *(stunned)* What?

Mer: They tried to get me involved sir.

Eve: Involved?

Mer: Threesomes sir.

Eve: Good God

Mer: They're trying to destroy me sir.

Eve: Have you any proof?

Mer: I have witnesses.

Eve: *(with venom)* Merrick, you listen to me carefully. This is an extremely dangerous allegation. I don't have to tell you what it could do to this school. *(pause)* You cannot afford to fuck this up, if you are lying and you are found out, I will destroy you. If you are telling the truth and you cannot substantiate this allegation, I will destroy you. So think carefully and make the right choice.

Mer: *(meeting his gaze)* I always win sir.

Eve: No Merrick, the school always wins.

(pause)

Eve: Well, do you still have something to say?

Mer: Yes sir.

Eve: What is it Merrick?

(pause)

Mer: I wish to report Anthony Bates and Mr Ball for sexual misconduct, harassment and attempted molestation.

(They stare at each other for a beat)

Eve: You know Merrick, I was a lot like you at your age, but I made the right choices and I never lost.

Merrick grins and exits. The lights fade.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Everett's office

Anthony and Scrotum are seated, Everett stands behind his desk with his hands on his chair, appraising them gravely.

Eve: Gentlemen as I have said, this is not something I take lightly at all. An accusation of this nature could very easily shake this institution.

Ant: Sir with all due respect....

Eve: I'm not finished Mr. Bates. Now as I was saying, the allegations against both of you are extremely serious. At this stage I have made no judgment and as far as I'm concerned, the matter is now under investigation. Therefore, your innocence, or your guilt for that matter, is yet to be determined.

Scr: But Gerald this is absolutely absurd ... surely it is obvious that (this is completely...)

Eve: At this stage nothing is obvious Steven, and I am taking these allegations extremely seriously. Believe me, if they are true there's no telling what this might do to the school's reputation.

Ant: Merrick Butcher!

Eve: I beg your pardon?

Ant: It's Merrick Butcher.

Eve: And why do you say that Anthony?

Ant: Revenge sir. It's what he calls the catch.

Eve: Ah yes, the Catch 22. Seems like we've all been faced with them lately.

Ant: He deliberately tried to set me up, sir.

Eve: And how did he contrive to do that Mr. Bates?

Ant: He baited me, sir. He blew smoke in my face.

Scr: Headmaster, as his housemaster and teacher I am convinced that this is a ludicrous attempt at undermining us both. There is no way that you can take it seriously.

Eve: Gentlemen, I am not interested in your conspiracy theories. What I need is proof. I have listened to Merrick's story and I have now heard your denial. If you can prove that these allegations are false, I will drop the matter immediately. However, if a simple denial is all that you have, then the matter shall be taken further.

Scr: Come on Gerald, you can't prove yourself against complete rubbish, we only have the truth.

Eve: If it is the truth you are speaking Steven, you have nothing to fear.

Ant: I think you know it's a bit more complicated than that sir.

Eve: Of course it is Bates. Scandals are always complicated.

Ant: I just hope it is the truth that you are looking for sir.

Eve: Bates, are you questioning my integrity?

Ant: No sir, it's just that Merrick believes that this place runs on reputation, rather than truth.

Eve: Merrick's a bright lad. *(afterthought)* And so are you Anthony. And that is why I don't need to remind you that this matter is to be treated with absolute secrecy. Believe me if one word of this leaves this school, I'll get rid of all of you. No scandal is ever worth the destruction of the school. And no schoolboy is going to hold this place to ransom.

Scr: We understand headmaster

Eve: Gentlemen, that will be all.

(Scrotum moves to the door, Anthony approaches Everett)

Ant: What happened to Mcarthur?

Eve: I beg your pardon?

Ant: Mcarthur committed suicide in 1937.

Eve: I have no idea what you are talking about.

Ant: Of course you do, everybody knows.

Eve: I don't believe in ghosts.

Ant: So you've heard of him then?

Eve: Bates you're wasting my time.

Ant: Well then answer my question.

Eve: No.

Ant: It was the same wasn't it?

Eve: What?

Ant: It was the same thing as this – the same reason!

Eve: Get out.

Ant: It was all covered up!

Eve: I said get out!

Ant: He was innocent wasn't he sir!

Eve: *(screaming)* Steven, get this boy out of my office!

(Scrotum starts pulling Anthony out of the office)

Ant: Don't let it happen again sir!

Blackout

SCENE 2

The Dormitory

Sid: They're never gonna believe you Merrick

Mer: Why not?

Sid: Well... it's ridiculous.

Mer: Is it?

Sid: Of course it is.

Mer: In my experience Sid, the only time people believe in a lie is when it's totally ridiculous and utterly absurd.

Al: That's crazy.

Mer: The more obscure and elaborate the lie, the more people will believe you, look at Hitler, look at the Afrikaners for God's sakes, their entire culture was based on bullshit.

Al: But it's obvious you're just getting revenge for being caught smoking?

Mer: I wasn't caught smoking, I was betrayed whilst smoking. There's a big difference.

Sid: Ja but it still looks like revenge.

Mer: And that is why my accusation had to be creative enough to bring the school's name into it. You see Everett doesn't give a shit about smoking or drinking, its harmless, its no threat to this place, schoolboys are always caught smoking. But the one word he doesn't want to hear is... scandal.

Al: He's still not going to take you seriously Merrick.

Mer: Well now he has to, doesn't he?

Sid: Why?

Mer: Because if this story hits the press irrespective of whether it's true or not, there's going to be a scandal and Everett knows that.

Sid: Shit... this could be huge! Jesus you're slimy Merrick.

Al: But so is Everett, he can smell a lie from a mile off.

Mer: That's why you lie with a straight face.

Al: How can you do that?

Mer: What?

Al: Just lie like that.

Mer: Easy.

Al: Haven't you got a conscience?

Mer: He deserves everything that's coming to him.

Al: I hope you know what you're doing here Merrick. Everett isn't a fool.

Mer: I know how this place works Al. And so does he.

Sid: Well whatever happens, it's going to come down to your word against theirs.

Mer: Not necessarily.

Sid: What you mean?

Mer: I've got a few witnesses.

Sid: Who?

Mer: You!

Sid: Us?

Al: Whoa, hang on, hang on. I've got nothing to do with this Merrick. This is your story and I am not getting involved.

Mer: You're already involved Al.

Al: Bullshit! I've got nothing between me and Anthony, this is your little war, I'm staying out of it!

Mer: You can't stay out of it Al.

Al: Of course I can, I was never in it.

Mer: You can't pretend you don't know what's going on.

Sid: Look Merrick I don't reckon we should get involved.

Mer: Sid, look at it this way, there is no more sitting on the fence, you're either with him or you're with me. Take your pick.

Sid: Well obviously I'm with you.

(They both turn on Al)

Al: I'm not gonna lie Merrick, you can't put me on the spot.

Sid: Al you have to, if I'm in you're in.

Al: I can't.

Mer: Greenstein, if you sit on the fence here, you are my enemy.

Al: I'm no one's enemy.

Mer: You know the truth so there's only two ways you can go, with him or with me.

Al: Come on Merrick, that's not fair.

Mer: Life's not fair mate, now make your choice!

Al: I refuse to lie, I cannot stand in front of Everett knowing that...

Mer: Have some fucking balls Greenstein, you apathetic shit! You wanna blow me out the water then blow me out the water, but believe me you're gonna pay. You side with him I'll take you both out of this place!

Al: I can't do this Merrick...Anthony is my friend.

Mer: Then go and tell the truth Al, go and speak to Everett right now and tell him I'm lying. Go on. *(Al doesn't move)* Just a word of advice for you Al, don't back the wrong horse...now get the out of my sight before I smash your face! *(Al exits, they watch him leave)* Right Sid lets get the story straight.

Blackout

SCENE 3

Scrotum's office

Anthony and Scrotum enter

Ant: He couldn't tell me.

Scr: Tell you what?

Ant: About Mcarthur.

Scr: Oh come on Anthony, he can't be bothered with old ghost stories.

Ant: You don't understand sir, it's not about ghost stories it's about scandal and truth. It's about the way this place buries things.

Scr: He was a depressed old man who over dramatized his death by hanging himself in a public place.

Ant: He hanged himself in the chapel for a reason sir. He wanted it to get out, he was trying to tell the world something.

Scr: I think that's your imagination running away with itself.

Ant: I think we're in a lot of trouble sir.

Scr: Everett's a smart man, he'll see straight through Merrick.

Ant: I don't even know if he wants to.

Scr: Oh come on Anthony, he knows that Merrick is lying.

Ant: But can't you see, they believe in the same things. Everett doesn't care about the truth, he's just terrified of a scandal hitting the papers. He will take the easiest option even if that means that innocent people are hurt. That's what Merrick is banking on.

Scr: And you believe that Merrick planned the whole thing?

Ant: Of course he did. He wanted me to report him for smoking. He knew I would do it and I walked straight into his trap. He's pulling the strings here and you don't want to believe it.

Scr: But it makes no sense, he stands to lose as much as you do.

Ant: That's why it's so clever, nobody believes that he would sacrifice himself to get me. That's why Everett is listening to him. He's the school rugby hero, without him we will lose this Saturday. Everett cannot afford to expel him.

Scr: He can't prove it. At most he can round up a few of his mates to vouch for him. But there's no proof.

Ant: For God's sakes sir, you're blind. Proof means nothing and neither does the truth. If you can't see that then you are extremely naive.

Scr: I don't see that Anthony and I won't believe it. You're becoming neurotic.

Ant: You have no idea what's going on do you. This is becoming a power struggle and if we lose, we're finished. I'll be expelled, you'll be fired for doing absolutely nothing wrong. I am not a martyr sir and I love this school, nearly as much as I despise it. I refuse to sit back and have everything taken away from me. Trust me sir, I will hurt someone to protect what's mine.

Scr: Anthony, if they believe him, I'll make sure this school's name is dragged through every mud pit in Africa. I'll show Everett a scandal with a capital S. *(pause, he turns to Anthony)* You forget that I also have power in this place and Everett knows that. He cannot afford to throw me out, because he knows I'm dangerous. *(pause)* Anthony, I'm not going to let anything happen to you.

(Scrotum gives Anthony a reassuring hug and Anthony begins to exit)

Scr: Anthony, we're stronger than them.

Anthony stares at Scrotum, and exits, the lights fade.

SCENE 4

The Dormitory

In the blackout we hear the sound of a harmonica being played. The notes are discordant and the player frequently stops and then resumes. The lights come up to reveal Merrick, sitting on Anthony's locker playing his harmonica. Anthony is standing at the door watching him intently. Merrick is unaware of Anthony's presence.

Ant: You'll never learn Merrick

Merrick looks up at Anthony, meets his gaze and returns to the harmonica. He tries again to master the instrument. Anthony listens as he tries.

Ant: Give it up, you're wasting your time.

Merrick tries again, this time with a hint of desperation. The music is the challenge and Merrick is determined to meet it. Once again there is no music, only noise.

Ant: That's not music Merrick.

Merrick stops playing, Anthony walks towards Merrick's locker and takes out his cigarettes He holds them up to Merrick

Ant: Smoke?

Mer: Why not.

Merrick lights up a smoke gives it to Anthony and then lights his own, there is a silence as they drag on their smokes

Ant: You gonna do it? *(Merrick nods)* You sure?

Mer: Positive

Merrick shines his boots. Anthony watches him.

Ant: Scrotum doesn't think you'll make it.

Mer: And you?

(pause)

Ant: I think you might.

(Silence)

Ant: Why you doing this Merrick?

Mer: I don't know.

Ant: Seems a hell of a way to prove a point.

Mer: It is.

Ant: You know there's a part of me that wants to kill you. To stick this cigarette right in your eyes and hear you scream. But there's also a part of me that almost admires you, that feels like you somehow have the right to do this to me. But it's wrong.

(silence)

Mer: Like old times

(pause, Anthony does not reply)

Mer: You wouldn't think we were going to war.

Ant: *(shakes his head)* Crazy.

Merrick regards Anthony

Mer: You know, you may just be perfect Anthony *(Anthony stares at him for a while, stubs out his cigarette and moves to the door.)* May the best man win.

Ant: *(turning)* There are no best men in war Merrick, only sad faces.

The lights fade.

SCENE 5

Everett's office

Everett is seated, lost in thought, there is a knock at the door.

Eve: Come! *(Merrick enters. Everett has a pile of newspapers on his desk and he appraises them gravely)* Page four. Rumours of scandal in top private school! *(He shows Merrick the offending article)*. Is this your doing Butcher?

Mer: No sir, I haven't said a word to anyone.

Eve: This is exactly what I didn't want to happen. I mean who in the hell leaked this to the press. Believe me Butcher, if I find out that it was you, I'll destroy you. *(pause)* On the bright side, nothing is conclusive which means we probably have some time before they run a follow up story. The board of governors have given

me two days to sort this mess out. And believe me, either way it will be sorted out. I just want to reiterate my stance and put it quite simply to you. If you are lying, you'll be gone by the weekend and that goes for anybody who defends your position.

Mer: I understand sir.

Eve: Right. Let's start with the two of them. Have you seen them together before.

Mer: Yes sir

Eve: What exactly did you see Merrick?

Mer: I saw them kissing.

Eve: Where?

Mer: On the mouth

Eve: I mean whereabouts?

Mer: On his desk.

Eve: Are you sure?

Mer: Positive sir.

Eve: It wasn't just a kiss of affection?

Mer: Sir, I have never seen men kiss like that before. They were practically taking each other's clothes off.

Eve: In his office?

Mer: Right before class. They never bother to hide it.

Eve: I suppose a kiss doesn't necessarily mean...

Mer: Ah come on sir you weren't born yesterday, I mean it's obvious, only a fool wouldn't know, it's all around the school. They're doing it everywhere, they don't give a damn.

Eve: Everywhere?

Mer: In the classroom, in the dormitories, in the chapel.

Eve: The chapel?

Mer: Saw them in there the other night, it gave me the creeps.

Eve: Good God.

Mer: I was prepared to turn a blind eye, until they tried to get me involved.

Eve: Ah yes, threesomes was it?

Mer: Yes sir.

Mer: It was only when Bates reported me for smoking with him...

Eve: Did you say, with him?

Mer: He tricked me into it sir, because I wouldn't join in.

Eve: Would you say this relationship between Bates and your housemaster led to him being made a prefect?

Mer: Sir it's common knowledge of what you have to do, if you want to be a prefect in our house.

Eve: I see. Now I take it you have people to corroborate your story.

Mer: Yes sir.

Eve: Who's first?

Mer: Sid Govender sir.

Eve: Send him in.

(Merrick fetches Sid who enters too jauntily to be relaxed, it should be clear that he is petrified and making a bad job of covering it up.)

Sid: Afternoon sir.

Eve: Good morning Govender.

Sid: *(Sid glances at his watches and realises that it is indeed morning, sheepishly apologises)* Sorry sir.

(Merrick is comfortably seated, Sid stands rather awkwardly)

Eve: Sidney are you aware of the consequences of lying?

Sid: No sir. I mean yes sir.

Eve: Are you lying Sidney?

Sid: No sir I promise you.

Eve: Alright Sidney, have you ever seen Bates and your housemaster together in a compromising position.

Sid: What?

Eve: In a sexual position, Govender!

Sid: Oh!

Eve: Well, have you?

Sid: Yes sir.

Eve: Go ahead

Sid: Well sir, Scrotum was on his desk

Eve: *(horrified)* I beg your pardon.

Sid: I mean Mr Ball was on his desk *(Merrick is glaring at Sidney, making him even more nervous)* and... and they were like... Kissing.

Eve: Like kissing? Surely they were either kissing or not.

Sid: No they were kissing.

Eve: No they weren't or yes they were?

Mer: Sir he's trying to say...

Eve: Shut up Merrick! I'm not speaking to you.

Mer: Sorry sir.

Sid: They were kissing sir.

Eve: Where?

Sid: *(stumped and looking desperately at Merrick)* Well.... All...all over sir

Eve: Where specifically?

Sid: *(very awkward)* ell it was like on his... lips and neck and...

Eve: I meant whereabouts Sidney

Sid: *(relieved)* Oh I see, in his office Sir.

Eve: And what were you doing there?

Sid: I was coming in for English sir.

Eve: Have you ever seen this happen before?

Sid: No sir. *(Merrick whirls around and glares at him)* I mean yes sir... all the time

Eve: Well which is it, yes or no?

Sid: Yes sir.

Mer: Sir as I said it's common knowledge...

Eve: Have they ever tried to get you to...you know...join in.

Sid: Once sir. *(defiantly)* but I refused.

Eve: Alright, who's next Merrick?

Mer: Alan Greenstein sir.

Eve: Send him in.

(Merrick calls Alan in, his demeanor is in sharp contrast to before. His impending betrayal weighs heavily upon him, he cannot look Everett in the eye.)

Eve: Alan, I want you to be aware of the consequences of this extremely serious allegation. You have to assure me that this is the truth. *(no response)* Alan is it the truth? *(no response)* Alan, I'm not going to ask again!

Al: *(Staring at the ground)* It's the truth.

Eve: Alan the truth isn't at your feet.

Al: *(looking up hesitantly)* Yes sir I know.

Eve: Did you see Mr Ball and Anthony Bates kissing?

Al: *(softly)* Yes

Eve: I didn't hear you

Al: Yes

Eve: When?

Al: Before English.

Eve: Has this happened before?

Al: *(looks at Merrick on the brink of telling the truth, but Merrick's iron stare dissuades him)* Yes

Eve: Do you like Anthony Bates, Alan?

Al: Yes sir, very much

Eve: Are you his friend?

Al: *(after a pause)* Not anymore sir.

Eve: Has he ever asked you to join in?

Al: *(Alan is startled by the question, he looks at Merrick who tries to signal something to him. Alan looks away and then stares into the face of Everett defiantly)* No sir

Eve: Not?

Al: No sir

Eve: Have you seen them together in other places?

Al: No sir *(Merrick is glaring at him)*

Eve: Are you aware that they have propositioned a number of other boys?

Al: No sir

Eve: You are not aware of these things happening around you?

Al: No sir

Eve: Are you lying Greenstein

Al: *(pause)* No sir

Eve: Are you trying to save your friend Greenstein? *(Alan does not answer)* Alan this is the last time I'm going to ask you, are these men homosexuals and are they guilty of trying to molest other boys? *(Still no answer, Everett begins to lose his temper)* Greenstein are these men guilty!

Al: *(his face is wracked with pain)* Yes they are.

Eve: *(after a pause)* Right who's next Merrick?

Mer: That's it sir.

Eve: I beg your pardon?

Mer: I don't have anybody else sir.

Eve: So you expect me to expel our top English student and fire a brilliant teacher because you and your two mates say they're guilty.

Mer: Yes sir.

Eve: Merrick, if this was your case in a court of law, you'd be laughed onto the street.

Mer: Sir the others have been threatened into silence.

Eve: So you two *(gesturing to Sid and Al)* are the brave warriors are you?

(The door swings open and Stuart Luthuli strides into the room)

Stu: Morning sir

Eve: Ah Stuart, good morning.

Stu: Sir I think I should say a few words.

Mer: Sir I object, this is my case and he has nothing to do with it.

Stu: Of course I do Butcher, I'm head of house.

Mer: Sir you cannot allow him to speak.

Eve: And why not Merrick?

Mer: Because he hates my guts sir and he's about as honest as Satan.

Eve: Are you aware of the issue at hand Stuart.

Stu: I am sir. And as head of house I believe I am in the best position to comment on Butcher's allegations.

Mer: (*frantic*) Sir this is ridiculous, he hasn't a clue what's going on, he just wants to destroy me!

Eve: Shut up Merrick and sit down. This is my office not a bloody circus. I will not tolerate such behaviour. Now Stuart, I trust that you will speak honestly and not allow your animosity for Butcher to cloud your opinion.

Stu: Yes sir

(*Merrick is absolutely beside himself in his chair. Sid and Al look equally terrified*)

Eve: Now Stuart, Butcher has accused Anthony Bates and Mr. Ball of being homosexual. And even more seriously of attempting to include other boys in their activities. Can you comment on these allegations?

Stu: I'm afraid to say they're true sir.

Eve: Really?

Stu: It's something I've known about for a while now sir, but decided to hush it up in the interests of the school's reputation.

(*Merrick is astonished at Stuart's turnaround.*)

Stu: It's something that I have struggled with for a long time sir, but it's now got to a stage where I have to do something. And as much as I hate Butcher, I have to say that he's telling the truth.

Eve: Have they ever tried to get you involved Stuart?

Stu: Of course they have sir. Mr. Ball tried to lure me in with the position of head of house.

Eve: You mean bestowing privilege for sexual favours?

Stu: Yes sir.

Eve: Is that the reason that Bates was made a prefect?

Stu: Of course it was sir. I was against it from the start, but there was nothing I could do.

Eve: Good God, this is an abomination.

Stu: Of course it is sir. And it's getting worse and worse.

(pause)

Eve: Thank you Stuart, I appreciate your honesty.

Stu: Sir you don't have to thank me, it's my duty.

(Everett takes a moment, the others wait for his orders.)

Eve: Alright gentlemen, I must report to the board immediately. I thank you for your honesty, the matter shall be dealt with swiftly.

(The boys exit)

Eve: Oh Merrick

(Merrick stops at the door and turns slowly to face Everett, who stares him down)

Eve: You're a brave man.

Mer: Thank you sir. I know.

(Merrick smiles and then exits, the lights fade on Everett)

SCENE 6

Scrotum's office

Merrick enters to find Stuart sitting in Scrotum's chair.

Mer: What the hell are you doing?

Stu: Same thing you are.

Mer: Why?

Stu: You mean you don't know the answer? *(pause)* I thought you would have guessed it.

Mer: Why Luthuli?

Stu: Because you were about to self destruct Butcher.

Mer: I never asked you to lie.

Stu: Of course you didn't, but you needed me. I was the one bit of proof that would always swing it around. I added substance to your lies and Everett had no choice but to accept the inevitable.

Mer: I still don't think Everett believes it.

Stu: Of course he doesn't. But we played his hand and made the decision for him. I mean what's he going to do, expel the first black head of house in the history of the school?

Mer: I still don't buy it Luthuli. It's something else, you want something don't you?

Stu: It's quite simple Butcher, you have what I want.

Mer: What is it?

Stu: In five days time the school votes for next years head boy. I need your power Butcher. *(Merrick's face breaks into a broad grin)* You see those spoilt little racist bastards will never vote for me. But they'll vote for you. God knows if you told them to vote for the devil, they would.

Mer: What do you want me to do?

Stu: Friday, we have assembly. I want you to stand up and say a few words to the school. Naturally it will be about this weekend's big game, but somehow you will mention the fact that anybody who does not vote for me is a traitor to the school.

Mer: You're pathetic Luthuli. You're absolutely pathetic.

Stu: What's your answer Butcher?

Mer: If I say no?

Stu: Then I walk straight back into Everett's office and tell him the truth.

Mer: I've got to hand it to you Stuart, you're slimy.

Stu: Do we have a deal?

(Sid and Al enter)

Sid: The moment we get out of this place you're going to buy me ten rounds of drinks!

Mer: Aha, here come my boys, congratulations!

Sid: He was easy man, you could see he believed us from the start.

Mer: Sid, I have never seen such a marvelous display of ham acting in all my life.

Sid: Well it just comes naturally to me.

Mer: Hey Al, cheer up for God's sakes, you look like you've just been to a funeral.

Al: Piss off!

Mer: What was that?

Al: I said piss off.

Mer: Ah come on Al, he deserved it.

(no response)

Mer: You had to do it Al.

Al: I didn't have to do anything.

Mer: You're being an asshole Greenstein

Al: No, you're the asshole Butcher, you're the one who lied, you're the one who made all this up, and you're the one whose wrecked those guy's lives!

(Merrick is about to argue when Stuart interrupts)

Stu: Butcher? *(Merrick turns around slowly)* Do we have a deal? *(Merrick moves closer to him, smiling)*

Mer: I could give you my word

Stu: That doesn't mean much Merrick. *(pause, Stuart holds out his hand for Merrick to shake, Merrick's face is in his)*

Mer: I think it's another Catch 22 Stuart. *(he stares at Stuart a long time and then shakes his hand)*

Scrotum and Anthony enter, the room becomes silent, Anthony sits on the empty chair next to Alan and Scrotum moves behind his desk. Alan looks up at Anthony stricken with guilt, Anthony stares ahead in stony silence. Scrotum stares at the class for some time before speaking.

Scr: You can put your books away. *(they do not respond)* I said you can put your books away! *(They obey, only Merrick is able to look at Scrotum)* How can I teach you when you can't look me in the eyes. *(silence)* I don't know what happened here, I have no idea what made you all do this. *(pause)*. Maybe you're right Merrick, maybe the truth is unimportant. *(pause)* The irony is that you're probably one of the most talented groups I've had the pleasure of teaching, and yet you're the only class to throw it all back in my face. *(pause)* I find it difficult to articulate my feelings, and I'm sure for some of you it's the same. You know Macbeth says, "False face must hide what the false heart doth know." And I sincerely hope that one day you boys will be able to lift your heads from the floor and walk tall like men.

(Merrick starts a slow clap from his seat)

Mer: Bravo. Come on chaps, that speech deserves a round of applause. *(he tries to get them to clap, only Sid joins in momentarily)*

Scr: You never stop fighting do you Merrick?

Mer: Never!

Scr: One day you'll run out of enemies, and then you'll have only yourself to fight.

Mer: Maybe.

Scr: You'll never win Merrick.

Mer: I've won already?

Scr: Have you?

Mer: Well I can see two losers and I'm not one of them.

Scr: If only you could see yourself right now.

Mer: Oh for God's sakes, just shove your philosophical crap. It's just words, that's all it is, words, words and more words. You can never win if you can't act.

Scr: What have you won Merrick?

Mer: What have I won? I've won the war!

Scr: All I can see is somebody whose lost his humanity.

Mer: I don't give a damn about humanity and as far as I'm concerned it's just as well you're going to be fired because you're a waste of oxygen!

Anthony who has sat in silence the entire scene, cannot contain himself any longer. He flies out of his chair and hurls himself on Merrick. Merrick is caught off guard and the rest are stunned by the ferocity of Anthony's attack. Chaos ensues as Anthony slugs away at the incapacitated Merrick, while the others try and pull Anthony off. He grabs a pencil from one of the desks and tries desperately to plunge it into Merrick's eyes. Merrick starts screaming in pain, Anthony is stabbing him in the eyes.

Mer: *(hysterical)* My eyes! My eyes! I can't see! Get him off, my eyes! I can't see!

Absolute chaos ensues, the lights fade.

SCENE 7

Everett's office

Everett stands behind his desk facing away from Scrotum who is seated in front of the desk.

Eve: Thank you for coming in at such short notice Steven

Scr: Well what choice did I have?

Eve: Sometimes we have no choice.

Scr: There's always a choice Gerald.

Eve: Perhaps.

(pause)

Scr: You're going with them aren't you? *(no response)* You really believe him don't you Gerald? *(no response)* You're taking the word of an angry schoolboy and his mates above a friend and staff member! What are you doing?

Eve: The evidence is overwhelming.

Scr: You call a bunch of kids fabricating a story, evidence?

Eve: Even your own head of house testified against you?

Scr: I heard.

Eve: Steven, I'm going to be frank with you. I have no interest in what did or didn't go on in your house. And I don't care about your sexual preference. My concern is the school and it is my job to ensure that the reputation of this school is held in place. This school is the greatest institution in the country.

Scr: It's not the reputation that makes it the greatest school in the country Gerald.

Eve: Come on Steven, we both know that's idealistic in the extreme.

Scr: I'm afraid I don't agree with you Gerald.

Eve: Steven, I haven't brought you in here to debate school reputation. We're discussing something that very nearly spiraled out of control.

Scr: What do you mean nearly, this whole bloody place is out of control!

Eve: Steven please. *(pause)* Now all you need to know is that this little scandal never happened. The rumours were just rumours. Nothing was ever proved and nothing needed to be proved. There will be a published apology in Friday's paper for some irresponsible journalism and after that the issue is closed. There will be no evidence that a boy by the name of Anthony Bates ever attended this school.

Scr: What?

Eve: He's been asked to leave, his parents are arriving this evening. Violence in the classroom is a serious offence.

Scr: Oh come on Gerald it was a schoolboy punch up!

Eve: Stabbing somebody in the eyes with a pencil is not what I call a punch up.

(pause)

Scr: You're hushing it up, aren't you?

Eve: It's in the best interests of the school.

Scr: To lose Anthony Bates? Never! You want a scandal, that's a scandal!

Eve: I would be more concerned about your future if I were you.

Scr: I have no future here.

Eve: Well that's completely up to you.

Scr: Surely you have to ask me to leave.

Eve: I don't have to do anything. In fact to the contrary, I have an extremely interesting offer for you.

Scr: What?

Eve: I making you head of the English department.

Scr: I don't believe it!

Eve: It's a fine offer Steven.

Scr: So Anthony's expelled and I'm offered a promotion.

Eve: You're a fine teacher...

Scr: And he's is a brilliant student!

Eve: Was a brilliant student.

Scr: *(realising)* You can't afford me to leave can you? You know I'll blow this place wide open.

Eve: Steven, if you take us on, so help me God, we will destroy you. We will fight you with every ounce of power we have. You can be assured that you will never teach again because your name will be poison. Is that what you want?

Scr: You've made a terrible mistake Gerald and it is up to me to expose it.

Eve: For God's sakes Steven stop trying to be a martyr. This is no time for heroics, your future is at stake.

Scr: He's unique Gerald, he's one in a million, he's copping it for some stupid, pathetic lie that could potentially cause the school some blushes. What does that say about your school?

Eve: It says that this is a school that stands up for principles, for rules, for dignity.

Scr: Oh please this kid has more dignity than you and I put together. I'm begging you Gerald, let him stay!

Eve: I'm afraid the decision has been made.

Scr: *(desperately)* Well reconsider then! Don't make him the scapegoat!

Eve: Sometimes one has to suffer for the benefit of the whole Steven. *(pause)* Now are you with us or not?

Scr: How can I decide something like that?

Eve: I report to the board in one hour, I need your decision now.

Scr: I can't Gerald, it would go against everything I teach and everything I stand for.

Eve: Steven think carefully, you leave - you may never be employed as a teacher again. You lose your house, your salary, your pension and most importantly your

reputation. You will be forever branded a pervert and a homosexual, is that what you want?

Scr: Don't do this Gerald.

Eve: It would be a shame that a teacher of your class would never teach again.

Scr: I'm his mentor, I mean I'm practically his father! And God knows he needs one right now. *(silence)* He's my friend Gerald. I told him I would fight for him. I'm the only person who can ... You don't understand, this would be the greatest betrayal of all.

Eve: He'll move on, he's talented and he'll find his way. You're too young to be a martyr Steven and you're too old to be unemployed.

Scr: He'd never turn his back on me.

Eve: Time will pass, people will forgive and possibly forget. You owe yourself this much.

Scr: So this is the catch?

Eve: I beg your pardon.

Scr: There's always a catch in life isn't there?

Eve: Of course there is

Scr: Catch 22 *(ironic grin)*

Eve: Sometimes you have to choose the lesser of the two evils. *(pause)* What's it going to be?

Scr: This is crazy Gerald . . .

Eve: Steven, this is your life, you're a teacher.

Scr: He's my boy, Gerald!

Eve: I know he is, but you're about to throw your life away.

Scr: If I don't fight, there's nothing to throw away Gerald

Eve: Then get out and go pack your bags.

(Scrotum doesn't move)

Eve: Once you close that door Steven, that's it.

(Scrotum doesn't move)

Eve: This is your last chance Steven, your last chance to fight.

(Scrotum doesn't move)

Scr: I can't

(pause)

Eve: Congratulations on your promotion Steven.

SCENE 8

A spot comes up centre stage. Anthony and Scrotum are staring at each other.

Ant: Catch 22?

Scrotum nods, tears are streaming down his face. Anthony walks up to him and stares into his eyes. He leans forward and kisses him on the lips. Anthony turns and walks out. Scrotum is left staring after him. The lights fade.

SCENE 9

The Dormitory

Anthony is packing the last of his clothes into his suitcase. Whilst he is packing the voice of Merrick is heard.

Mer: *(voiceover)* Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you before what will be one of the most crucial weeks of this school's history. Tomorrow we take on the old enemy and as always it's going to be a war. We have a choice, either we submit like cowards, or we stand up and fight like men. Every one of you here today has to truly believe that we will win, for with the knowledge of victory comes the courage to fight. But most all, we have to show no fear, because if the enemy sees no fear, then he sees no weakness. And if there is no weakness then we will never lose. *(applause)* One more thing before I finish: on Monday, we vote for next years head prefect, and I believe there is only one person that we as a school can vote for. Only one man possesses the strength and integrity to lead this school and to maintain the values that we have helped create. Only one man can show that this school is a real part of the new South Africa. And that is why I implore you all to vote for Stuart Luthuli. *(more applause)* Thank you for listening. *(more applause, it gradually fades away)*

Anthony finally zips his case shut. He reaches into his locker and retrieves his harmonica, he looks at it for a while then, begins to play. As in the beginning it initially sounds like random notes, but slowly they form a familiar melody. He is now sitting on his locker as the lights slowly fade to darkness.

APPENDIX B

A CROWD OF TWISTED THINGS

Written by Compton James

PERFORMANCES

May 1994	Square Space Theatre University of Natal, Durban
July 1994	Standard Bank National Arts' Festival Grahamstown
October 1994	Natal Playhouse Loft Theatre

A CROWD OF TWISTED THINGS

By

Compton James

A Crowd of Twisted Things was first performed in May 1994 at the Square Space Theatre, University of Natal, Durban, with the following cast:

Flash	Compton James
Jonno	Paul Turner
Rigter	Ross Garland
Gibbo	Shaun Ede
Des	John van de Ruit
Gabby	Miranda Young
Directed by	Compton James

“The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things . . .”

T.S. Eliot

Rhapsody on a Windy Night

The Players

Flash

Jonno

Rigter

Gibbo

Des

Gabby

(**NOTE:** The writer apologises for any inconvenience associated with the poor quality of this archival copy of the script.)

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back

9 con

Flash: Oh brilliant! I can see you in court, Jonno. This man is

Flash: Encourage?! Christ! I'm not thick you know. I could get a couple of A's if I wanted to.

Jonno: Then why don't you?

Flash: 'Coz its too much effort.

Jonno: Oh that's very convenient.

Flash: Yes, it is actually.

Jonno: Okay. Fine. Don't do any work for finals and see how well you do.

Flash: Look, Jonno. I don't want to be the one who breaks it to you but your name is not on the short list for the Rhodes scholarship!

Jonno: At least I'll get into the 'varsity of my choice.

ENTER DES, RIGTER, AND GIBBO. DES IS SKITTISH AND NERVOUS WITH VIRTUALLY NO SELF CONFIDENCE. HE IS CONSTANTLY LOOKING AROUND FOR FEAR OF BEING CAUGHT. HE IS THE ONLY ONE OF THE THREE DRESSED IN FULL SCHOOL UNIFORM. HE IS WEARING BLACK LONGS, WHITE COLLARED SHIRT, A SCHOOL TIE, AND YET AGAIN, THOSE EVER RELIABLE BLACK GRASSHOFFERS. RIGTER IS TALL AND ATHLETIC WITH CLOSELY CROPPED HAIR AND ONE SEES AN IMMEDIATE TENSION BETWEEN HIM AND FLASH. HE IS WEARING THE SAME AS FLASH, ONLY HIS RUGBY JERSEY IS OF ANOTHER SCHOOL AND THIS WILL BE MADE PAINFULLY OBVIOUS LATER ON. GIBBO IS OBVIOUSLY ON A DIFFERENT PLANE TO THE OTHERS. HE IS WEARING A TATTY, OLD GREY CARDIGAN WITH A TIE - DYED T - SHIRT, TATTY TRACKSUIT PANTS WITH JESUS SANDALS. ALL OF THEM ARE OUT OF BREATH AND HAVE JUST FINISHED RUNNING FROM SOMEWHERE.

Right: (Angry but not loud) Shot, 'ous. So kind of you to let us know you were bugging off and leaving us behind.

Jonno: Don't whinge.

Des: What do you mean! Thanks to you we nearly got caught. I could be deprefected. *Jonno: No great loss*

Flash: Okay, Des. The next time we decide to break into the staffroom and steal all the booze we'll make sure you don't come along and then you won't have to worry your pretty little head.

Des: Don't you start, Flash. You're out of your mind.

Flash: Well, you told me to get some booze, so I did.

Right: Yes, but we didn't tell you to smash the booze cabinet.

Flash: You didn't tell me not to smash the booze cabinet, hey!

Des: Oh, forget it. Just keep it down, will you!

Flash: Look, if you're gonna get so upset about this, then I'll throw the whole lot out the window.

Jonno: Look, everyone is a bit tense so why don't we just chill out for awhile. Flash, pass me the box so we can get started.

FLASH REACHES FOR THE BOX AT THE END OF HIS BED AND PASSES IT TO JONNO, WHO OPENS AND BEGINS TO PULL OUT BOTTLES OF LIQUOR. DES CAN HARDLY BELIEVE HIS EYES.

Jonno: Okay, um ... a bottle of vodka, whiskey hmm Glenfiddich, not bad ...

Right: Come on, come on.

Jonno: Chill out, okay. Two five litre things of red wine. Bloody Tassenberg. God, these bastards are cheap.

Flash: Now we can have a thrash. (In an Italian American accent)
As long as I can remember all I ever wanted to be was a gangster.

Des: Jesus, man. Can't you keep quiet, please. We're gonna get caught up here.

Flash: Hey, that line is from one of Scorsese's best movies so just shut ...

Rigt: Surprise surprise! Do you ever have anything original to say?

Flash: How's this? Fiss off, Rigtter!

Gibbo: You have to admit, Rigtter, that was pretty original.

Des: Do you guys have to shout!

Flash: Oh for God's sake! If you don't shut up, Des, I'm gonna throw you out the bloody window.

Des: Look, man. I just ...

Flash: Look, man nothing! Its 2 in the morning! No one this side of the equator is going to hear us, you arsehole, so why don't you just keep your feeble mouth shut!

Jonno: Flash, just leave him, okay.

Rigt: Calm down, oke.

Gibbo: Guys, I don't like the atmosphere in here.

Flash: Well, I just farted so ...

Gibbo: No, man. I'm serious. All this anger is not good.

Rigt: Come on, are we gonna drink or not. Pour me a glass of wine, Jonno.

AT THIS POINT, JONNO TAKES THE 5L CASK OF WINE AND FOURS SOME INTO TIN COFFEE MUGS THAT ARE IN THE CARDBOARD BOX AND HE HANDS THEM OUT. FLASH THEN PRODUCES A KEY FROM HIS POCKET AND STARTS TO THROW IT UP IN THE AIR AND CATCH IT. HE MAKES THIS EXTREMELY OBVIOUS TO ALL PRESENT.

Des: What key is that?

Rigt: (Realising) You son of a bitch! That's the key to the booze cabinet of the staffroom. You had it all the time?

Flash: Yep.

Rigt: You bastard! All that noise you made kicking the fucking thing in! Christ, man, you could've got us bust.

Flash: The only bust your gonna get is your mother's.

Rigt: (Livid) Jesus!

Gibbo: Girls, girls, please. No violence. Here, Rigtter, drink your wine.

Des: Please can have some?

Flash: (Condescending) No, you can't, you revolting little man.

Jonno: (Disapproving glance at Flash, then he hands a glass of wine to Des) Here, drink this.

Gibbo: (Looking out the window) Its wonderful out there tonight. So cold. The moon must be freezing out there, all by herself. Do you think she ever gets lonely?

Flash: Jesus, you are weird, Gibbo.

Rigt: This is coming from someone who spends his life quoting movies.

Flash: (Italian American accent with mock aggression) You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me? Well, I'm the only one here. Who do you think you're talkin' to? (He chuckles)

Des: Shut up, man!

Flash: Hey, relax, oke.

Jonno: Flash, he's right. Keep it down, okay.

Rigt: Why don't we just put him down instead?

Flash: (Sarcastic) Ho ho ho. Gerbhardt, you are such a funny man.

Rigt: Fiss off, dickweed.

Gibbo: Come on, guys. Look at the moon. Its like a great big silver bandsaw slicing through the arteries of life, the very sinew of our existence.

Flash: (To the others) Who is this man?

Rigt: Look, Gibbo, if you start talking about a deeper commitment to reality or any shit like that, I'm leaving.

Jonno: You should actually listen to the things he says. They're not all shit.

Flash: They aren't? Well, he certainly had me fooled.

Gibbo: Don't talk about me like I'm not here.

Flash: Well, you aren't most of the time. You're off visiting some other planet. Would you rather we talked behind your back?

Gibbo: You do any way.

Flash: This is true.

Des: Actually, you can't talk behind someone's back because in order to be behind their back you have to be in front of their stomach and that means they can see you so ... (He realises that the others are staring at him in disbelief so he trails off)

Jonno: Let's just get on with this bloody drinking and forget about irritating each other. Christ, I thought we were supposed to be friends.

Flash: (Pointing at Rigt) There is no way that anyone is going to class that German botti-basher as a friend of mine.

Rigt: (Angry) For Chrissake's!

Flash: (Singing) Deutschland, Deutschland, uber alles!

Rigt: (Moving in on Flash) I'm gonna crack you, my boy!

Flash: Whatever you do don't mention the war!

Des: Will you keep it down, please! Apeman's house is here, man. (He indicates the window)

Rigt: Its this bastard. He refuses to grow up.

Jonno: Tonight was supposed to be fun, remember.

Flash: Well you tell this neo-Nazi fag (Indicates Rigt) to pull his jackboot out his arse and relax a bit.

RIGTER IMMEDIATELY GRABS FLASH BY THE LAPELS OF HIS RUGBY JERSEY AND IS ABOUT TO HIT HIM, BUT THEN JUST HESITATES AND LOOKS INTO FLASH'S EYES. THEN JONNO COMES BETWEEN THEM, WITH HIS FACE TO RIGTER AND HIS BACK TO FLASH. HE THEN PUSHES RIGTER AWAY QUITE AGGRESSIVELY AND LOOKS AT HIM. DURING THIS WHOLE EPISODE FLASH MAKES NO ATTEMPT TO DEFEND HIMSELF, AND KEEPS THE SAME GRIN ON HIS FACE THROUGHOUT.

Rigt: (Still aggressive) One day, my boy, one day.

Flash: One day what? Hey? Come on, come on.

Rigt: Forget it, you're an idiot.

Gibbo: (Genuinely upset) What is it with you two? Every little thing has to come to blows. If you hate each other so much, then just ignore each other.

Flash: You try ignoring him! (Points to Rigt)

Gibbo: (Frustrated) You, you ... you ... you are so filled with hate.

Flash: (Mocking) And you - you are so filled with shit.

Gibbo: I don't believe this. I have to go and brush my teeth!

Des: What?

Gibbo: I have to go and brush my teeth.

Jonno: At 2 in the morning.

Gibbo: It's therapeutic! (Exits)

Des: Now look what you've done.

Flash: Christ! What!

Des: Well, I'm gonna talk to him.

Flash: (Sarcastically) Oh you do that, Des.

Des: Jas, you're so mean.

Flash: I'm mean? (Sarcastically) S'joe, you really know how to insult someone. You really got me there.

Jonno: Just leave him, Des. He'll be fine.

Des: No, he won't, Gibbo's sensitive.

Flash: I wonder what to?

Des: Don't be raw, Flash. You know what I mean.

Flash: Only too well! Bunch of bloody poofs.

Des: Look, you're the one who upset him. Why don't you go and talk to him!

Flash: 'Coz I thin' he's a weirdo, okay.

Des: Well, I'm gonna talk to him. (Exits)

Flash: Jesus! Those two deserve each other. (Imitating Des) You're the one who upset him.

Jonno: (To Flash) Jassas, oke. What is your case, hey?

Flash: Whaddaya mean?

Rigt: He's asking you why you're such a fuck up.

Jonno: No! I want to know why you are so mean to everybody except me and Gabby.

Rigt: As I said, he's asking why you're such a fuck up.

Flash: I'm mean to Gabby.

Jonno: Only when you're pissed.

Flash: Kak, man!

Jonno: Kak, my arse! Answer the question!

Flash: 'Coz Gabby's got tits and you I trust.

Rigt: Well, that's as good as an excuse as any! Shit, no wonder she dumped you.

Flash: (Directly at Rigt) I KNOW why she dumped me, arsehole.

Jonno: Shut up, Rigt. So the only thing you saw in Gabby was tits!

Flash: And arse.

Jonno: Don't lie!

Flash: About what?

Jonno: About her!

Flash: Stop me!

Jonno: Face reality, my boy. She's not a bitch, she doesn't dig you anymore so why don't you just let it be. No amount of booze is gonna change things, Flash.

Flash: Oh, please, man!

Jonno: Face reality.

Flash: I do. Every single day.

Pull had any
Jonno: Ah, come on. Grow up, man. Christ! This is not a bloody soap opera where you can carry on over your lost loves. Robert De Niro poncing about the screen is not how you get over something. This is the real world where there are plenty of other women. You're eighteen! Trust me, you haven't just lost the bird you're gonna marry. So all this crap about stealing booze is pointless. The only reason you do it is to get caught.

Flash: Let's change the subject, shall we?

Jonno: You have no idea what this is about, do you? This is serious shit you're doing, Flash. If you get caught, you won't just get expelled, you'll get arrested. They won't see you as school boy, they'll see you as a spoilt, rich, white who's got nothing to do but throw away his privileges.

Right: Uh, Jonno, I thought you were supposed to be stopping a fight, not starting one.

Flash: I don't like being lectured, Jonno, so I'm gonna take a shower and let you calm down a bit, okay.

Jonno: Don't give me this tormented soul crap, Flash. I'm only telling you this because I'm your friend. You're making a tit of yourself, Flash.

Flash: I'm what?

Jonno: All this stealing booze n shit! Its okay for awhile but you do it often... well... its like you're trying to be this hectic image kid.

Flash: Image kid?

Jonno: Don't get hacked off with me, okay. All I'm saying is like... your not this Renaissance poet who lost the love of his life. You're an eighteen year old who got dumped by his chick.

Flash: Screw you, Jonno! I loved her.

Jonno: I know, but there'll be others who won't bugger you around as much.

Flash: Look, I've had a rough year...

Jonno: All the more reason to move on. You're just feeling sorry for yourself, Flash.

Flash: Bullshit!

Jonno: You are, Flash. And your old man would've hated that.

Right: Hello! I'm in the room.

Flash: I am not acting, Jonno.

Jonno: I know you're upset but don't run around telling everybody. Christ! Just, like, act normal about it. (Flash starts to exit) Where are you going?

Flash: I told you. To take a shower.

Jonno: This is exactly what I mean, Flash. You're just being heavy, man. Who the hell goes and has a shower in the middle of the night. Its stupid!

Flash: I'm trying to avoid you.

Jonno: Why? We can screw the same chicks 'n be arrested by the same cops but I can't tell you when you're being an arsehole. Get real, Flash.

Flash: Look, Jonno, I'm going to have a shower.

Rigt: At this time of night?

Flash: Why? Do you want to show me how to pick up the soap, Rигie! That is what she calls you, isn't it?

Rigt: She doesn't call me anything anymore.

Flash: Really? So it was over before it really began, then. That's quite ironic 'coz that's the way she described your dick. (Exits)

Rigt: (Shouting after him) Arsehole! Jesus, that oke must learn to take criticism.

Jonno: You don't know him, Rигter, so don't judge him. That's the problem with Germans all round really. They're too judgemental.

Rigt: I am not German. When will you idiots realise that?

Jonno: How can you say that you're not German with a name like Rигter Gerbhardt.

Rigt: My grandfather was German but I'm not, alright.

Stand Jonno: Don't get so stressed, man. We're only ripping you off 'coz we know that we get a reaction out of you. Its not like we don't like you or anything.

Rigt: Flash doesn't like me.

Jonno: He did once.

Rigt: Ja, but I never did anything to him and now the oke wants to kill me.

Jonno: Ah come on, Rигter. You pulled hectic blind on Flash. Mind you, Gabby's bloody hot so I can't exactly blame you.

Rigt: Exactly! She came onto me before even before she broke up with Flash. I mean, I'm only human.

Jonno: Ja, ja. I know. When a woman who looks like that ...

Rigt: She ... like ... sticks her tongue in your ear and ...

Jonno: One thing leads to another ...

Rigt: Then you start to kiss her back ...

Jonno: You're starting to get hot under the collar ...

Rigt: Ja, exactly.

Jonno: And before you know it you've broken up a really good thing and nearly destroyed a friend of yours' life. Anyone can understand you wanting to do that.

Rigt: (Realising) It was a bastard thing to do, wasn't it.

Jonno: Yep.

Rigt: It just happened, Jonno.

Jonno: Things like that don't just happen. Even if she begged you, you should've refused, man. For Christ's sake, Flash is in the same rugby side as you and he hates you so much that he won't even pass you the ball.

Rigt: Well, she's fucking hot and she came onto me so I shouldn't have to feel guilty.

Jonno: Yes, you should.

Rigt: You weren't there, Jonno. You don't know what happened.

AT THIS MOMENT JONNO MOVES TO THE SIDE OF THE STAGE AND WATCHES

AS IF RIGTER IS RELATING THE STORY OF HIS SEDUCTION. RIGTER HAS TAKEN OFF HIS SHIRT AND STARTS TO BRUSH HIS HAIR, AS IF HE IS GETTING DRESSED. THE ENTIRE STAGE IS DARK EXCEPT FOR A POOL OF LIGHT AROUND RIGTER INTO WHICH GABBY MUST ENTER. GABBY IS WEARING A SCHOOL UNIFORM. SHE IS A BEAUTIFUL BRUNETTE AND THE FRUMPY UNIFORM CANNOT HIDE HER FIGURE. Blonde

Gabby: Howzit, Rigter. How are you?

Rigt: Howzit, Gabs. Fine. I don't know where Flash is. I think he might be having a shower. I wouldn't wait for him in the dorm.

Gabby: Why not?

Rigt: 'Coz chicks aren't allowed in here and Apeman could come round 'n check.

Gabby: No. I saw all your members of staff down at the field watching the 15 A's. No one is coming up here.

Rigt: Well, do you want me to go call Flash for you.

Gabby: Not particularly.

Rigt: (Starting to get nervous) Well ... you ... um ... can't wait for him here.

Gabby: Why not?

Rigt: 'Coz, well, okses have got to get changed.

Gabby: What okses?

Rigt: Well, me.

Gabby: So.

Rigt: So I gotta get changed.

Gabby: Well, I don't mind.

Rigt: Well, I do. Could you stand at the other end of the dorm or something?

Gabby: How about or something.

Rigt: Seriously, Gabby, I gotta get changed.

Gabby: Then do it.

Rigt: But ...

Gabby: Oh, come on, Rigie. Its nothing that I haven't seen before.

Rigt: When?

Gabby: Wouldn't you like to know?

Rigt: Ja, I would actually.

Gabby: You know that camping weekend, when you were in the shower?

Rigt: What? You and Michelle?

Gabby: Yep.

Rigt: Fucking hell!

Gabby: That's what we said.

Rigt: I thought you were supposed to be a hectic christian.

Gabby: Even a 'hectic christian' has to fantasize.

Rigt: What about Flash?

Gabby: Boring! (Eyeing Rigter's chest) Have you ever noticed the difference between men and women's nipples.

Rigt: Can't say I've ever really compared them.

Gabby: Women's nipples should be sucked. They're made that way. At least mine are.

Rigt: Probably because of the baby. You know. Childbirth.

Gabby: Mmm. But I have very sensitive nipples, Rigter. Very

sensitive.

Right: (Increasingly nervous) How nice for you.

Gabby: Are you coming to our Matric Ball?

Right: I dunno. I don't think so.

Gabby: Well, I'll speak to you at Tim's house. You are gonna go there after the game, aren't you?

Right: Ja. What about Flash?

Gabby: He's not going out this weekend. He's got too much work. That's why I came up to see him today.

Flash: (Off stage) Gabby! You here?

Gabby: (Shouting to Flash) Coming, babe. (To Righter) I'll see you at Tim's then. Bye. (Exits)

Right: No, wait... shit.

THE LIGHTING REVERTS BACK TO WHAT IT WAS BEFORE AND RIGHTER PUTS HIS SHIRT BACK ON. JONNO SPEAKS.

Jonno: I don't care what happened. You shouldn't have done it. Flash is not right upstairs, man.

ENTER GIBBO WHO IS LOOKING SLIGHTLY HARASSED AND EMBARRASSED

Gibbo: I just saw Flash on the way to the showers and he looks mightily pissed off.

Right: He's just pissed off with himself.

Jonno: (Looks at Righter with surprise) Oh, really!

Right: Where's Des? I thought he was with you.

Gibbo: He's ... uh ... ja ... still in the ... um ... shower room.

Right: Doing what?

Gibbo: (Pause) Um ... crying.

Jonno: Why's he crying?

Gibbo: I ... um ... well, I whacked him.

Jonno: Where?

Gibbo: By the pisstrough, near the basins there.

Jonno: No, man. Where on the body?

Gibbo: Oh! ... um ... on the nose.

Right: (Laughing) Why?

Gibbo: Coz he tried to kiss me.

ON HEARING THIS, BOTH JONNO AND RIGHTER BURST INTO FITS OF LAUGHTER

Jonno: He what?

Gibbo: He tried to kiss me.

Right: I can't actually believe this. The world's greatest hippy actually dondered someone.

Gibbo: Well ... like the oke tried to kiss me.

Right: So you beat the crap out of him! (Laughs) Way to go, Gibbo.

Jonno: Well, what happened?

Gibbo: I told you. I hit him.

Jonno: No. Before that. You must've had a reason.

Gibbo: Well, I was hacked off with you guys so I went to brush my teeth because I find it helps calm me down. Well, like, Des

came in to see if I was okay. He started talking to me, and then he sat down next to me, like right, right, next to me.

Jonno: That's no reason to belt him for being a fag.

Gibbo: (A bit angry) I didn't belt him for being a fag. I hit him 'coz he wouldn't stop sticking his tongue down my throat!

Rigt: Stop bullshitting and tell us what really happened! Christ, its like getting blood out of a stone.

Gibbo: I don't really think that it is any of your business. I mean if Des wants you to know, he'll tell you himself.

Rigt: Don't be stupid. Of course its our business.

Gibbo: Well, he doesn't want the whole world to know about it.

Jonno: He's got a point Rigt. It would be a bit embarrassing for the poor bugger.

Rigt: Well, he should've thought of that before he became a poof. Come on, Gibbo, out with it.

Gibbo: (Reluctantly) Okay. He started telling me about the time ... well ... like ... he ... uh ... the one time he put your underpants on his head and jerked off over them.

Rigt: (Utter disbelief) He what?!!

Gibbo: He put your underpants on his head and ...

Rigt: (Charges towards the exit in a rage) I'll kill him. My oath, I'll bloody kill him.

Jonno: (Stopping Rigt) No, hang on. ~~I want to~~ hear the rest of this.

Rigt: Ja, I bet you do.

Jonno: Come on, man. Relax! It'll be good for a laugh.

Rigt: You wouldn't laugh it was your undies on his head.

Jonno: But he never would. Your skid marks are so much better than mine.

Gibbo: Guys, this is not funny.

Jonno: I think it's hilarious.

Gibbo: This is not funny, okay!

Jonno: Ah come on, Gibbo. Are you trying to tell me that you don't find the thought of Des running round the dorm kaalgad with Richter's Mickey Mouse underjocks on just slightly amusing.

Rigt: (Worried) How do you know they were the Mickey Mouse ones?

Jonno: I don't. Its just that he always said he thought they were quite cool.

Rigt: (With dawning realisation) Oh shit!

Jonno: You're wearing them, aren't you? Gross, man. He probably came in them.

Rigt: Shit, shit, shit, shit!

RIGTER IS DISGUSTED WITH THIS RATHER REVOLTING DEVELOPMENT AND THRUSTS HIS HAND DOWN HIS PANTS AND STARTS TO HOP AROUND THE STAGE IN AN ATTEMPT TO RIP OFF HIS UNDERPANTS. AFTER A SHORT WHILE, HE SUCCEEDS, AT WHICH HE LETS OUT A SCREAM OF AGONY AS HE HAS NEARLY CASTRATED HIMSELF IN THE PROCESS. HE SINKS TO THE FLOOR IN AGONY, HOLDING THE OFFENDING UNDIES IN HIS HAND. ALL THIS TIME JONNO HAS BEEN HAVING FITS OF LAUGHTER AT RIGTER'S MISFORTUNE.

Gibbo: Come on, you two. If people find out about this then there

will be heavy shit.

Jonno: Just calm down.

Gibbo: You don't understand. We can't let something like this get out, not in a place like this. It'll kill him. The oke is messed up, not infectious. Please don't tell anybody.

Rigt: (To himself) My underpants!

Jonno: Tell us what else happened.

Gibbo: When he told me the thing about Rigt's underpants, he tried to kiss me.

Jonno: What ... he like ... just somer tried to grab you?

Gibbo: Ja.

Rigt: (To himself) How could he use my underpants? Shit, man.

Gibbo: I don't think he's gay, though.

Rigt: (Beginning to recover) Oh, definitely, Gibbo. I mean sticking another oke's jocks over your head is like hectic heterosexual behaviour.

Jonno: Rigt's got a point, Gibbo.

Gibbo: No. The oke's screwed up from this place. You've got to understand.

Jonno: Understand what?

Gibbo: Him. This place. Everything. Coming here messed him up badly. He's so lonely here, he just wants someone to care about him.

Rigt: The oke's a poof, Gibbo. An A#1 rectum raider.

Gibbo: Look, Des kissed me 'coz he thought ... he thought he was gay, not because he actually is. He just wanted to be close to someone and he thought that was the best way to do it.

Rigt: Well, it's a novel approach.

Gibbo: Look, Rigt, the oke's not a fag and even if he was, it's none of your business.

Rigt: Standing up for gay rights? Is this a complex I detect?

Gibbo: Just fuck off, okay.

Rigt: Ah, come on. Everybody thinks he's a bit suspect.

Gibbo: (To Rigt) Everybody thinks that you're an arsehole but does that make you one.

Jonno: Just relax, people. I don't think you have to worry about this going any further than us guys. Okay, Gibbo? Are you sure he tried to grab you though?

Gibbo: Of course I'm sure, man! And this bloody perfect school drove him to it.

Rigt: Go easy on this school thing. You make it sound like this place is haunted.

Gibbo: You want to know about real ghosts in this place? There are ghosts that don't let you sleep at night, Rigt. They're the ghosts of every cowering old boy who keeps his mouth shut about what goes on here. It's haunted by the guilty spirits of every headmaster who let the bullying go unchecked, because of tradition. You know what, I wouldn't piss on tradition if it was on fire. This place is haunted by the ghosts of all the new boys who sit there and take beatings but never speak out because they are too bloody scared. And most of all, it's haunted by parents who turn a deaf ear to their sons desperate cries for help. This so called institution just wants to bend you and crush you, and

if you won't fit into the mould, they destroy you. That's what they ^{happened} done to Des. This school has made him feel so alone and confused he's clutching at straws in the hope that they might make him a little less lonely.

Right: If Des is gay, then it is no fault of the school.

Gibbo: You ignorant arsehole! It's no fault to be gay. If you're gay then you're gay. But it is a fault to ostracize someone till they think they're the one with the problem. Des looks around and sees arseholes like Flash giving him non-stop uphill and he thinks that he deserves it so he must be screwed up. So he tries to get into me.

Jonno: Don't ruin it by going overboard on this psychology thing. You were beginning to make sense there for a second.

Gibbo: Christ Jonno! For the millionth time, this is not funny.

Right: Look, man. You cannot ...

Gibbo: What do you know about it, Righter? You've only been here since the beginning of this year. Us buggers have been here four or five. People have done exactly the same thing to me. Just 'coz I wear sandals and weird t-shirts people think I'm a drug addict and they look at me like ...

Jonno: But you are a drug addict.

Gibbo: That's not the point.

Jonno: Well, it is actually.

Gibbo: People don't know I'm a drug addict. They just assume because of the way I dress.

Jonno: Okay. Sure. But they assumed right.

Gibbo: I'm trying to show you the narrow-mindedness of this place. It's like a cancer.

Jonno: Don't knock the system if it works, Gibbo.

Gibbo: All it does is perpetuate itself. Jonno, from one generation to the next.

Right: Jeess, you really are weird.

Jonno: If you don't like it here, Gibbo, you shouldn't have come.

Gibbo: In the first place, I had ^{TURN AWAY} no idea what this place was like and, in the second place, even if I did know, I had no choice. I was going to go to a private school, just like my dear Dad, preferably a boarding school. So here I am. Part of an elitist, archaic system of education that died with Charles Dickens. If you don't fit in with their idea of what's right, they destroy you.

Jonno: That's not ...

Gibbo: No! Remember when you burnt John Morcombe's toast in our first year? They caned you till you passed out. The prefects whipped you till you bloody fainted.

Jonno: That's not the point!

Gibbo: Yes it is! They did the same thing to Flash. They hit him till he bled. I remember, they promised they wouldn't stop hitting him until they saw blood. That's sick, man. Okes like that should be locked up. It was the prefects again. They were the guys who were supposed to be setting an example.

Right: Ja, but you get to do it when you're in matric.

Gibbo: Oh whoopi doo! I can't wait till morning, then I'll go and beat the crap out of some new boy because I'm in matric. In

fact, why should we wait till morning. Let's go wake up some poor thirteen year old and terrorize him shitless now. Let's go and make him cry, shall we? You keen for a little spot on trane, Rigter?

Rigt: That's not what I meant.

Gibbo: The scary thing is that that's exactly what you meant.

Jonno: Look, Gibbo, its like ... like ... well ...

Gibbo: You don't know what its like, ~~des~~! And because of that, Des is sitting all alone in the shower room bawling his eyes out and none of us have got the guts to go and speak to him because we think he's gay.

FLASH ENTERS SMOKING A CIGARETTE, BUT HE HAS NOT HAD A SHOWER.

Flash: Speak to who?

Jonno: Not in here, Flash. You'll stink the whole place out.

Flash: Then open a window. Come on, speak to who?

Gibbo: Des.

Flash: Howcome?

Gibbo: Because he is in tears. Didn't you see him in the shower room?

Flash: (To Gibbo) Ja, but I didn't think anything of it. (To Jonno) What happened to him?

Gibbo: You mean you spent all that time with an oke while you were having a shower and you didn't even ask him why he was crying!

Flash: (To Gibbo) I didn't have a shower because there wasn't any hot water. (To Jonno) What happened to Des?

Rigt: Old Gibbo here cracked him one.

Flash: (Laughing) You what?

Gibbo: (Embarrassed) I hit him.

Flash: Why?

Jonno: For sticking Rigter's rods on his head!

Flash: Not the Mickey Mouse one's.

Jonno: Yep!

Rigt: Jesus! Does everyone know about these rods!

Gibbo: I thought you said you wouldn't tell anybody.

Jonno: Ja, I know but I thought Flash here would really appreciate it. That's a six pack you owe me, boy!

Gibbo: You took a bet on Rigter's underods?

Jonno: No man. We bet on whether Des was gay or not. Flash reckoned he wasn't and I said he was.

Gibbo: (Disbelief and disgusted) Oh my God!

Flash: Well, you seem to be scoring with everyone these days, Gerbhardt.

Rigt: Ha bloody ha!

Gibbo: Des really needs our help, guys.

Flash: Well, I think Rigter is our man. A bit of executive relief, hey!

Rigt: Listen, mate. I learnt everything I know from Gabby.

SILENCE.

JONNO AND GIBBO LOOK AT RIGTER IN DISBELIEF WHILE RIGETR STEELS

HIMSELF FOR A PHYSICAL ONSLAUGHT FROM FLASH.--FLASH'S CHARACTER IS TOTALLY DIFFERENT AS HE WITHDRAWS INTO HIMSELF AND STARTS TO DRAW ON A HORRENDOUS MEMORY. THE LIGHTING BEGINS TO CHANGE AND ALL THE CHARACTERS ARE FADED INTO DARKNESS EXCEPT FLASH. GABBY EMERGES FROM THE WINGS, THIS TIME WEARING A T - SHIRT AND LEGGINGS THAT SHOW OFF HER FIGURE. SHE MOVES INTO THE POOL OF LIGHT THAT SURROUNDS FLASH AND THEY BEGIN TO RE - INACT A SCENE FROM FLASH'S MEMORY. THEY ARE SITTING WATCHING A RUGBY MATCH.

Flash: Christ, ref are you blind?

Gabby: Flash! Don't say that.

Flash: That was a high tackle, man. The ref can't just ignore it.

Gabby: But you always swear so much. It's a sign of stupidity, you know that?

Flash: You and I both know that I am not stupid.

Gabby: I never said ...

Flash: Please, Gabby! I'm trying to watch the match and I can't do that with you yakking in my ear all the time.

Gabby: (Visibly hurt) Sorry.

Flash: What do you mean a knock on? It came off his chest, for fuck's sake!

Gabby: Don't swear, Flash. Please!

Flash: Shoosh, Gabs.

Gabby: We've gotta talk about things, Flash.

Flash: (Irritated) I'm watching the match.

Gabby: What's more important? Talking to me or watching the bloody match!

Flash: Alright! Alright! I'm listening.

Gabby: Things aren't going so well. It's not the same.

Flash: What isn't?

Gabby: Look at me when I talk to you!

Flash: Sorry!

Gabby: Well, are you gonna say something?

Flash: Don't worry, Gabs. I'm very happy with you.

Gabby: What?!

Flash: I'm very happy ... yes, well played.

Gabby: You really are stupid sometimes. You know that.

Flash: I'm just correcting you on a few facts, that's all.

Gabby: (Indignant) Oh really! Flip, you know how to piss me off!

Flash: (Smiling) But you still love me, don't you?

Gabby: (Deadly serious) No. I don't. You're such an ignorant arsehole and you make me sick. (Flash tries to put his arms around her) No, don't touch me!

Flash: What is it with you, for Christ's sake!

Gabby: Don't say that!

Flash: Everytime I dare to disagree with you, you take it personally. It's beginning to piss me off.

Gabby: That is not true.

Flash: It is, my girl.

Gabby: Don't call me 'my girl' either.

Flash: Why don't you learn to take criticism?

Gabby: You make me so cross.

Flash: Oh for God's sake, Gabby! Just because we have a little disagreement there's no need to get dramatic about it! You

always do this!

Gabby: I'm not getting dramatic. I'm serious.

Flash: What do you mean?

Gabby: What I say. Maybe things should be platonic for awhile.

Flash: Platonic? Did you have to look that word up before you came here today.

Gabby: Screw you, Flash! (Tries to exit) I don't even want to be friends with you.

Flash: (He stops Gabby) Friends?! Have you any idea how humiliating that word is? (Mocking) Let's just be friends. Christ, Gabby! You're friends with your dog. I'm the guy you're supposed to get naked with, remember.

Gabby: I knew you would react like this.

Flash: Well, how am I supposed to react! Do you expect me to shout it from the roof tops?

Gabby: Look, don't make me feel any worse than I already do, okay.

Flash: Make you feel any worse?!

Gabby: God! I'm such a bitch.

Flash: (Sarcastic) Oh, I wouldn't say that. I might think it but I'd never say it.

Gabby: I'm not saying we should like break up permanantly but we should ...

Flash: Fuck other people?

Gabby: FLASH!

Flash: Stop hedging your bets, bitch. We either break up or stay together.

Gabby: Don't speak to me like that!

Flash: What difference does it make? You just gonna screw me around and lead me on till you find someone else and then you'll bugger off. You've probably already invited someone else to your matric ball. (Gabby is silent) You haven't, have you? (Again Gabby does not respond) You don't waste any time, do you! Who is it, Gabby?

Gabby: I'm not gonna tell you.

Flash: Why?

Gabby: Because you and your friends will go and beat him up, that's why.

Flash: Get real, Gabby. Tell me who it is!

Gabby: It's none of your business.

Flash: (Moves in on her and shouts) TELL ME!

Gabby: (Scared) Righter.

Flash: (Laughing) I should've known.

Gabby: We're just friends, okay.

Flash: Crap!

Gabby: I want to see you again!

Flash: (Pushing her out of the light) Tell your problems to Righter!

Gabby: (From the darkness) Please?

THE LIGHTING RETURNS TO WHAT IT WAS BEFORE THE FLASHBACK AND FLASH IS LEFT STANDING WHILE THE OTHERS LOOK AT HIM WITH WARY CURIOSITY. GABBY HAS EXITED BY THIS TIME.

Flash: --(Defeated) --Perhaps --I'd --better --finish this cigarette
outside. (Exits)
Jonno: Well played, Rigter. Very tactful!
Rigt: He asked for it!
Jonno: You don't ask for shit like that.
Rigt: He's a bastard.
Jonno: You've only known him since the beginning of the year.
Rigt: That's long enough! Everything Gabby said about him is
true. He's yah - yah - yah at everyone's throat the whole
time. He's a wanker, man.
Gibbo: Well, why don't you just stay away from him, then.
Jonno: Just let it be for a while, okay.

DES ENTERS NERVOUSLY.

Jonno: Des! Aaaaah ... well ... um ... where you been?
Des: (Embarrassed) In the shower room.
Jonno: Oh. I see.
Rigt: Ja.
Gibbo: Well.
Jonno: Mmmm.
Rigt: So ... uh ... Gibbo, can you pour me a drink, please?
Gibbo: Hmmm? Oh. For sure. (Pours wine into mug and hands it to
Rigt) *A Drink*

THE CHARACTERS LOOK AT EACH OTHER NERVOUSLY WITH THE OCCASIONAL
MUFFLED GIGGLE UNTIL FINALLY JONNO SPEAKS HOLDING BACK A SMILE.
Move back to Des, he's so tell me - back at Rig
Jonno: Des, what do you see in ... uh ... Rigter's underpants.
Des: Shit! Gibbo, you said that you wouldn't tell anybody.
Gibbo: Look, my oath it won't go any further. I swear!
Jonno: Why Rigter though? I mean, I thought you had taste.
Rigt: Hey!
Des: (Starting to cry) Please, guys. It was a mistake, man.
Jonno: Don't worry. Rigter's not ready for a relationship yet.
Gibbo: Come on, ous. Please!
Rigt: Getting protective, Gibbo!
Gibbo: Well, it's not funny, alright.
Des: Please try and understand, guys. Please. There's only about
four months till we get out of here. I don't need this shit
now.
Jonno: This is a boys school, Des! It was a bloody stupid thing
to do.
Des: I couldn't face anybody if they knew, please. I swear I
won't do anything like this again, just please don't tell
anybody. You've also got Rigter to think about.
Rigt: What about me?
Des: Everyone'll know that it was your underpants I used.
Rigt: Shit! *Des: What?*
Jonno: Just one question, Des. *What's it like kissing an oke?*
Rigt: Gross, man. Just how sick are you?
Jonno: (To Rigter) I just wanna know what makes people do it. (To
Des) Was it the same as it is with a chick?
Gibbo: (Annoyed) He didn't get the chance to kiss me properly,

okay.

no: Come on, man. You okses have done this before. You're both men of the world. Was it better or worse than a chick?

no: (To Jonno) How would Des know that?

no: Have you never grabbed a chick, Des?

: Shut up, okay.

no: You poor bastard.

no: What difference does it make if he's grabbed a chick or not?

no: (Aside to Gibbo) If you haven't grabbed a chick by the time you're in matric, then its ... uh ... time to face up to the facts.

bbo: What facts?

no: That old Des here might actually ... well ... you know ... he could be authentically ...

bbo: What?

no: Gay! There. I said it. You happy now?

es: Lisa Milton.

igt: Who?

es: I grabbed Lisa Milton in Std 9. *Sit my bed, get a drink*

igt: No you didn't.

Des: I did, okay.

Gibbo: No you didn't, Des.

Des: Whose side are you on, Gibbo?

Gibbo: Yours. Its just that Lisa's folks emigrated to Australia at the end of Std 8.

Des: When she came back here on holiday, we had a fling.

igt: She hasn't come back for a holiday. ~~Gibbo~~ Des

Des: There's no woman that I want to grab, okay.

Jonno: Face the facts, Des. What you tried to do to Gibbo tonight, well, its just a sign of the times. Its all downhill from here.

Des: (Pleading) Please don't tell anyone about tonight. It would just make things worse for me. Come on, guys.

igt: Maybe if you weren't such a woe, you wouldn't be in this position.

Gibbo: What is that supposed to mean?

igt: It means he's always whinging and he can't take a beating. He's a poof, man.

Des: Just 'coz I'm not like you ...

Gibbo: Christ! You are braindead, Gerbhardt. Don't you understand that people can't grow in this type of enviroment. This whole school has stagnated.

igt: Don't talk shit!

Gibbo: Oh that's great, Rigt. Anything you don't understand is shit. You really are stupid.

igt: Hey! Watch it, okay?

Gibbo: Watch what! You certainly have recieved an openminded education, haven't you.

igt: What are you talking about?

Gibbo: The way you think. The way you've been educated.

igt: What's that got to do with anything?

Gibbo: (Laughing in disbelief) Bloody everything!

Jonno: He's got a point, Gibbo. We don't come here for the

-education.

I don't actually believe what I'm hearing.

o: Well, its true! You come here for the name, for the protection, for the old boys club. That's what you come here for. Your matric means no more than if you got it from Pondokkie High. Its the tie that counts.

IR FLASH. HE IS NOW COMPOSED AND HIS FORMER ACID SELF.

sh: I've finished my twak.

no: Ask Flash, go on, ask him. *Sit my bed*

sh: Ask me what?

: Why we're here.

sh: Horny parents?

: Seriously, man. Do you think this school is worth it?

it: Of course it is.

sh: What would you know about it? You've only been here since the beginning of this year but I see your loyalties are still divided (Points to Rigger's rugby jersey).

it: Shut up!

ash: Why? So you can tell everyone how good your new school is. Look at you. You want to be one of us so badly but you never will be, will you. You fart around in your St Mark's rugby jersey. Well, I've got news for you. This is not St Mark's. This is a school where we don't like presumptuous strangers, so why don't you take your split identity and stick it where the sun don't shine.

bbo: (Sarcasm) The shining example of a private school education.

ash: Gibbo, its a system of education that if it suits you will set you for life.

bbo: And if it doesn't suit you?

ash: Then it destroys you! Its just the way it is. This place doesn't pretend to cater for everyone, so if you can't survive here then stay away. That is what you and your kind must realise!

bbo: (Indignant) Me and my kind?

ash: What is it Blackadder calls you ...uh ... 'Malnourished whinging lefties'.

bbo: When my folks pay this kind of money they ...

ash: They agree to sacrifice their hold on you and they hand you over to a system. I know that every parent prays that the system doesn't destroy their son. It is nothing more than a calculated risk, and if it pays off then your son need never look back. And to tell you the truth, people like you and Des are in the minority. Most of the people who come out of here do so in one emotional piece. What happened to you in the showers is not our fault, its not the old boys fault. Its your parents fault for sending you here and its your fault for letting them.

s: (Crying) I didn't want to. They wouldn't listen to me. THEY WOULDN'T LISTEN!

ash: So that gives you the right to blame us. (Des is silent)
Well? Does it?

(Pause) No. No, Flash, it doesn't! I'm too weak willed to fight against them, just like I'm too weak willed to fight against you. When you start ripping me off, all I can do is stand there and take it because anything I say you'll use to humiliate me even more. I can't hit you 'coz you're twice my size and you're the sort of person who'd enjoy beating the shit out of me. I don't know if I'm gay or not, I don't know what I am and you'll probably rip me off about it till the end of the year when hopefully I will never see you or this place again. I'm not the brightest oke around so you will always be more successful than me. I will never play first team anything and I'll more than likely marry an ugly woman who'll hen-peck me and have loads of affairs. You will be, in the eyes of our society, a success, whereas me, I'll be the guy no one remembers in ten years time. Despite all that, I want you to know two things. One, without guys like me, guys like you would be ordinary. Two, I never have, and hopefully never will, bullied anybody.

RE IS A PAUSE DURING WHICH TIME FLASH STARES AT GIBBO AND DES. HAPS DES'S EMOTIONAL OUTPOURING HAS REACHED FLASH'S HEART. IT KS ALMOST AS IF THE BITTERNESS THAT FLOWS OUT OF FLASH HAS ALLY BEEN STEMMED. SUDDENLY FLASH COMES TO HIS SENSES.

sh: Jesus! You can talk a lot of shit sometimes.
bo: God, you people are so full of your old school crap. I pay the same money as you and I don't pay to be humiliated by you lot. Fuck you all. (Exits)
sh: Go on, Des. What are you waiting for? Follow him. Go on.
t: Shut up, Flash!
sh: Go on, Des. Chase his tail!
t: Just shut up, okay.
sh: Go on. We're waiting.
t: (Starts to follow Gibbo) Just leave me alone, okay.
sh: (Contempt) Go home, Des.
t: (Des exits)
t: Wanker. (Flash spits)
no: You love getting to people, don't you?
sh: Well, the end always justifies the screams.
no: What?
sh: With them gone, there's more booze for us.
no: (Disbelief and disgust) Great.
t: Well, I'm gonna have another drink.
no: Get us one, will you.
sh: What's the time, Jonno.
no: Half two.
t: (Downing his drink) Shit. I'm supposed to be at the compound.
no: Now?
t: I won't be long.
no: But its the middle of the bloody night.
t: Ja, so? I said I wouldn't be long.
no: What are you gonna do? Bonk one of the coon girls?
sh: Hey!

(20)

o: (A little annoyed at the correction) Sorry. African ladies.

h: Don't apologise to me. Apologise to them.

o: Of course I'm not.

h: Let him go, Jonno.

o: Well, if you want to go, then go.

h: I'll see you guys now - now. (Exits) *Block 4*

o: Where's he bugging off to?

h: He's going to buy dope, you cretin.

o: He's what?

h: Drugs, Jonno. Marijuana.

o: Rigger?

h: I wonder if Gabby knew.

o: Stuff Gabby! If he gets bust, they'll expel him like a shot.

h: That's a thought. Maybe I should tell Apeman. (Laughs)

o: Imagine buying the stuff at school!

h: Have you ever tried it?

o: No. Have you?

h: A couple of times. Just makes you feel really pissed, that's all.

o: Did you do it when you were going out with Gabby?

h: Fuck, are you mad! She would've had an absolute fit if I'd smoked dope when I was going out with her.

o: Are you gonna try and get back together with her?

h: What for?

o: Well, if she and Rigger have broken up then ...

h: Please!

o: You still dig her?

h: So what? It's the rugby tol at the end of the term and the last thing I need is a handbrake at a party like that. Even Gibbo got laid at the last one!

o: So you definitely going, then?

h: Of course, my boy. Wouldn't miss it for the world. And you?

o: I dunno.

h: What? Do you know whatta thrash its gonna be?

o: Ja but ... what if Melanie Watson's there?

h: All the better.

o: Ja, but she knows.

h: Knows what?

o: That I dig her.

h: But don't you want her to know?

o: Ja, I do. But ... ah ... shit, I dunno.

h: Come on, Jonno. You've got nothing to lose!

o: Even still, I reckon she knows and she thinks I'm stupid!

h: That's 'coz you are stupid. You've got to impress her.

o: With what, Flash! I couldn't impress a toilet.

h: With that attitude I'm not surprised. You need some sort of ... I dunno ... mmm ... confidence booster.

o: Like what?

h: Like a start, a toehold. Make her laugh or something.

o: Make her laugh?

h: Ja. I promise you. Laughter! As far as women go its a

springboard, if not into their pants, then at least into their address books.

Jonno: I won't be able to make her laugh, I'll be to pissed. Anyway, I can't do that sort of thing, just start spading out of the blue.

Flash: Well, you might as well come to the party anyway. Chances are that you'll pick up some drunk chick and be able to grab her.

Jonno: Why are you so keen for me to go?

Flash: 'Coz you're the only oke who ~~looks old enough to buy the booze~~ and whose folks won't mind if we come home legless.

Jonno: Oh great. I feel really wanted, Flash.

Flash: Come on, man. You've got to take the first step. What have you got to lose by talking to her?

Jonno: She could embarrass me.

Flash: Okay, I'll admit that your chances with this babe are pretty slim ...

Jonno: Slim? They're bloody anorexic!

Flash: Okay. But you are still in with a chance.

Jonno: How?

Flash: Well, she is a bit of a slut so if you get her drunk enough then you'll be able to grab her. Hell, get her to drink enough and I'll be able to grab her as well.

Jonno: I'll get bloody arrested for that.

Flash: Well, I won't tell anybody.

Jonno: Maybe I should forget the whole thing.

Flash: Maybe you should stop farting about and do something.

Jonno: I don't see you fending women off with a baseball bat so maybe you should shut up!

Flash: Well, I'm the one who went out with Gabby for a year and a half.

Jonno: So where is she now, Mr. Expert?

Flash: (Hurt) Not with me.

Jonno: I'm sorry.

Flash: So am I. Look at us Jonno. All we ever talk about is women.

Jonno: All I ever talk about is women. All you ever talk about is movies.

Flash: I dunno. I talk about Gabby.

Jonno: Except you don't really talk as much as you scream. Anyway she doesn't count.

Flash: Stuff you! She's hotter than anything you've grabbed.

Jonno: Ja, but that's not the point. I can't tell you what I want to do with her.

Flash: What do you want to do to her?

Jonno: Take her to the library, Flash. Christ, what do you think!

Flash: Your my friend, Jonno!

Jonno: What's that got to do with it. My relationship with you doesn't change the shape of her bum.

Flash: It's bloody nice, hey.

Jonno: Tell me about it.

Flash: She had great tits too.

Jonno: And she used to wear those tight little black dresses.

Flash: Shit. Ja. Those things were short, hey.

Jonno: Not short enough.

Flash: I was stupid to let her go.

Jonno: So why did you?

Flash: You know, man.

Jonno: I know the reason you spout off when you're pissed. I want to hear a reason when you're sober.

Flash: We split because of ... fuck, I dunno.

Jonno: Yes, you do.

Flash: (Begins to talk reluctantly) She told me that she needed time, space, the usual shit. The whole thing was a big balls up. She wanted to take it easy but still remain faithful. Well, she kept phoning me and everything. But all the time she was grabbing Rigter. I didn't know this and she wasn't gonna tell me especially since I accused her of having a thing for Rigter anyhow. And then Dad died. When I heard that, all I can remember is wanting to be with her, wanting her to make me feel better. So I phoned her and she gave me the usual speel that chicks give you when they don't give a shit about you.

Jonno: What? The 'I'll always be there for you no matter what' speech?

Flash: Yep. And I sucked the whole thing in. What I didn't know was that between breaths she was sticking Rigter's dick in her mouth ...

Jonno: Don't be gross ...

Flash: YOU THINK I'M JOKING! You think I'm joking. She told me, Jonno, she told me a couple of weeks ago. Remember at the College game, when I freaked out? That was why. I couldn't believe what she told me. When I was on the phone telling Gabby that my Dad was dead, she was too busy giving Rigter his greens to notice. Do you know how that made me feel? It made me feel worse. I didn't think I could. I remember saying to myself Flash, just think, it's not gonna get any worse and then (A little laugh) Gabby decided to prove me wrong. She always had to have the last word.

Jonno: (To himself) Christ!

Flash: What is it with women, hey? I reckon there must be a chemical in a man's spit that reacts with female hormones. You meet a chick and everything's going great and you think you've finally found one with a bit of sense. Then the moment you stick your tongue in her mouth she becomes this unreasonable, meniacal, banshee. In that split second they change from being like an oke to being like a woman, and it ruins everything.

Jonno: (Ignoring Flash's rambling) Look, Flash. I'm sorry about what I said earlier with the drinking an' everything. I'm just worried about you, that's all.

Flash: Crap! You're not sorry. You meant it. And everybody agrees with you. They look at me and they see a big drunken lout. They look at Gabby and they see a sweet little Bible thumper who's just been dumped by Rigter after going through the living hell of a relationship with me. I just get lost in the equation so of course she's gonna get the sympathy.

Jonno: So those two have definitely broken up, then?

ash: Well, you heard him.
onno: I wasn't too sure.
ash: Yep! I got a hysterical phone call yesterday afternoon.
(Imitates Gabby) 'Oh Flash! I made such a mistake. I can't believe I lost you. Rigger's such an arsehole.' I knew it would come. You've got to handle that chick differently. She likes to act things out a bit. Do you know that when we used to go out she hardly wore panties?
onno: Gabby?! Are you serious?
lash: Ja.
onno: I didn't think she had it in her.
lash: She didn't have anything in her until she started going out with Rigger. (They both start to laugh but Flash trails off as the implications of his crude joke sink in) Do you reckon they actually, you know, like made love?
onno: Don't think about it, Flash. It'll freak you out.
lash: Ja, you're right. But I miss her though. Miss my Dad too.
onno: But its not our fault they're gone, is it.
lash: I never said it was
onno: Then stop taking it out on everyone else.
lash: I don't!
onno: Yes, you do. Look at the way you lay into Gibbo every chance you get. He's harmless, Flash.
lash: I know.
onno: Even Rigger, he's okay.
lash: Jassas! That oke. I promise you...
onno: Why don't you ignore him till the end of the year? Its only a couple of months.
lash: Because I just want to kill him every time I see him.
onno: Well, you can't coz he's here on a sports scholarship and the teachers'll kill you if you even look at him wrong.
lash: I just wish he'd provoke me one day.
onno: Well, he's not going to, is he.
lash: You don't understand, Jonno. I hate him more than... than... I dunno! Christ! I've never felt like this about anyone. You know that feeling you get when you stub your little toe and then everyone starts laughing at you even though its bloody sore. That's the way I feel every time I see him. I just wanna lash out at him for being there. I wanna really injure him badly. You know, the other day in practise I was in a loose maul when I saw Rigger's rugby jersey on the ground. I could've rucked him shitless. My foot was hanging over his head, Jonno. I coulda torn him to shreds. I was going to, Jonno. I was this far from squashing him when old Valskerm blew the bloody whistle. Jesus, one day I'm gonna kill that oke.
onno: Can't you just ignore him?
lash: You sound like Gibbo. Its impossible for me to ignore him. I would if I could, Jonno.

ENTER RIGGER CARRYING A SMALL PLASTIC PACKET WHICH CONTAINS THE ROPE HE HAS JUST PURCHASED.

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Jonno: Apparently so. You're not gonna smoke that shit in here.

Right: What?

Jonno: That dope.

Right: Well, you can't stop me.

Jonno: Look, I'm not gonna get bust for something that I haven't done, so take that shit somewhere else.

Right: Christ! Its okay to steal booze but its not okay to smoke a little dope.

Jonno: I stole the booze so that's my problem. I'm not gonna risk you smoking dope in the dorm.

Right: No one is gonna catch us at this time of night.

Flash: You heard him, Gerbhardt. You're not smoking it in here.

Right: I don't see what this has got to do with you.

Flash: Look. That's heavy shit an' we don't wanna take the chance so why don't you smoke it outside.

Right: Bullshit! After the noise you made with the booze cabinet, you can go screw yourself.

Jonno: Look, Right. We don't smoke that shit so we don't want to get bust for it.

Right: Come on, ous. You can't be serious. Its not gonna make any difference ...

Flash: (Beginning crack) Look, just do it outside!

Jonno: (Realising Flash is using this just as an excuse to provoke a fight) Hey, Flash. There's no need to get so tense about it.

Flash: This asshole should respect other people's wishes.

Right: (Sarcastic) Ja! Just like you smoking in the dormitories, hey?

Flash: That's different.

Right: Oh really? (Angry) Come on, Mr. Fucking Wonder Boy, how's it different?

Flash: Don't cause shit with me. Just take that stuff outside.

Jonno: Forget it, Flash, it doesn't matter.

Flash: Yes, it does or you wouldn't have mentioned it.

Right: Look, if you can smoke cigarette ...

Flash: (Holding back the anger) Take it outside, Gerbhardt!

Right: Why don't you go and get stuffed!

Jonno: (Almost pleading) I thought you were gonna forget about this, Flash.

Flash: That was then, this is now.

Right: This isn't about the dope, Flash, 'coz I've seen you smoke it yourself. You wanna para with me. Fine. But do it over something worthwhile, not Gabby. We both know she's not worth shit. She's a lying bitch.

Jonno: (Sensing the imminent explosion of violence) Look, Flash, why don't we go to the shower room and have a drink and that way everybody can calm down.

Flash: I don't want to. I want to kill this stupid fuck. ~~Stand bet~~

Right: Why? What have I ever done to you?

Flash: Made me feel like shit, that's what!

Right: (Losing control of his voice) Jesus Christ! It wasn't me who took Gabby away. She just left you and it wasn't me who made your father die. I'm really sorry it happened but I'm afraid its not my fault and it never will be, no matter how

much you want it to be.

Flash: Oh really! I can just imagine you telling her what a bastard I was and giving her your great big shoulders to cry on. Aren't you just so fucking sensitive! You really are a good friend. And that last crowning jewel was the best, Rigger. Offering to take her to my Dad's funeral. That just showed what a big man you were. The ultimate nineties man. Well, my friend, let me tell you this. I am not the only asshole in this room. Do you honestly think that Gabby and I stopped going for it just 'coz she was with you? If you do, then your fucking stupid.

Rigt: Jesus Christ! I don't wanna hear this, Flash. I'm trying to say I'm sorry. What do you want me to do?

Flash: Sorry? Sorry! Have you any idea how I feel? Do you know what it's like to phone Gabby and beg her to come back all the time knowing that you're there and as soon as she puts down the phone, the first thing she is gonna do is kiss you. I used to try and keep her on that phone as long possible.

Jonno: Flash, just forget about it. This oke doesn't give a shit how you feel. Let's just go.

Rigt: You are fucking crazy, Flash. Why don't you grow up and get on with your life? It's over, boytjie, and your amateur dramatics ain't gonna change that.

Flash: You were out to screw things up from the start. I was so happy with her, so fucking happy and it didn't bother you and Gabby a bit, did it?

Rigt: If you were so happy, why did you treat her like shit?

Flash: Because I treat everyone like shit!

Rigt: I didn't plan anything, Flash. Christ, how do I make it clear to you? I was just being friendly, and things happened, okay. I never wanted to screw things up. Anyway, you know better than anyone she's not worth fighting over. She chose me on purpose 'coz you an' I were beginning to become friends.

Flash: (Screams with rage) FRIEND! You don't even know the meaning of the word. You wanted to fuck her from the first moment you saw her and nothing was gonna stop you. Jesus, you make me sick. You waltz in here from St Mark's on a bloody sports scholarship, and you think you own the place. Well, my friend, you don't. You will never be one of us and you will never understand us. You come from nowhere and when you leave here, you will go back there and die. You never cared about her, and you never cared about what you did to me. You think that you're so fucking sensitive and caring, and you think that you're so rebellious with your dope. Well, you can go fuck yourself, 'coz no one else will.

Rigt: (Maliciously quiet) You know that if you get Gabby horny enough then her good, Christian morals go out the window. I would never have guessed that infidelity was banned by the ten commandments.

FLASH FLIES AT RIGTER LIKE A RABID DOG. HE INTENDS TO DESTROY THE MAN WHO RUINED HIS LIFE AND RIGTER IS TEMPORARILY STUNNED BY THE FEROCITY OF THE ATTACK. JONNO STANDS PARALYSED WITH FEAR WHILE

LOOKING AT THE MAN HE KNEW TURN INTO AN ANIMAL BEFORE HIS VERY EYES. THE DIALOGUE SHOULD BE AD LIBBED BY THE ACTORS, BUT SHOULD BE RESTRICTED TO ANIMALISTIC GRUNTS. IN THE FIGHT THAT ENSUES, RIGTER IS THROWN AGAINST THE SIDE OF A BED AND KNOCKED UNCONCIOUS. FLASH GRABS THE FISHING KNIFE FROM THE BED AND MOVES IN ON RIGTER. JONNO GRABS HOLD OF FLASH IN THE NICK OF TIME AND SPEAKS.

Jonno: For fuck's sake, Flash. Are you out of your mind?!

FLASH STOPS AND LOOKS AT WHAT HE IS DOING. HE TURNS TO JONNO BUT BEFORE HE IS GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF GIBBO AND DES HURTLE IN, OBVIOUSLY ATTRACTED BY THE SHOUTING.

Gibbo: You've woken up the whole school, man. (Looking around) Where's Rigter?

Des: ~~Flash~~ (Seeing Rigter on the floor) Oh my God! He's dead.

Gibbo: What are we gonna do?

Flash: Doesn't matter.

Jonno: He's not dead, you fuckwit!

Flash: All that matters is that I wish he was. I always thought that killing him would make me feel better.

Jonno: ~~You thought about killing him?~~

Flash: Yep. Every single day.

BLACK OUT. SPOTLIGHT ON JONNO.

Jonno: Flash
Jonno: Gibbo was right. We had woken up the whole school. All the lights started going on and Apeman came lumbering through the door. He thought Rigter was dead as well, but he wasn't. He came round about a minute later and couldn't remember a thing. He couldn't even remember stealing the booze. Des burst into floods of tears and started wailing about his old man. Gibbo just stood there muttering fuck under his breath. Apeman gave us a blasting about dignity, pride, and school reputation. Even when he was harping on about it I knew Flash was going to do it. It was written all over his face. He was going. There was no way that he would give anyone the pleasure of expelling him. That night he bolted, ran away. I think he hitched a ride to Jo'burg on a train, and as far as I know he never finished matric. Last I heard he was working at Jan Smuts loading cargo planes. His Mum phones me now and again to see I've heard from him or if I have his address but I can never help her. How do you help someone with a son like Flash? The took the rap for the whole thing. We were whipped six but Flash was expelled in absentia. Don't think he cares though. I recieved a postcard from him about a year ago. All it said was: ~~THE BEAST~~

Flash: The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH ANTHONY AKERMAN

Edited transcript of an interview with playwright Anthony Akerman conducted by John van de Ruit on 11 November 1997.

JvdR: When you reflect on your schooldays at Michaelhouse, what sort of feelings are you left with? Would you categorise them as positive or negative?

AA: When I left the school I was very negative about it, I didn't like [it] much at all – I hated being a cack, I hated all the authoritarian stuff, I hated the snobbery. There was a lot that I didn't like about it. For me it was a bad school – at prep school I was in the top class and won most of the prizes, yet within a year at Michaelhouse I dropped several classes. The school never did anything for me besides put me on daily report and try and beat me. I became very rebellious. I spent my energy on fighting the system. It did not mean I was miserable – you make the best of a bad job. I didn't even get my matric – I had to do that in March once I had left the school. I did go back for an Old Boys' day to get drunk on the school property and insult the masters a bit – but otherwise I had nothing to do with the school for a long time. I did live in exile for seventeen years – in Holland. If I ever explained the kind of school that I went to, my Dutch friends, they never would have believed it – it's so typically British. I suppose I tried to deny that I went [there] primarily because I didn't like the whole snobbish ethos. When I came back to South Africa I went to have a look at the school; it didn't necessarily happen on that particular visit but I had to accept that I went through the school, that it was part of my past and part of what has formed me. It was still a moulding experience for me.

JvdR: Is there anything about the school you see in a positive way?

AA: Maybe. I don't know – possibly the upside of a very privileged institution is that it does give people a confidence that they don't have to earn. I even noticed in my exile

in Holland (although to what extent is that just your personality?) other South African friends in exile - who had been to Government schools - with me, didn't necessarily have the confidence I had in terms of making things happen for myself. It is possible that there are some positive sides to it. So when I decided to write a play on this, it wasn't just to do a hatchet job on the school. A lot of people thought it was going to be a 'satire' - I'm not actually capable of writing satire - it's very ephemeral, it doesn't interest me. I also wanted to write about other things and the school provided a context in which it could happen. It provided a language, backdrop, a hierarchy of things that are interesting in a drama. I became fairly ambivalent about what my position was: people would say, "You are Julian!" - I think I am all of them.

JvdR: What does the word tradition conjure up for you (with reference to Michaelhouse)?

AA: Michaelhouse had a certain idea of what traditions are - I think it's probably loosened up quite a bit now. Michaelhouse would have had to invent a tradition anyway because in the grander scheme of things it's a young school - it's only just celebrated its centenary, and if you look at the schools on which Michaelhouse is based - Eton, Harrow, Rugby - some of those schools are seven hundred years old, so Michaelhouse just bought in a tradition, lock, stock, and barrel, a bit from this school, a bit from that school, so a lot of the traditions are not even traditions but have now become entrenched. Tradition is something that is usually shit. You have a cold shower because you have no hot water - so it becomes a tradition. Upholding a tradition in this way is basically a very conservative impulse. If you were a cack and had to fag, when you're in matric you are not going to want to abolish fagging. If you were an old boy and you had to have cold showers you are not going to want have cold showers abolished because you somehow convince yourself that it was good for you - that it toughened you up. After four years of cold showers, I have never taken a cold shower in my life. So traditions can be stupid things; but then again, there was something about the chapel services that they used to have which was high church Anglican with the King James version of the Bible and hymns, ancient and modern - I enjoyed the theatricality of it - which is now translated in

a Reader's Digest way, which makes a lot of sense if you want to convert people to Christianity although we weren't really converted to Christianity anyway. I suppose if you do something long enough it becomes a tradition, but I think the venerating [of] traditions becomes a stupid thing.

JvdR: Was *Old Boys* a play that you always wanted to write? As opposed to a play such as *Somewhere on the Border* that, since your army days, you always wanted to write and get out of you – was *Old Boys* a similar experience?

AA: I think it was. What *Old Boys* and *Somewhere on the Border* have in common was that they were both set in institutions. So that is quite fun because you get a language that comes with it, a hierarchy that comes with it, which is very nice to use dramatically. I think after having written *Somewhere on the Border*, I thought it would be nice to do something in the context of Michaelhouse. Although I thought of it more in terms of television and film, with hundreds of boys running down the corridors and lining up and having to say 'adds' at role call – to show some of the stupid traditions in a visual way. But that was out of the question as I was living out of South Africa and not even allowed in South Africa and they certainly weren't going to put anything I wrote on television. But then it was really when [I] was back in South Africa and bumped into a few old boys, one of them being Robert Greig, a theatre critic for the *Sunday Independent*, who was with me at school (he was in the school smokers photograph.). He said to me, "When are you going to write a play on Michaelhouse?", and at the time, I didn't have an idea of how to write the play. It would never be about therapy – if I needed therapy I could have written a notebook about it. When writing plays, the therapeutic side of it is only a spin off, there has to be something else. It took me a while before I found a hook and knew how to go into it. Then I applied for a grant to write the play and received some money from the Foundation of the Creative Arts. So once I got that money I was committed, I couldn't back out. So it wasn't something that I have been walking around with all my life.

JvdR: What was your intention in writing the play? Were you making a comment or trying to capture how life was at the time?

AA: You try to do various things. I did want to make some of the absurd things of an institution like that more visible. You don't have to go a long way out of your way to do that. By the time I knew that I wanted to write the play, the thing that interested me was memory – how does your memory function. It has now been 31 years since I left school and I have a good memory, although it might be faulty on some issues. Memory has a censorship function that erases things that it doesn't want to remember, things that are too painful to remember. I want to look at two things: one was how events that happened to people at a very young age lingered on and were, in some way, ever present and affected their lives as an adult, and how they remembered it. If you think of the play, a guy like Adrian [Baynesfield] the head prefect who gives Julian the choice of saving his own skin or letting the vulnerable cack take the rap. Julian ends up selling out his principles that he had and lets Vaughan [Cockburn] get flogged and that scene on stage can be a fairly upsetting scene – it used to make me very angry in rehearsals anyway. And then, when we see them in the final scene which is thirty years later, Adrian seems to have no memory of ever having beaten Vaughan, that is what particularly interests me – the concept of memory. And also I suppose if I had anything specific to say about an institution like that, it's how those types of institutions, whether it be school or army or parliament, is the way they often bring out the worst in people, they bring out the potential for corruption. And I suppose my hero in the play is Julian, who's the glamour boy, the clever guy, the rebel etc is ultimately crossed by the system and all the things he says he believes in – he compromises. And Adrian, who is certainly not a stupid guy, has so much cunning, is actually a very corrupt person. There is the story in the play about his son who has been caught drinking and rusticated [which] is actually based on a story by the boys while I was interviewing. It's about a boy who was caught smoking and he wasn't expelled because his father was on the board of governors. It's true, it happens! And that was only in 1995. That's why some of the schools felt it was a bit close to the bone and got a bit nervous – and it was banned from the Hilton Festival. If I had any point to make or an attack on the school, it would be how those institutions – those very

hot-house institutions where they're single sex and boarding school institutions – that no matter how civilized a school like Michaelhouse is now, you put five hundred boys together, there's bullying that goes on, they gang up on the weaker guys – it brings out the worst in people. And I spoke to the masters - in fact, everyone received me very hospitably and was very helpful - but I asked the masters: "Do they have workouts still?" And they said, "We don't know", but they don't really want to know. It's just the way that the cack was treated. There is nothing in the play about the way the cack was treated that was far-fetched. And what was that training people to do? It was teaching them how to deal with black people as slaves kicking them around.

JvdR: I want to question you about style, why the emphasis on old boys rather than five boys in a private school setting? Was that because you were an old boy looking back?

AA: I didn't want to do a slice of life play that could easily have turned into nostalgia about a group of guys. I don't find that interesting, and I suppose that's got to do with me being older now. So much that you write about, you go back to the past anyway. I was interested in how that place formed me – so I was, in a sense, like Julian, turning off the road after not having been there in thirty years. It did, however, mean that I had to cast the play in a specific way. I had to find actors who could plausibly play boys and plausibly play people in their forties. There are plays like *Another Country* that have just been set in schools, where you've got 23/24 year old actors playing schoolboys and that can work, but the audience sees the characters as adults in the first scene and, after a quick costume change, accepts them as schoolboys. It's a stylization that the audience accepts. Nobody is going to say: "He was thirty playing somebody who was seventeen!" The actors bring their knowledge and experience of being thirty year olds to the interpretation of seventeen year olds. Funnily enough, a number of the actors had been to those particular schools.

JvdR: I want to ask you about characters. You have some characters of type, i.e. the prefect, the 'rugger-bugger', the rebel and the wimp (not to say that they were

stereotypical or one dimensional). Do you think that in institutions like Michaelhouse, characters migrate towards types?

AA: Well yes there is a certain amount of that. I was interested in Julian who is the main character in the play. Part of the story is what happens to him. In an institution like this [he] adopts a stance that he is the non-conformist, he's not going to let the system beat him. He's smart and has a lot going for him. He's not sporty but he's the brightest guy in the house. Adrian is a genuine friend of his, they genuinely are friends. By the time we meet them they aren't any longer. Conferring privilege on one boy and not on another is a wonderful way of driving a wedge between friendships. I was a leader of a rebellious group and they made my mate a prefect – they put the other guy in the sixth form dorm and me in the matric dorm – given the privileges. So Julian is the rebel in the story – he's causing shit. He has a rebellious attitude and that's something that people are nervous about in an institution like that. Institutions like that really demand belief, loyalty, belief in the system.

Adrian is clever enough to have a guy like Julian on the inside pissing out than on the outside-pissing in. So you buy him out. It makes perfect sense. If they made me a prefect, I would have done the same. I would have been a good prefect, any boy is tempted with honour and privilege. Julian goes in for it but lays down very clearly what his parameters are – he says he won't witness any floggings, he nails his colours to the mast. Julian thinks that he can accept those kind of privileges without paying any price for them. He's deluding himself. So he carries on, he smokes in the prefect's room for fuck's sakes. He thinks he's untouchable. Julian's *hubris* is his arrogance – he's arrogant. So Julian is really the guy who compromises himself – the shame that Julian feels, that the school actually broke him, is why he never returned to the place.

That friendship with Adrian, with Adrian acting as a kind of Mephistopheles – he's the kind of guy who goes to Faustus and says, "Just sign this in your blood." And Adrian comes to collect later. But I didn't want Adrian to be an unsubtle character. I knew I needed an antagonist, a more extreme type of character and Miles is the prototype of the rucker-bugger. But you know, when I was there, guys as thick as a plank were made prefects because they were gifted at playing with balls. I wanted a guy like Miles

because he serves a comic function but he is quite dangerous – a different type of antagonist, so that the conflict between Adrian and Julian could be more subtle. And then, of course, Vaughan is an important character, because if Julian hadn't been the way he is, Vaughan would have bumbled along; Adrian may never have found out about his sister – all the boys got ragged about their sisters, in fact having a pretty sister could be a plus. If you had a sister who was going out with a guy in matric you were protected. Of course, I complicated the matter as much as possible. Those little betrayals where Adrian knows that Julian is working up courage to invite Louise to the matric dance and he gets in first. Why does he come down so hard on Julian? Is it because Julian has to start getting into line or is it because he has been humiliated in front of the whole school because everybody knows that his best mate got tit of his date? In a sense, Vaughan becomes a pawn in that struggle. There is a sense that Vaughan is a victim, where Adrian [has] maneuvered him into that position where Julian will ultimately betray him. Vaughan is a more interesting character for me – I think he is the bravest character in the play. Vaughan is the one guy who says “no” to the system – it doesn't last for long. You see, Julian has paraded the fact that he is not like the other guys and of course, there is a sexual ambiguity that is there. What I find interesting is that people always say with regards to school homosexuality that “you have to look after the young boys”. Yet he is the one who makes the pass at Julian. Julian is not gay – but there is so much sexual ambivalence in a place like that, as you must know. I mean some of those boys in their first year singing in the choir are so pretty and ambivalent, almost hermaphrodite. It is a momentary slip on Julian's part that he kisses him [Vaughan], and enjoys kissing him. But from that moment, there is a thing where Vaughan will feel that there is a kind of bond. But Vaughan is not a sweet innocent guy; when Julian shits him out as he leaves, he says, “I saw you smoking.” So then when Julian makes his move with Louise at the matric dance, he's not only betraying Adrian, but in Vaughan's eyes he's been betrayed, and also Louise – he's just using her. So when Vaughan feels that betrayal, he takes the radical position and says: “I won't listen to you anymore.” The teasing put downs to the system that Julian does, is easily dealt with by the school in a liberalist tolerant way, but a boy who refuses to fag – you cannot have that! You've got to kill the guy. It's unacceptable, it challenges the foundations and all the beliefs that a school like that is

based on. So in a sense the most brave gesture [is] when Vaughan refuses to pick up the book thrown on the floor – it's like Antigone, if you're looking for dramatic antecedents. So that explains the five characters.

JvdR: Did you use homosexuality as a device, and why was your “weak” character the one to be homosexual?

AA: As I said, I don't think he was the weak character. To me it makes perfect sense in the scheme of things and the sequences of betrayal. I was always intrigued by this because Michaelhouse had a reputation of being a 'poofster' school when I was there. It was known as 'Michaelhutch' by the other schools because we had so many bunnies there. Because a guy had been expelled a couple of years before – there was a notorious incident which was all over the papers about a guy called Ben George, who left the country and has since returned and is a chiropractor in Howick, was expelled for homosexuality. And that was in the late fifties. Because of all this the school was about as homophobic as anything; you weren't allowed to shake hands with your mate because you were touching him. I was very intrigued about what went on in the homosexual subculture, because I wasn't homosexual. This one friend of mine who was head boy at Michaelhouse a few years after me - he was an actor and played in the very first production of *Somewhere on the Border*. He was living in London and I did a taped interview with him and asked him specifically about the gay scene. I mean it was incredible the stuff that was going on and nobody knew about. One of the boys that I interviewed when I was researching the play was a prefect, and I could see that he was wanting to tell me, and half way through the interview, I asked: “Are you gay?” and he said he was. His big problem was when his father finds out, because he was an ex-Rhodesian and a farmer. People pretend it doesn't happen but it does. It seems very natural for it to find its place. I mean if you had left it out altogether people would have asked me why I left it out. Boys at that age are so insecure about their sexuality and their own sexual identity.

JvdR: With reference to *Somewhere on the Border* and *Old Boys*, which are both plays based on South African institutions. In both plays, the rebel character begins by openly rejecting the system, but is somehow turned around and ultimately ends up undermining themselves? Is this a comment that you are making about institutions in general?

AA: You've picked up a similarity between those plays. I was aware that Julian and Campbell were linked and Campbell is a different type of rebel. But there is something very similar in the dramatic development of those two characters, in a different context. Julian is more sophisticated. Campbell was more of a Durban beach boy. If you were doing a Hollywood movie you would have to see how your rebel triumphed in adversity over the system and beat the system and was made head boy. *Somewhere on the Border* stops at the point where Campbell does the last thing in the world that he ever would have had to do. But like Julian, Campbell shoots the black guy to save his own skin. But we don't ever see how he deals with that. With Julian, I have looked at that a little more.

The one thing about the school that really interested me in my research, was the constant refrain of the complete lack of skills learned at the school relating to women, not even knowing how to relate. And if you look at the track record of a lot of the heterosexual relationships, there are a lot of disasters around. It seemed to me that with a guy like Adrian - he's with Louise who is a looker and comes from Zululand money, she's a prize - he doesn't know how to handle her.... But I guess the self-mockery of Julian interests me - where have his flash Jo'burg morals got him? He still exists within the system - he's now in PR. When Adrian says to Julian, "You're as much of a product of this school as I am Julian, it made you what you are today", it's the truth.

JvdR: I am interested in the audience response to the play. As an old boy myself, I felt at times nostalgic and identified strongly with the play despite the fact that I experienced Michaelhouse in a different era. For example, the flogging scene in no way shocked me whereas my partner was horrified at the brutality of it and even more horrified that I responded so calmly to it.

AA: Mostly I think the old boys enjoyed the play very much. I think people who hadn't been to similar institutions were more horrified than those who had. My wife went to St. Johns in Pietermaritzburg so she knows that kind of shit. People did laugh a lot – in Grahamstown, it was almost impossible – although that wasn't the intention of the play. I had one or two, one of the prefects in my time, his wife said to me, "What about the happy times, why do you only harp on about the negative things, where you unhappy there?" But generally speaking, the response was very favourable. I think people take away from it what they want. Some people loved the play and yet have no qualms about sending their sons there next year. It wasn't written as a deterrent, to say that private education is a bad thing.

JvdR: Would you send your son to Michaelhouse?

AA: The question is academic, because I don't have a son. I suppose my answer would be that, had I the kind of money to send a son there, it would depend on the boy. If he wanted to go there and he was good at sport, then I suppose I would. If I said that he had to go to another school, then I suppose I would have been as unimaginative as my father was in sending me to Michaelhouse. My father was unhappy there yet he sent me there because he thought he was doing the best for me and I suppose, in a sense, part of putting the play on was a way of forgiving my father because he was as much of a victim as I was at the school.

JvdR: How did the play shift in the direction for the stage?

AA: I trained as a director and worked as a director long before I wrote my first play, *Somewhere on the Border*, which I wrote when I was thirty-two. So I had ten years as a professional director, directing other people's plays. When I write, I have to stop thinking like a director, stop trying to solve directing problems while I'm writing. Normally in professional theatre, there's a large lapse of time between writing a play and staging it. I had a very good idea of the meaning of the play and the characters and what

I was trying to say, but I want input from the actors. I'm not fussy about stage directions – I put in very few stage directions really. Those are the things we discover during rehearsals. But I do write and rewrite and I try to write very economically. There's not much flab in the play – no long still standing moments... So I don't find it problematic. There might be a play that I write say with fifteen characters (which doesn't happen nowadays) that I want someone else to direct. I am very happy with five or six-handers. On the other hand, I think, without wanting to sound arrogant – it might very well be arrogant – who would do a better job on this play than me? I see a lot of theatre and I know what's out there. I would enjoy other people to direct my plays – but I'm a working director myself.

JvdR: You had an enormous amount of publicity in the press. Did you engineer it, or was it a natural, organic response to the subject matter?

AA: Publicity is always important – you look at any theatre company and you'll find the one thing that is bad is its publicity. Most companies don't have the money to hire good publicists and if you pay peanuts you get monkeys! A play like *Old Boys* had a built-in target audience – we did do very well in Durban, selling out halfway through the run. I approached a number of the old boys' associations – but there is such a demand, even from people who had been to [other] schools.

JvdR: Do you think *Old Boys* will still have relevance in decades to come?

AA: You would hope not, but probably. I had a cack at Michaelhouse, who saw it in Pietermaritzburg, and he said to me, "It's still exactly the same," so I am sure that a lot of the dynamics will be the same even if the superficial things change. A school like Michaelhouse is not in trouble because people are very jittery about state education. People are willing to pay. It still is elitist, you have to be rich to send your kids there. It does create a snobbery, clubbish kind of attitude. I thought at one point - because I was treated very well by the Michaelhouse community when I researched the play, except the Rector who didn't see me - but at one point, I thought, "They've all been so sporting

maybe I've been a little hard on them", but then I went to a Hilton/ Michaelhouse rugby match at Hilton with Charlotte Bauer, who was doing a story on the play and the Michaelhouse centenary. It wasn't as ostentatious – you know, the kind of old boys who have never grown – those old farts with kids at the school who shout "Come on Michaelhouse!"; and making little racist remarks about the black wing for Hilton. I thought you're a bunch of cunts! A bunch of fucking wankers. But no, I don't think I've been too hard on them at all.

APPENDIX D

WAR CRY: CRITICAL MATERIAL

War Cry has been performed as follows:

September 1999	Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre
February – March 2000	Natal Playhouse Loft Theatre
September 2000	Hilton College Theatre, Hilton Festival

War Cry was nominated for 12 FNB Vita Awards in 2000 receiving the awards for Best Script of a New South African Play and Best Newcomer. It also received the Noupoot Farm Award for New Writing in 2000.

The following articles represent a selection of the critical reviews, press material and programme notes from the various productions of *War Cry*:

1. Pillay, Terence. 1999. *War Cry* heralds a serious talent. *Sunday Times*. 19 September.
2. Smart, Caroline. 1999. *War Cry* Triumph. *Daily News, Tonight*. 23 September.
3. Bell, Suzy. 1999. Powerful, but falls flat at the end. *The Independent on Saturday*. 25 September.
4. Greer, Graham. 1999. Some fine acting in *War Cry*. *Sunday Tribune, Sunday Magazine*. 26 September.
5. Programme Notes. 1999. Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre.
6. Els, Colleen. 2000. On the warpath. *Daily News, Tonight*. 24 January.

7. Smart, Caroline. 2000. *War Cry*. Artsmart. 21 February.
8. Von Klemperer, Margaret. 2000. Fresh and invigorating. *The Natal Witness*. 22 February.
9. Suter, Billy. 2000. Rivalry and revenge. *The Mercury*. 22 February.
10. Suter, Billy. 2000. Red-faced in the ladies' loo. *The Mercury*. 23 February.
11. Von Klemperer, Margaret. 2000. A writer in full cry. *The Natal Witness*. 22 August.

1. Pillay, Terence. 1999. *War Cry* heralds a serious talent. *Sunday Times*. 19 September.

War Cry heralds a serious talent

New play two years in the making

THE first thing that strikes you when you meet actor/playwright John van de Ruit is his confidence. But he is the first to point out that this should not detract from the other, very emotional side to his nature.

A self-confessed paradox, the typically moody Arian has begun carving his niche in Durban's performing arts industry and has proved to be a force on par with, if not bigger, than most celebrated writers in KwaZulu-Natal.

His latest offering, a play called *War Cry*, which he wrote and plays a role in, will debut at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre this week. But 24-year-old Van de Ruit says that far more than simply being a new play on the circuit, *War Cry* is the culmination of two years of arduous work which he hopes will establish him as a serious writer.

"I've been working on this production for a long time and I'm finally ready to let audiences in on this big event in my life," smiles the honours graduate in drama.

"I schooled at Michaelhouse and the play revolves on two characters in a private school, but this is not to say that it's autobiographical. It's creatively biographical. I feel positive about the project, but also quite anxious about audience reactions."

Van de Ruit is no stranger to the limelight.

His face lights up as he recalls singing, acting and entertaining his family when he was still a child. This passion for performance survived and he says he seized any opportunity at school to get involved in concerts and anything that required even a modicum of acting.

It was a natural progression to continue this affair with drama at university, where he was first brought to the attention of Durban audiences.

"I guess I started getting more serious about the medium when I got to university," he explains.

"I wanted to cultivate this natural aptitude I had for theatre and it was here that I wrote my first play *Private Universe*. It made me rea-

As a child, theatre personality John van de Ruit dreamt of being on a stage entertaining audiences with his songs and plays. TERENCE PILLAY spoke to the remarkable artist who has realised his dream and won wide acclaim for his fine efforts

“I would like more than anything to see a theatre-going culture develop in Durban”

seriously. I love the adrenaline rush I experience in front of an audience, but I have started concentrating more on writing."

For Van de Ruit, the cherry on the top was when he won a Playhouse student writer award for *Private Universe* and a coveted Vita nomination for best new actor for his role in *Master Harold and the Boys* this year.

He is emphatic that theatre in Durban needs an urgent overhaul and not enough artists get the recognition they deserve.

"Theatre in Durban is in trouble," he says with conviction.

"But then again this province has always been marginalised with regard to the arts. I would like to see a theatre-going culture develop here. We have a great core of really amazing actors, like Susan Monterege and Ellis Pearson to name but two, and it makes me

Johannesburg to be spotted. It's time Durban took care of its artists, especially those who have made strides in the industry."

Relocating to Johannesburg — the hub of arts in this country — is not something the talented thespian wants to do, but he feels that soon he may have no choice.

He does however have a few aces up his sleeve, like the novel he's been dabbling with.

And people around him beware, Van de Ruit loves listening in on conversations — but not as a malicious pastime, he points out.

He says that he later uses some of this material to write dialogue for characters he makes up in his plays.

"I love writing dialogue to see what characters develop," he says. "I simply do it for fun. But it is a great bank to have when I'm looking for material."

As for his spare time — all 10 minutes of it — he relishes listening to his favourite pop group U2 and enjoys the great outdoors. But something that people don't know is that he also loves watching silly spoof movies — the likes of the trashy *Naked Gun* and *Police Academy*. "I'm a traditional South African boy at heart and play rugby, cricket and golf and swill beers with the best of them, but there are two sides to me and I love the balance," he says.

Van de Ruit is pleased with the direction in which his life is moving and feels confident of greater successes in the future. And if his new play is anything to go by, it won't be surprising if this happens sooner than he expects.

● *War Cry* runs at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre from September 21 to 25. Bookings at Computicket

2. Smart, Caroline. 1999. *War Cry Triumph*. *Daily News, Tonight*. 23 September.

War Cry TRIUMPH

WAR CRY (8)

Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre

Review: By **CAROLINE SMART**

THERE is a new playwright to be reckoned with on the South African theatre scene.

John van de Ruit's first full-length play, *War Cry*, is highly impressive. Finely directed by Tamar Meskin, it forms part of the 50th anniversary of the University of Natal's drama and performance studies department.

Mervyn McMurtry's cleanly designed set provides the private boarding school background for a battle of wits between Anthony Bates (Van de Ruit) and Merrick Butcher (Ben Voss) who play out a scenario which builds in intensity to a highly dramatic climax.

Forceful

Seen in a very different context to their well-known comedy show, *The Final Cut*, both give fine and mature performances.

Drawn into the metaphorical boxing ring are their room-mates Sid Govender, an endearing portrayal by Santhiran Moonsamy, and Alan Greenstein, well-played by Tyron Akal.

Rakau Boikanyo gives a sustained and forceful performance as head of house, Stuart Luthuli, and Bruce Piper is suitably blustering and pompous as the manipulative headmaster Gerald Everett.

One of the most impressive and under-played performances of the evening came from Patrick Kenny as teacher Steven Ball who recognises the spirit of genius in Bates but is helpless to halt its destruction.

Director Meskin has moulded a production of an extremely high standard.

It only runs at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre until Saturday do not miss it!

Powerful, but falls flat at the end

theatre review

By SUZY BELL

Arts and Leisure Editor

Review: *War Cry*

AT ONE stage I thought *War Cry* was about to spiral into a homophobic soap opera. Thankfully it didn't.

Having so much enjoyed Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys*, I was impressed to see how cleverly bright young playwright John van de Ruit treated the same subject matter – boarding school.

The story is not just about boarding school but wider issues of truth, honour and reputation. Van de Ruit has written a fine script with well-drawn characters.

War Cry is a powerful production superbly directed by Tamar Meskin with strong performances from the entire cast, notably Ben Voss, Patrick Kenny and the playwright himself.

Van de Ruit also co-wrote and performed in *The Final Cut* and he was nominated for a 1998/99 FNB Vita Award for his impeccable performance in *Master Harold and*

The Boys. There are some wonderful comic moments as van de Ruit has a great ear for the natural flow of dialogue and he skilfully combines quiet dialogue with more fiery moments.

But the ending aside, from seething with *Betty Blue* pretension – remember the arty French movie where Beatrice Dalle's eye gets jabbed? – it somehow manages to fall flat.

That's the only weakness.

War Cry is on tonight at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, University of Natal, Durban at 7.30pm.

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|--|
| 3. Bell, Suzy. 1999. Powerful, but falls flat at the end. <i>The Independent on Saturday</i> . 25 September. |
|--|

4. Greer, Graham. 1999. Some fine acting in *War Cry*. *Sunday Tribune, Sunday Magazine*. 26 September.

Some fine acting in *War Cry*

John van de Ruit's *War Cry* which played at the Sneddon Theatre this week as part of the 50th anniversary of the University of Natal's drama and performance studies department, is a significant play in many aspects. First it reveals the cloak of English colonialism that our school fraternity still hankers after and, second, for the coming of age of Ben Voss as an actor. But more about Voss later.

The play is set in a private school somewhere and could have been any of the so-called "better schools" in the Durban region where fathers still turn up to watch rugby wearing collar and tie. Why? Because they want to impress the board of governors. Another colonialism. Such pretentiousness is amazing.

Van de Ruit played the lead role of Anthony Bates with sensitivity and Santhiran Moonsamy played the easily led and gormless Sid Govender to perfection. Our pseudo public school system is filled with Sids. However, it was Voss who stole the show. He brought out the Machiavellian cunning that only schoolboys are capable of, with a performance that I will remember for many years. Voss did it all, the change of expression, the turn of injured innocence when confronted by the headmaster played by Bruce Piper. A masterly performance.

Piper showed the great lengths headmasters are prepared to go to protect the good name of their school going beyond the natural justice and fairness that they supposedly teach their pupils.

Tyron Akal and Patrick Kenny gave good performances as the sensitive Alan Greenstein and the naive teacher, Alan Ball. Special mention must be made of the performance of Rakau Boikanyo who played the "coconut" Stuart Luthuli, (who these schools depend on for legitimacy) with an acting skill

WRITER'S NOTE

When *War Cry* hits the stage it will be the end of a long and wonderful journey that has taken me into the minds of seven men and an amazing institution; a journey that has taken me to so many places that I cannot even remember my starting point. At times it has been excruciating, at others it has been nothing short of magical.

Unlike many other plays set in private schools, most notably Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys* and Julian Mitchell's *Another Country*, my primary aim was not to offer a critique of such institutions, but rather to use them as a foundation for dramatic action. Therefore, the school in *War Cry* becomes a 'system', a battleground on which the 'war' is fought, rendering the particular identity of the school unimportant.

I have always resisted the temptation to explain a play's meaning in the programme, primarily because I feel it limits the possibilities of what it could mean to you, the audience member. Therefore, I leave you to watch, think and decipher your own truth.

Finally, I would like to thank the director Tamar Meskin for her belief and talent, and the cast of *War Cry* who have brought meat to my words and inspiration to my script. I would also like to thank the Drama and Performance Studies programme for their dedication to new writing.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The notion of a catch 22 is a strange and difficult one – faced with a crisis and no way out without loss of some kind, what would you choose? This is the central premise of *War Cry*. This play speaks finally about the making of character – how and why we become who we are – and therein lies its power: we are forced to confront the best and worst in ourselves and others, which makes for compelling theatre.

If the world is a battlefield, then the measure of our greatness is in how we choose to play our part in the battle, how we determine what matters to us, and how we act on our decisions. Life is all about choices and action; the choices we make shape us, for good or ill, in the course of our life's journey, and they are irrevocable in so many ways. In the words of Khalil Gibran:

"The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on;
Nor all thy piety nor wit could lure it back
To cancel half a line, nor all thy tears
Wash out a word of it."

This is the real truth: no matter how much we might choose to do things differently a second time around, there is no going back; "what's done is done and cannot be undone". If we learn this, we learn that we should consider carefully before we act, with an awareness of the potential consequences. Institutions, like the one represented here, offer one possible set of 'rules' by which to determine our choices, rules by which to live and wage the 'war'; but, as the adage goes, rules are made to be broken and are only proved in the exception. Perhaps it is the rules themselves that must be questioned, the notions of what it means to be a man and what constitutes true courage.

This play pits two world views against each other – one that sees only black and white, enemies and friends, with nothing and no-one in between; and one that understands that life consists only of shades of grey, and is a constant striving, a searching for the answers by which to shape our future in the face of the everyday perils that surround us. This awareness makes for Anthony's tragedy and, ironically, his triumph.

It is every director's dream to work on a new play, to see it through from conception to final birth, and I am no exception. This project has been a labour of love for so many people in too many different ways to note here. There are two people in particular, though, who have helped to make the project a reality: Mervyn McMurtry, whose dedication to promoting new writing creates the environment in which we are able to challenge ourselves and take the risks that lead to this kind of magic; and Paddy Meskin, who has provided the bedrock on which we have built the work, and the support system for making it happen in all the pragmatic, necessary ways. I want also to thank with absolute appreciation the wonderful, dedicated cast, whose professionalism and enthusiasm have made the experience such a joyous one for me. Finally, I want to express my deepest personal gratitude and profound appreciation to John van de Ruit, for having trusted me with his 'baby', and for affording me the opportunity to help shape it and give it form and life – it has been an honour and a privilege.

ON THE WARPATH

John van de Ruit's first full-length play *War Cry*, is being presented next month in The Playhouse Sanlam Loft Theatre, in association with Underdog Productions. **Colleen Els** reports



LOCAL hit drama *War Cry*, will be presented in The Playhouse Sanlam Loft Theatre by The Playhouse Company and Underdog Productions from Saturday, February 19 to Sunday, March 5.

War Cry premiered at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in September last year, as the flagship production for the University of Natal Drama and Performance Studies programme's 50th anniversary celebrations.

Described by Durban Theatre Academy

Director Dennis Rubin as "one of the finest pieces of theatre" he has seen on the South African stage, *War Cry* received overwhelmingly positive reactions from critics and audiences alike during its short run.

Tonight theatre critic and compiler of the weekly arts news column, *Gallery Notes*, Caroline Smart says: "*War Cry* is highly impressive, and director Tamar Meskin has moulded a production of an extremely high standard."

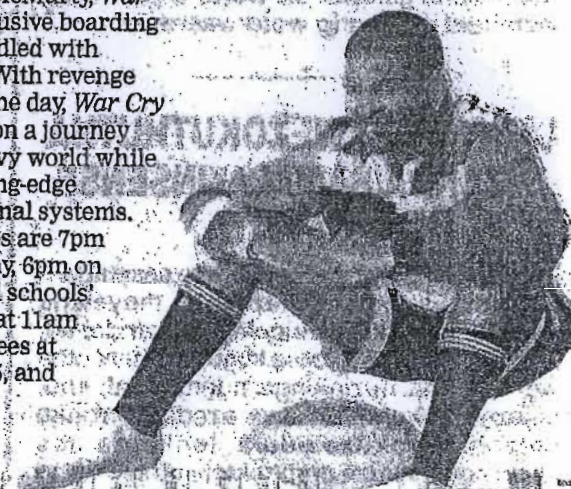
War Cry is a gripping, entertaining drama told with humour and passion.

It explores a world in which truth is relative, people are both better and worse than we imagine, and where nothing is ever simply what it seems. The show stars Vita Award nominees John van de Ruit (*The Final Cut*, *Master Harold and the Boys*), Ben Voss (*The Final*

Cut), and the cream of Durban's young talent, Rakau Boikanyo, Tyron Akal and Santhiran Moonisamy. Written by Van de Ruit and under the direction of Meskin, with set design by Professor Mervyn McMurty, *War Cry* is set in an exclusive boarding school, which is riddled with rivalry and deceit. With revenge being the order of the day, *War Cry* takes the audience on a journey through a topsy-turvy world while also offering a cutting-edge critique of educational systems.

Performance times are 7pm Tuesdays to Saturday, 6pm on Sunday, with special schools' shows on Tuesdays at 11am and Saturday matinees at 3pm. Tickets are R25, and R10 for schools' performances. Book at Computicket or, for credit card

bookings, Dial-A-Seat on (031) 369-9446 or call TicketLine after hours on (031) 304-2753. Call Nanjini on (031) 369-9446 for discounted block bookings and to book for the schools' performances.



7. Smart, Caroline. 2000. *War Cry*. Artsmart. 21 February.

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WAR CRY (article first published : 2000-02-21)

Having given a production a rave review in a former run, I'm always a little apprehensive about facing the same production some time later for fear that it will not come up to expectations.

I needed no such fears with the season of John van der Ruit's *War Cry* now running in the Playhouse Sanlam Loft. The production was first performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in September last year as part of the University of Natal drama and performance studies department's 50th anniversary celebrations.

It impressed then and, on a much smaller stage in the intimate Loft Theatre with two new cast members, it still impresses. In fact, it's better – John van de Ruit has tightened up the dialogue considerably and added several scenes, the original cast members are comfortable and settled in their parts and Tamar Meskin's direction is as controlled as before.

War Cry is set in an exclusive boarding school and is based on one schoolboy's jealousy of another when he is passed over for prefectship. Despite the fact that they were good friends, he sets out single-mindedly to destroy him and uses the most diabolical means to do so.

Ben Voss plays rugby hero Merrick "I never lose" Butcher with a strength and passion that is impressive, subtly altering his performance to suit the smaller performance venue. As the more sensitive Anthony Bates, John van der Ruit squares up to his rival with calm and dignity carrying out his duties as prefect responsibly even though he may not always agree with the rules.

On the outskirts of the twosome's "boxing ring" are their dormitory mates (Santhiran Moonsamy and Tyron Akal) and head of house (Rakau Boikanyo) and all three have grown considerably as performers since the first run. As Sid Govender, Santhiran Moonsamy is mercurial and suitably gullible, pulling in most of the laughs. Tyron Akal offers a nice detached quality as the upright Alan Greenstein forced to renege on his principle never to lie. As Stuart Luthuli, Rakau Boikanyo endures Merrick's constant jibes and racial slights with equanimity and forbearance and is quietly imposing when the tables are turned.

Newcomers to the play – Tim Wells as Steven Ball and Peter Gardner as Gerald Everett – bring their own strengths to an already gripping and tension-filled production. Tim Wells puts in a consistently sensitive and strong performance as the genial and likeable young teacher who becomes the innocent victim in a battle for supremacy. Peter Gardner's stage presence is undeniably commanding as the brusque and perceptive headmaster whose sole concern is the good name of the school – all else is expendable. It is a pity we don't see either of these actors more often on the Durban drama stages.

Mervyn McMurtry's well-designed set, created as it was for the Sneddon stage, is somewhat cramped in the Loft but still provides three clear performance areas and Julian August's lighting is sensitive and well placed.



John Van de Ruit (left) and Ben Voss in the excellent *War Cry* at the Sanlam Loft in the Playhouse.

Fresh and invigorating

► Theatre

War Cry

Venue: Sanlam Loft, Playhouse

IT'S not new to use school as a microcosm of the world; to see coming-of-age as loss of innocence, but *War Cry*, written by John van de Ruit and directed by Tamar Meskin, brings spark and freshness to these well-worn themes.

The setting is a boys' private school in the new South Africa — which mercifully is seen as a place and time like any other. It has its own peculiarities but is not treated as a scab to be picked at. It just is. Van de Ruit, his own schooldays not so far behind him, perfectly creates the atmosphere of adolescent teasing — funny, often quick-witted, sometimes crude and, on the surface, friendly. But menace and cruelty are never far away.

Van de Ruit plays Anthony Bates, a clever, idealistic boy who has wrestled with his conscience and accepted a prefect's badge, even though he has no faith in the rules. Opposing him is his long-time friend and school rugby hero, Merrick Butcher, played with frightening intensity by Ben Voss. Butcher is envious and is determined to push Bates into making the only decision an idealist faced with a difficult choice can make. Once Bates has

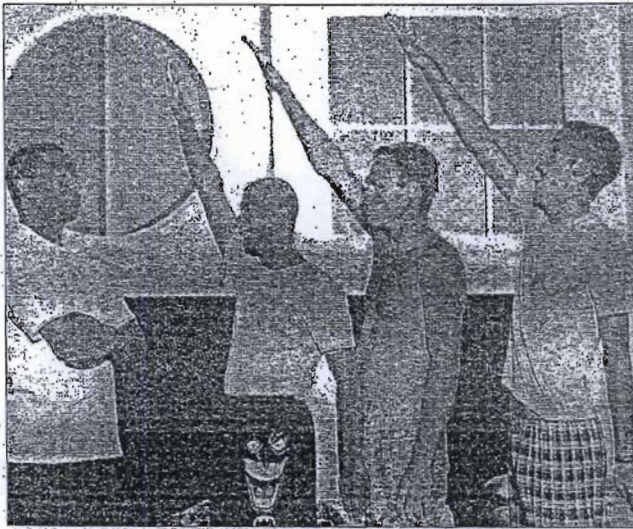
led shirker Sid Govender (Santhiran Moonsamy), the decently weak Alan Greenstein (Tyron Akal) and the head of house, Stuart Luthuli (Rakau Boikanyo). He is the apparent triumph of the system, the smooth, assured upholder of truth, integrity and rules — and, even more than the angry Butcher, he has made his leap into the world of disguised cynicism and deceit, imperfectly hidden by the honourable, ethical surface.

Tim Wells plays the housemaster, sagging from his own idealism into weary compromise and Peter Gardner is the headmaster, his long-established disregard for truth and his manipulateness disguised as reasonableness having got him to the top of his profession. All the performances are excellent as the characters, in their own ways, make their choices. It is no coincidence that the boys are studying *Catch-22* as their setwork.

The precocious talents of Van de Ruit and Meskin have served up a pacey piece of theatre in *War Cry*. There is humour and pathos in this realisation that fair play is just another construct. It is a young piece and it brings tremendous energy to what has recently been a tired local theatre. For that alone (and it offers much more), it deserves support and applause.

Margaret von Klemperer

• *War Cry* runs at the Sanlam Loft



LOCAL DRAMA: Scenes from *War Cry*. Above left are Rakau Boikanyo, Santhiran Moonsamy, Ben Voss and Tyrone Akal. In the picture on the right are (from left) Peter Gardner, John van de Ruit and Tim Wells. The production, written by John van de Ruit, is running at the Playhouse Sanlam Loft until March 5.

WITH some tightening of its looser ends since its debut last September at the University of Natal, Durban graduate John van de Ruit's play about rivalry, deceit, revenge and the shaping of character makes for an engaging two-hour drama.

However, notwithstanding some early rave press, *War Cry* is not quite the triumph for Durban theatre some have painted it to be.

Certainly Van de Ruit, who also heads the cast of seven males, has penned a lively, intelligent and well-paced script with mostly finely developed characters.

That this is a young talent with much potential there is no doubt.

But his subject matter is not new – rivalry in a local private school was a theme much better explored in Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys* – and it's just a little clichéd.

Also on the downside is that *War Cry*'s plotting tends to become largely predictable, while the dialogue in its early moments is a tad waffly.

And director Tamar Meskin, while otherwise doing a good job and drawing commendable performances, makes a wrong move with her choice of recorded music during blackouts between scenes. It's so overly loud and melodramatic it becomes corny to the point of raising unintentional smiles.

Rivalry and revenge

STAGE: *War Cry* (7) – Playhouse Sanlam Loft

Mervyn McMurty has designed an effective set comprising two raised-stage sections, each backed by walls of frosted window panes. To the left is a dormitory with four beds; to the right a headmaster's plush office, with desk, chair, carpet and plant.

In front, below these sections, we have a desk and several armchairs, depicting the office of an English teacher at an elite South African boarding school.

Cocksure

The play centres on the rivalry between two matric friends at this school – amiable and conscientious student Anthony Bates (Van de Ruit), a newly appointed prefect, and Merrick Butcher (Ben Voss), the cocky and cocksure rugby hero who secretly resents not having been given a badge.

The two share a room with easygoing Alan Greenstein (Tyrone Akal) and jovial, amusing

and rather dim-witted Sid Govender (Santhiran Moonsamy).

Trouble raises its head when Merrick, pushing his luck, lights up a cigarette in front of Anthony and blows smoke into the prefect's face. This leads to a battle of wits that results in the rugby hero being reported, dropped from his team and given other punishments.

Merrick then swears to destroy Anthony and sets in motion a devilish plan that will muddy the name of his old chum.

It will also affect the easy-going English teacher, Mr Ball (Tim Wells), and tarnish the school's reputation, something the crusty principal, Mr Everett (Peter Gardner), simply will not allow.

Reluctantly roped into Merrick's nasty plan are Alan and Sid, while also pertinent to the success of the revenge attack is input by the dorm's student head, Stuart Luthuli (an impressive, but too-mature-looking Rakau

Boikanyo), with whom the racist Merrick doesn't exactly get along.

The ensuing drama plays very heavily on *Catch-22* situations – *Catch 22* being the set-book of the matric pupils. It's a case of no-one wins, and even when they think they do, it is at a cost.

Van de Ruit, last seen in *Master Harold and the Boys*, and Voss, last seen as the lead in *A Time To Die*, seem to get better with each outing, but the supporting performances from Akal and Moonsamy are every bit as good here.

Wells does his best in the underwritten role of Mr Ball, a character greatly lacking balls, while Gardner provides the requisite stiffness and slow enunciation his role dictates.

Although depicting a world where the dormitory and the classroom are battlefields, *War Cry*, as Van de Ruit points out in programme notes, is also a human story about growing up, and the sad realisation that some men will never progress beyond the window bars of their youth.

The play, presented by the Playhouse Company in association with Underdog Productions, is being staged until March 5. Booking is at Computicket.

BILLY SUTER

9. Suter, Billy. 2000. Rivalry and revenge. *The Mercury*. 22 February.

10. Suter, Billy. 2000. Red-faced in the ladies' loo. *The Mercury*. 23 February.



200 QUESTIONS
BILLY SUTER

cal theatre personality JOHN VAN DE RUIT, FNB Vita Award-nominee last year, is staging *War Cry*, a play he wrote and in which stars, at Durban's Playhouse Loft until March 5. He is today's subject in our fun fortnightly series putting personalities on the spot.

WOULD you tell us a bit about *War Cry*, what inspired you to write it, when you wrote it and how long you spent creating the play?

The five memorable years I spent at Michaelhouse were at the very heart of *War Cry*. From the moment I began to write, I knew it was only a matter of time before I returned to the ghosts and orders of my high school years.

The story is a combination of lived experience, a good deal of embellishment and an intriguing plot with a multitude of twists and turns for good measure. It has taken me two years to write and I've lived every minute of it.

What would you say to people to encourage them to see the play?

War Cry is an extremely gripping story that takes the audience into the world of five boys and two masters at an elite, private school. Although classified as a drama, the play is packed with humour and intrigue, which is guaranteed to entertain and, indeed, shock some people.

You had some rave reviews for *War Cry* when it was staged at the University of Natal last year. What makes you most proud about it?

What pleases me most is when I look back to when the play was a few scribbles in the middle of an old notebook and how, over the past two years, it has developed into a script, and finally into an accomplished piece of theatre. The fact that the response to the play was so positive is merely the cherry on top.

Novel

What other writing have you done, and do you enjoy it as much as performing?

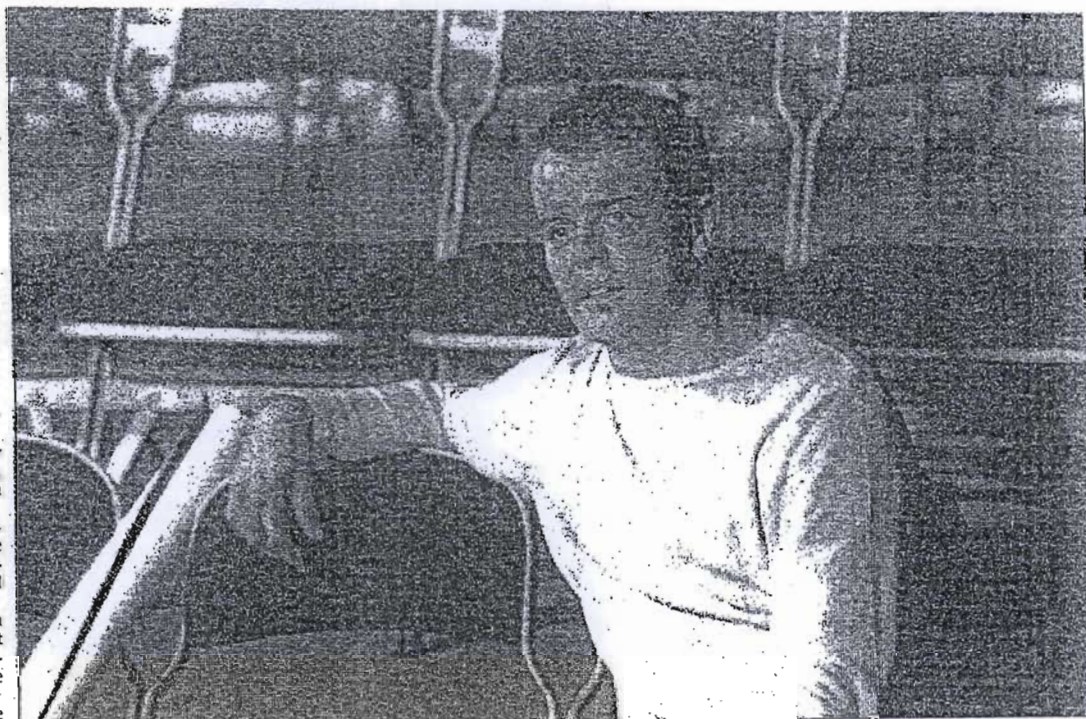
I have written two one-act plays - *Private Universe* and *Catacomb* - and a sitcom called *lobbing Hood*, which is currently being pitched to TV and the SABC. I am also now adapting *War Cry* into a novel. I love writing and when I picture myself in 30 years time, I see a grizzled old man with a pipe, furiously thrashing away at an old computer. But still nothing beats the feeling of live performance!

What have been two highlights of your student career and two highlights of your professional career?

Student career: performing as the first and last character in my play, *Private Universe*, 1994, and playing George, Nelson in *Across the Universe*, 1994. Professional career: the production of *War Cry* and doing the performance of the year in *War Cry* and the boys were amazing experiences.

Who are your acting idols and influences?

Anthony Hopkins is my idol. The greatest influence on my career has been my mentor, Tamar Meskin, who directed *War Cry* and has been instrumental in just about everything I have done.



JOHN VAN DE RUIT... funny, intense, ambitious, moody and a touch off-beat.

Red-faced in the ladies' loo

What words best describe you?

Funny, intense, ambitious, moody and a touch off-beat.

What are your views on the state of theatre in South Africa and what do you see as the best ways of getting bums on seats?

South Africa has so many talented artists and wonderful creators that it is such a shame we do not possess a culture of the theatre. Theatre needs to be marketed in all its forms as an event, no different from those of sport and music. This has to be accompanied by theatre of high quality and entertainment value.

What have been among your most embarrassing moments - on stage and off?

On stage, it was forgetting my lines during a performance of *Master Harold and the Boys*. In a panicked attempt to buy myself some time, I bit into a rotting fridge cake. Trying to get rid of a mouthful of cake in front of a packed audience is as tough as it gets!

Off stage? I think it was being caught in the ladies' toilet at the Kwasuka Theatre by a large group of schoolgirls, five minutes before curtain-up.

Who is the most famous person you have met, and who would you give 60k to meet?

I met American director Spike Jonze last year at a theatre conference. I will undoubtedly want to meet him one day.

What are some of your favourite plays and films of all time?

Plays: Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* and Arthur Miller's *A View From a Bridge*. Films: *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Apocalypse Now* and *Withnail and I*. My favourite playwrights are Pinter and NF Simpson.

What sort of music do you listen to and what music do you detest?

I like most music, especially that by U2. But I wouldn't charge out to buy a rap album.

What traits do you most despise in others?

Indifference, ignorance and pessimism.

Where is home for you, what is it like and with whom do you share it?

I live in a flat just off Ridge Road with fellow actor and good friend, Ben Voss. Entrance is clearly at your own risk.

Advice

What are the best things you can cook?

I cook a mean pasta and as soon as our stove is plugged in, I think I'll dabble with a few roasts.

What is the best bit of advice you ever received and who gave it?

Our first-team school cricket coach, Andrew Coo's, told me to "get into our changeroom after yet another dismal result and proclaim: 'Remember boys, this is our last season!'"

At the time we didn't really enjoy his sage wisdom. However, when faced with an audience of four and there is no rent-a-crowd in sight, it's something I like to reflect on.

What pin-ups were on your bedroom walls when you were younger?

In my early days my walls were covered with sports stars. However, in time, they were replaced with pictures of beautiful women in varying states of undress.

What is the most trouble you have ever been in?

Women trouble! I can't even begin to explain. What are your hobbies, pastimes and favourite things?

I love wildlife and getting away into the bush. I also enjoy fishing, sleeping and all sports (although I have, of late, scratched golf off my list). I also like drinking wine late into the night while having intense discussions about nothing in particular.

What are your views on calls to reintroduce the death penalty in South Africa?

According to my sociology professor, it has never been proved that the death penalty leads to a lower crime rate. On the basis of this and honest debate, I would be against it.

11. Von Klemperer, Margaret. 2000. A writer in full cry. *The Natal Witness*. 22 August.

With the backing of a Vita, John van der Ruit is proving his worth

A writer in full cry



by
**MARGARET
VON
KLEMPERER**

JOHAN van de Ruit is riding the crest of a wave. His play, *War Cry*, which will be the opening production at *The Natal Witness* Hilton Arts Festival on September 15, picked up a fistful of Vita nominations and two awards — including Best Script of a new South African Play — and his new three-hander, *Foul Play*, is coming to the Hilton fringe from a successful run at Grahamstown.

I first saw Van de Ruit when he was playing Oliver in a school production at Michaelhouse, the experience which, he says, got him hooked on the theatre. But knowing that he was at boarding school and having seen *War Cry*, which is set in a South African private school, I have to ask the obvious question: is the play autobiographical?

"No," he says. "I have taken bits of reality but the overall story is not something that happened at school." He explains that the choice of subject for his first full-length play came because it was a world he knows intimately. Like anyone looking back on school, there were things he hated: the loneliness, the realisation of just how brutal boys can be and how they can humiliate each other. But there was also a positive side: the taste of success, the bonding. With hindsight, Van de Ruit reckons he was happy at school.

War Cry looks at intrigue, rivalry and deceit played out in the sometimes stifling school environment. Unlike other plays with similar settings — Julian Mitchell's *Another Country*, which looks at homosexuality and the Burgess and Maclean spy scandal, or Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys* which is set in a thinly fictionalised Michaelhouse during the sixties, *War Cry* deals with characters

and how they develop in a close-knit, masculine world. Van de Ruit, who spoke to Akerman while he was working on the play, felt he had a new story to tell.

It is a very South African play. The head boy (played by Rakau Boikanyo) is black and another of the boys (Santhiran Moonsamy) is Indian. But race is not an issue and, although Van de Ruit was concerned that he might face accusations of reinforcing stereotypes, the play has met with a positive response. "I wanted to get the feeling of everyone being in it together," he says, explaining that was his experience of school.

For him, the acknowledgement the Vita award gives to his writing is something very special. "It's very hard for anyone to say, 'I am a writer' — it is usually a spare-time thing. But the Vita says to me that I am a writer. It's a big boost for my first full-length play; I still have a lot to learn about writing."

While Van de Ruit enjoys acting — he plays a major role in *War Cry* — he sees it as something of a rat race. "Acting is more of a craft; there's a lot of imitation and tricks. But I am at peace with myself when I am sitting writing," he says. "Acting is how I earn a living but when I am 50 I would like to be a professional writer."

That may be a long way off — 25-year-old Van de Ruit is still sometimes asked for his ID when he goes into bars — but already he is busy on a novel based on *War Cry*.

His other work on the festival is *Foul Play*, which follows on from his first success, *Final Cut*. "It's lowbrow fun for people to go to and have a laugh," he says, explaining that the popular success of this kind of work earns him money so that he can concentrate on more serious work like *War Cry*.

The cast of *Foul Play* is Van de Ruit, *War Cry* director Tamar Meskin and Ben Voss, also a veteran of *War Cry* and *Final Cut*. Voss and Van de

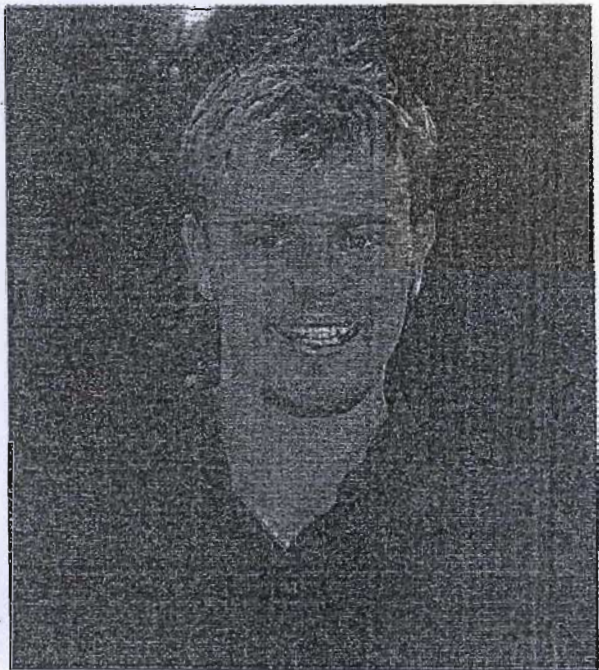


Photo: MARGARET VON KLEMPERER

Busy actor and playwright John van de Ruit. Two of his works will be performed during the Natal Witness Hilton Arts Festival next month.

Ruit play two down-and-out guys who somehow need to raise some funds to get to Britain to collect an inheritance. It's a complex tale of a rugby Springbok who choked to death on an orange at half-time and ashes that have to be scattered. The simplest way the two can think of raising the money is a little robbery. And what better target than an American tourist?

The three have workshoped the comedy together and after Hilton will be heading off to Hermanus with it for the Whale Festival.

And in the midst of all this, Van de Ruit is still working on his master's thesis through the Drama department at the University of Natal in Durban on the depiction of private schools in South African drama and fiction. It is an impressive catalogue of achievement for someone who is still asked to prove that he is over 18.

• Booking for the Hilton Arts Festival is now open. Booking kits are available from selected Spar stores and *The Natal Witness*.

APPENDIX E

OLD BOYS: CRITICAL MATERIAL

Old Boys premiered June 1996 at the Natal Playhouse Loft Theatre. Subsequently, it has been performed at the Grahamstown Festival and at The Agfa Theater on the Square in Johannesburg. *Old Boys* received the 1997 FNB Vita Award for Best Script. The script was published by the Witwatersrand University Press in 2000 in a collection entitled *Dark Outsider* with two other plays by Anthony Akerman.

The following articles represent a selection of the critical reviews and press material from the various productions of *Old Boys*:

1. Shevlin, Ingrid. 1996. Taking revenge on the old school tie. *Sunday Tribune, The Other Mag.* 9 June.
2. Von Klemperer, Margaret. 1996. The past shaping the present. *The Natal Witness.* 6 June.
3. Coleman, David. 1996. Akerman's winning drama calls back the past. *The Mercury.* 12 June.
4. Bell, Suzy. 1996. Telling it like it was. *Daily News.* 13 June.
5. Bauer, Charlotte. 1996. The lofty redbrick tradition. *Sunday Times.* 23 June.
6. Bristow-Bovey, Darrel. 1997. A quest for theatre amid millinery nightmares and kudu steaks. *The Sunday Independent.* 13 July.
7. Jordan, Mary. 1998. Drama about Michaelhouse in a class of its own. *Business Day.* 8 October.

1. Shevlin, Ingrid. 1996. Taking revenge on the old school tie. *Sunday Times, The Other Mag.* 9 June.

Taking revenge on the old school tie

play *Old Boys* takes a cal look at the long-term effects of private boys-only education. It will make you ge even if you didn't and the hallowed Natal school on which this play is ed. Old boy Anthony Akerman speaks to INGRID SHEVLIN.

It is no secret that the play *Old Boys*, which has just premiered at Durban's Playhouse, is based on Michaelhouse and the experiences of young boys including those of Johannesburg-based playwright Anthony Akerman, who spent most of his miserable years in the 60s.

Although the name of the school which has educated some of the country's most influential orators, captains is never explicitly mentioned in the play, use of its uniforms, archival photographs, slang and traditions do make its identity obvious to the "Natal Nitwit".

Anthony Akerman is quick to point out that what happened in this prestigious school was mirrored in every other British-style public school.

In the 60s may have been a time of rebellion but at the school which was fit to expel pop singer Manfred Mann, the rigid traditions of prefect power and hazing (fagging), floggings and humiliations (lines with a difference) were the order of the day. So was obedience by generations of less males.

My father loathed it here, I don't know why he sent me here" is one of the characters in the play.

"It's called tradition," was the typical response from another.

In his script Akerman settles scores (and expiates old angst) with his references to Natal (its dull and conforming), divine swines (hypocritical teachers), Rectums (rectors) and a telling version of grace: "For we are about to receive may God have mercy on us."

Get to chat to Akerman during a break in rehearsals when I comment on his obvious enjoyment of (many) funny lines. "Well," he laughs dryly, "It's not boring me

ily falls in the ODF category, is a delight (as is his play) to interview. He is articulate, frank, funny and irreverent.

Emboldened by this I read him a programme quote by the author of *Enemies of Promise*, Cyril Connolly, who alleges that public schoolboys always remain adolescent, school-minded, self-conscious, cowardly, sentimental and, in the last analysis homosexual.

Which of these "qualities" does he "boast" of I ask?

He laughs and fobs me off adroitly: "Connolly was talking about the ruling classes; the successes. And I don't count myself among these."

He explains that his play is about "how the past lives on in the present to the extent where you are conditioned by places, by ideas and by what you choose to forget."

"Apart from the personal angle, it was very tempting to write about an institution that had a strict hierarchy and a special language. It is a nice framework to work within."

Anthony Akerman was sent to



My father loathed it here, I don't know why he sent me here

line from Anthony Akerman's play, "Old Boys"

Michaelhouse because it was a family tradition. "My father was unhappy there but he felt that he owed it to me because it was an elite school and because the Old Boy Network would be a powerful ally."

"In truth it was not active in the theatre world and it never did me any good in Europe."

This tall, burly man admits his first year at the school which is celebrating its centenary was his most miserable ever. "I lived in fear. The bullying was quite severe. There were humiliating things like having to push a chalk around the floor with your nose."

"I wasn't flogged all that much though; about a dozen times in four years. But I'll never forget one year I got a B2 in for a whole

the new constitution." He smiles wryly.

He reacted to the bullying regime by becoming a complete rebel. "So I wasted my time. I stopped working. In fact I failed my matric there."

"When I went back in 1990 I hadn't been there since Old Boys Day in 1968 when I only went back to smoke in forbidden areas." He grins gleefully at the memory and lights up another cigarette.

"The school seems to be a much gentler place now. There is more of a protective attitude to children and more of an interest in the arts. In my day to be head of school you had to be in the first 15. And now there are even raunchy pin-ups up in the prefect room. So this play is not a reflection of Michaelhouse as it is now."

In any event, he says, he would never send a child of his to a place like Michaelhouse (the fact that he doesn't have any makes it, happily, an academic dilemma): "For the simple reason that I don't believe in single sex institutions. It's not very conditioning for adult life. Many of the guys I spoke to who had been to one spoke of women as if they were another species."

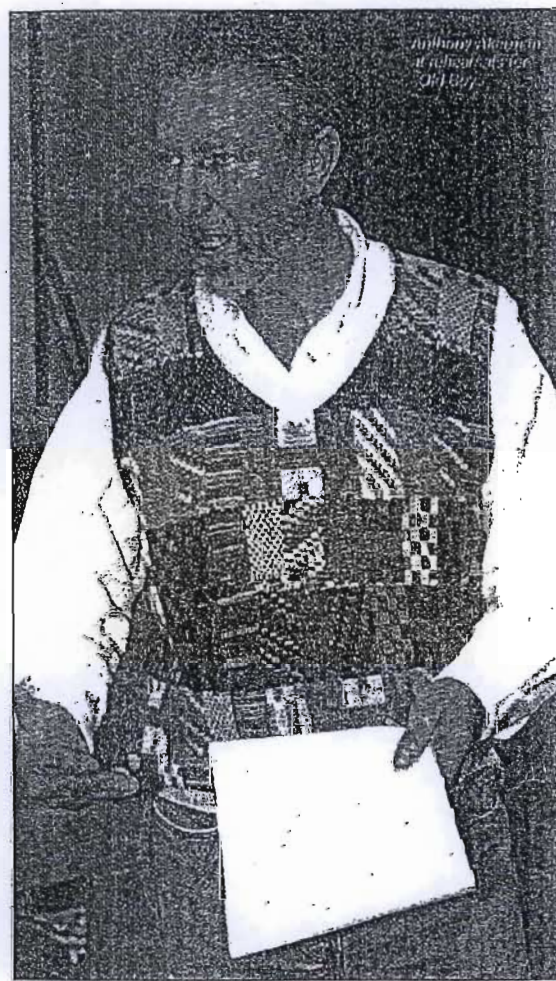
It is only lately that Akerman has, as he puts it, "come out of the closet". "I now admit I went to Michaelhouse. Before I said I was born in Durban, grew up in Natal and went to Rhodes University." So this play has been a sort of catharsis?

"I have a high degree of ambivalence about those years but yes, there is an element of exorcism. And in a way I have been able to have the last word."

Although the play is based on his personal experiences it is not autobiographical in a literary sense, he says. He interviewed scores of old boys and was even given carte blanche to speak to present pupils.

"I believe the rector has not had time to read the play but a lot of Michaelhouse boys are coming down to see it."

"Although they have no problem with it, perhaps they would prefer I hadn't done it. In a sense they have taken the same kind of ideological stand that the Vati-



Anthony Akerman in a rehearsal of *Old Boys*

FEATURES

The past shaping the present

ANTHONY Akerman's *Old Boys* is set in an exclusive private school for boys in the midlands in the 1960s. Akerman was himself a pupil at Michaelhouse during the sixties, and makes no secret of the source of his inspiration.

His cast will be dressed in Michaelhouse uniforms and the name "Michaelhouse" will be used — with the permission of the school. He considered creating a fictitious setting, but was concerned the audi-

A new play, which is about to open in the Playhouse Loft, has strong Natal Midlands connections — through the cast, the author and the subject matter.
MARGARET VON KLEMPERER reports.



ence would be too busy trying to identify the school to listen to the play.

Akerman says he is not out to knock elitist education. "What interests me is how the past lives in the present, how it shapes the present. And how the experience of that kind of institution — any single-sex boarding school — shapes you at a very impressionable age."

Playing a homesick fag whose attractive older sister is an object of interest to the senior boys is Antony Coleman, who six years ago left Maritzburg College for Wits University and the bright lights of Johannesburg. While he was never a boarder at College, the day boys still had to spend their breaks "running after the sixth formers" and he knows all about the humiliations juniors face.

Working on the play six years after he left College, he admits that he was hit by a sense of "horrible familiarity" when he started work. "It's amazing how the feelings you have worked through come back."

Most people's memories of school are powerful — and seldom entirely pleasant. Akerman has tapped into the reminiscences of many old boys in his research for the play, and asked about his own school years, he says he was "extremely unhappy".

"I was not an achiever in terms of the school's values, and when I left, I shook the dust off my shoes." But even after 19 years in Europe and success as a playwright, he found himself wondering to what extent the school was still there in his makeup. "You are formed and shaped by school," he says. "And I still haven't forgotten the names and faces of the people who bullied me." A couple of respectable pillars of society get named while we talk.

I ask Akerman how he thinks the school will react to *Old Boys*. They have been helpful to him in his research, the script has been sent to them and the boys will see the play during its run. Akerman grins, perhaps the school is following the example of the Vatican and keeping a discreet silence in the face of criticism. "I'm not taking cheap shots, but if the cap fits."

Coleman's schooldays are less distant. Have things changed since the Sixties? The two discuss it, and while certain things, like flogging, are no more, there are still plenty of similarities, with South African schools seeming generally conservative in their attitude to the rights of their

pupils.

And while Coleman had Honours for drama in his schooldays at College, he feels that there were two schools — one which appreciated what he did, and one which followed a more traditional path. Rehearsing *Old Boys* has brought it all back.

Away from these specifics, Akerman sees his play being about characters, friendships and betrayals; about how our adolescent past lives on in our present. Coleman describes the play as an emotional rather than a didactic experience. And they feel that even if the play causes unease among powers that be, those who have been through this kind of experience — the old boys — will enjoy the play. As Akerman says, "Who does the place belong to? Those of us who went through the sausage machine."

Old Boys is not Akerman's first play with a local setting — but the problems facing theatre mean that his Grahamstown hit from 1995, *Dark Outsider*, which is a fascinating look into the life and exile of Natal poet Roy Campbell, has not been seen in this province.

To get what was already an award-winning play staged at all took Akerman four years and, although PACT offered their production to the Playhouse, there just wasn't the money for a Durban run. So a play by a Natalian about a Natalian, both of them descended from Byrne settlers, has still only been seen in Gauteng and the Eastern Cape.

Akerman has strong views about the future of theatre in South Africa, and is particularly concerned that any cuts will have a disastrous effect.

"It's very dangerous to say that people will demand to have back what has been cut. No government will give it back, and we will become culturally impoverished."

And most theatre managements are not putting their money where their mouth is. There's a lot of lip service to "local is lekker", but there's also a kneejerk colonial reaction that British and American plays are going to be better. That's rubbish — we're just as capable of doing stuff that's good. We should be developing our own talents.

Some writers are having problems adjusting to the new situation in the country and there is a need to move away from polemical theatre to writing that has to do

with "character, paradox, ambivalence and all those things which make up life".

But the theatre pays so badly, says Akerman, that writers get tempted away to other things to make money. "It is impossible for serious theatre to survive without state funding," he says, explaining that without it, there would be no National Theatre or Shakespeare Company in Britain — "just more Miss Saigon".

One area where things do look a little more promising is television. Coleman in particular is enthusiastic that this is the medium of the future in South Africa. But even so, he is concerned that not enough time is taken over productions, that the production team does not have the time to sit down and discuss a script.

Akerman is hopeful that local work will soon get more of a look in. SABC 3 is beginning to commission writers and he is hoping to get a four-part adaptation of William Plomer's *Turbet Wolfe* made for television. The book caused a scandal in its time, and Akerman feels the story, set in Zululand, has reverberations for now.

The way the various television channels are positioning themselves means that SABC 3 can afford to be more upmarket, says Akerman. "So much has had to have broad, prime time appeal for the kids and the grannies," he says. "But now we can use polysyllabic words and be broadcast at 9 pm at night — and these are the programmes we can sell overseas."

Radio also has potential — *Dark Outsider* has been broadcast — and Akerman is working on another idea for a series, also set in Natal. This one would be based on the Bambata uprising.

"One nice thing about radio is you can use a big cast — and have wonderful sets!" says Akerman. But the downside of film, radio and television is that one in 10 000 scripts ever gets made — a dispiriting statistic for writers.

It's one reason why writers and actors see theatre as having the edge. It's not easy to get plays staged, but interesting new work does still have a chance. It can also be done without costing a fortune. "We could have done *Old Boys* really cheaply — in a garage, if we'd had to," says Akerman. And even if the play treads on a few toes, it's new and it's local.

Old Boys opens at the Playhouse Loft on June 8 and runs until June 30. Booking is at Computicket.



Anthony Akerman (above), writer and director of *Old Boys*, which is to open in Durban soon, and Antony Coleman (left), who takes the lead role as a homesick fag.

3. Coleman, David. 1996. Akerman's winning drama calls back the past. *The Mercury*. 12 June.

Akerman's winning drama calls back the past

STAGE: *Old Boys* – Sanlam Loft, Playhouse

A WORLD premiere for the Playhouse Drama Company, Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys* should please discerning theatre-goers long starved of such worthwhile fare.

It's also a play that, being set in a boys' private school, will have added appeal for the select few who have been educated at similar seats of learning.

While Akerman all but names the school as Michaelhouse, his Alma Mater, the experiences recalled will be shared by many others with similar backgrounds.

Certainly at a time when a nigh-Spartan order prevailed and conforming and upholding tradition were seemingly deemed every bit as important as learning.

To what extent this has changed through the years is made evident by the play opening in the present, then switching to the past for most of what follows.

It's *Old Boys' Day* when, by chance, Carlyle visits his old school, there to encounter former friends and foes and, as the day progresses, recall his own school days.

He's long since shed any association with the school and lost contact with fellow pupils. But once back in familiar surroundings the past intrudes.

He remembers the time when, long a rebel, he was persuaded to conform and so become a prefect. And how this shaped his matric year and what followed.

All takes place in the prefects' room with Cockburn, a first-year boy, at their beck and call to make tea, clean shoes and oil cricket bats as communal "fag".

Carlyle is contrasted with Baynesfield whose very thought and act is dictated by form and convention. And with Carruthers, a humourless, sports-mad bully.

On the night of the school dance Carlyle and Baynesfield vie for the attention of Louise, Cockburn's demure, but determined sister who is a pupil at a nearby girls' private school.

How their youthful interaction was to surface in their



SCHOOL DAYS: A homesick Vaughan Cockburn (Antony Coleman) sings for prefects Adrian Baynesfield (Timothy Wells, centre) and Julian Carlyle (Nicholas Ashby) in a scene from Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys*.

adult lives emerges when the play returns to the present.

If the outcome is not unexpected, this doesn't diminish one's enjoyment.

For while *Old Boys* proves that a boy's connection with his school is not severed when he leaves, this is done with much humour, not least in the schoolboy slang.

Although competently cast overall, it's Nicholas Ashby as Carlyle who's best remembered. Other roles are filled by Timothy Wells (Baynesfield), Antony Coleman (Cockburn), Ashley Dowds (Carruthers) and Jacqui Logie (Louise).

Logie most successfully bridges the time gap from maiden to matron. With the "youths", their "five o'clock shadows" intrude somewhat.

Stephen Gurney supplies the voice of the school chaplain backed by those of boy choristers singing hymns between the various scenes. The simple but effective set was designed by Rod Smith.

Akerman, who also directed *Old Boys*, will be remembered for his *Somewhere on the Border*, one of the best plays of the Loft Theatre Company era.

With *Old Boys* he scores again. The season ends on June 30.

DAVID COLEMAN

Telling it like it was

OLD BOYS (9)
Sanlam Playhouse Loft
Review: SUZY BELL

'NOSTALGIC, frighteningly familiar, poignant, very, very real," were some of the words rolling off the tongues of Michaelhouse Old Boys to describe a really magnificent play currently on at The Playhouse. It's *Old Boys*, written by highly acclaimed playwright, Durban's Anthony Akerman, who did "time" at that exclusive all-male, private school in the Natal Midlands - Michaelhouse. The play is based on his personal experiences (and interviews with old boys) but he claims the characters are fictitious, so I expect every school had a fag nicknamed Bograt and Spaz (short for spastic).

It's a fine script without indulging in sentiment yet there are scenes, even to an old girl like me, that are familiar (we had the "Mamba" which was a cricket bat used for punishment instead of the cane).

Marvellous

The dialogue is marvellous and witty - mosquito bites on wafer-thin skin. Akerman has spiked his script with poetic lines like: "Don't slouch around like a public schoolboy. . . remember your breeding." He even satirises the sacrosanct game of rugby.

There's the psychological play on cruelty, deception, hypocrisy and the sheer sinfulness of forcing boys to withstand a range of treacheries in the name of the Father (in both senses of the word) and the good of the school.

Bollocks! says Akerman in this play, "What did the old boys club do for me as an actor?"

With a simple set and a groovy 60s soundtrack and a real rendition of Michaelhouse pupils singing *Stars of the Morning*, *Old Boys* is certainly a waltz down memory lane. "Making tea was exactly like that!" exclaimed a chuffed old boy wearing a school-boy grin and uniform navy-blue Michaelhouse blazer. "His attention to detail is absolutely amazing," enthused another. During the performance I overheard a shocked wife ask her hubby: "Did you do things like that?" after witnessing a reenactment of a flogging on a terrified fag. "Absolutely," said hubby, suitably smug.

Wifey frowns, hubby smirks. His eyes look slightly sad. Prefect power lost and found, here in this the-

like Ixopo High, will feel things are a bit too frighteningly familiar. Akerman dissects the heart of the issue of private, all male schools. He doesn't simply insinuate or imply, he tells it as it is - with a frankness that will make you shudder. But there's subtlety of course.

Nothing over the top unless required, like the character Coruthers - a dim-witted rugger-bugger played by the highly talented Ashley Dowds. His performance, although a small role, is quite outstanding. He's an incredibly focused actor, totally absorbed in his comical but very identifiably South African character.

Talented

Dowds is also a talented playwright - he won the 1995 BAT Centre Festival of Tables Best Script award.

Timothy Wells plays Adrian Baynesfield (a picture-perfect name) who is in fine form as the uptight, upright, moralising Head of House, and later as an old boy. Very natural and quite superb in his role. His wife is Jacqui Logie and she is very, very good. Her comic timing and quick dialogue relay is spot on as the bitchy but quite liberated wife of Baynesfield and also as the coy St Anne's girl in her baby-doll blue matric dance dress.

Akerman has a strong cast of fine actors in this production. Even Anthony Coleman as the lily-white, spindly-legged fag, is suitably vulnerable and nervous. The perfect homesick victim keen to run away from perpetual taunts and mockery from the sinister seniors. Playing a senior, but a rebellious chain-smoking one, is the very smooth and cocksure Julian Carlisle played by the highly confident actor, Nicholas Ashby.

The play is centered around the notion that Michaelhouse in the 60s was seen to be the Eton of South Africa. Those who went to the school (seen to some as a mighty privilege based on tradition) were forced to display good breeding, conformity, no individuality at all, in order to literally survive the then "warped" system. So even if you didn't have to wash the prefects dirty coffee mugs, (I can now unabashedly admit I washed them in the loo!), this play, *Old Boys* will appeal to the obvious targeted audience but also those who are curious to know what they (thank-God!) missed. Highly recommend.

5. Bauer, Charlotte. 1996. The lofty redbrick tradition. *Sunday Times*. 23 June.

SUNDAY TIMES, June 23 1996

The lofty redbrick tradition

ERE is a story about Michaelhouse that I am assured is not apocryphal. At a traffic intersection in Maritzburg there is a beggar whose cardboard supplication reads: "Destitute. Please help. Ex-house." It is said that Old Boys sometimes moved to roll down the sides of their BMWs and Rav 4s and man to pull himself together. A Michaelhouse Old Boy down on his hands and knees is one thing, but to flaunt it on a grubby cardboard at a traffic intersection is another matter. But I've also been told that most of them would never dream of reacting piously, and that the unfortunate situation is being "looked into" by the Maritzburg branch of the club to see if it can be done to help.

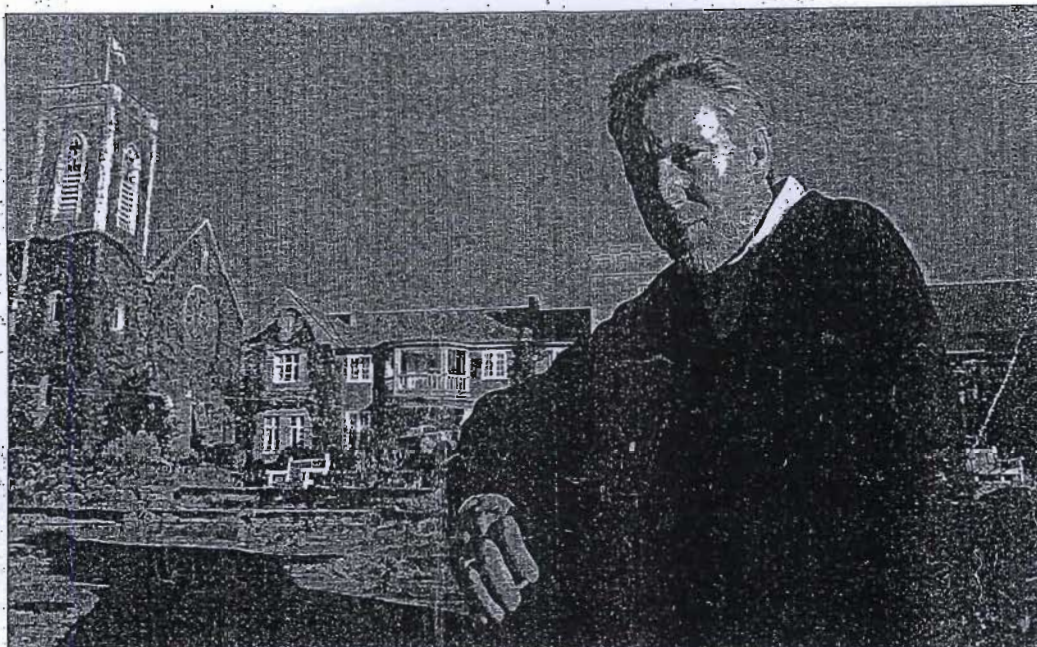
sort of people who send their sons to Michaelhouse are so discreet about it you'd think they acquired it osmosis. Thick Henderson how much it costs a boy there and he'll tell you in that voice familiar to all who listen to rugby commentaries: "Two billion!" He is quite serious. "That's cost 40 years ago and that's what now," he boasts. "We've kept pace with inflation." Put the question another way: ask him how rich one has to be, Henderson, who sent all three of his sons to Michaelhouse, says: "It's not the riches of Sandton who come here, it's good, solid citizens who've made their money."

Upsomen fired in the Michaelhouse consider it vulgar to put a randspice tag on so lofty an education. Perhaps they simply enjoy the past, when Michaelhouse preserved the sons of wealthy Natal who really grasped the barnyardism for the school fees — a year, basic, Michaelhouse. Playwright Akerman and I given from Johannesburg to Balgownie KwaZulu Natal village where house, a redbrick beauty, resides on undulating hills, forests and streams. The spiritual heart of the pretty chapel, designed by Sir Bakshi, though busy destination Buildings at the time, rather obliged. The entrance to the announced by an avenue of tall, plain oaks, planted in remembrance of Michaelhouse boys who died in far One. Everywhere you look something to delight the eye: a curved archway, a millioned colonnade by ivy-cladding, a fountain bed. It is, as the brochure says, a few can match.

MAN is here to see how the run of controversial play *Old Boys* — red by his ambivalent feelings — Michaelhouse boarder in the doing at the Durban Playhouse, so agreed to show me around his ter. I have come to try to unravel the series of an elite South African school system built on the unremitting of a British model that of fashion in the early 20th century Michaelhouse, already in the sort of mood brought on by an inveterate the perfect example.

car, Akerman had regaled Michaelhouse stories and tried to put it's more arcane rituals into some perspective. I learnt of the "cack" — cackles being the name by which year boys are called, meaning "the earth". In Akerman's day, it was the mercy of prefects who hem for the smallest infraction like putting their hands in their pockets or unbuttoning their blazers reserved for those higher food chain).

about the crippling effects of isolation — physical and spiritual family, friends, and indeed out-of-bounds world beyond the school's Memorial gates. I listened to the story of the famous mass of boys, including pop star Mando, who on a term-end rail trip to burg tore up their compart-



EXORCISING GHOSTS... playwright Anthony Akerman revisits his Alma Mater and makes peace with his past

Picture: RICHARD SHOREY

Old money and the aspice of perpetual adolescence

Charlotte Bauer's



World



THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE PRIVILEGED ELITE... prefects in 1901 in their Eton suits at Michaelhouse, the school for the sons of gentlemen

tradition. When Akerman, who spent 17 years in Holland, returned to Michaelhouse last year to research his play, he spoke to several Old Boys who confessed that they had felt similarly "disturbed" by their school experience. Others look back at their Michaelhouse days as a glorious honour, a tough-love education that instilled in them values of decency, philanthropy and honesty; a rarefied experience that bound them to each other forever in the aspice of perpetual adolescence. "It doesn't do you any harm," reasons Henderson, commenting on the muscular Christianity that prevailed up until the '70s and that rested largely in the Head Prefect's flogging arm, "and if everyone's in the same boat, you get used to it. Of course, it's not like that anymore."

No, it isn't. Today, those like Henderson who believe a stiff-upper redbrick school like Michaelhouse still offers those who

can afford it the best shot at a decent, all-round education, have grown weary of explaining to people like me the difference between the old ways and the new.

THE Michaelhouse myth mushroomed around character-building bullying, cold showers and porridge for supper; on Spartan rituals intended to deliver unto the boy his birthright — the superiority required to become as rich and powerful as his father.

The latter-day reality is somewhat gentler: the showers have warmed up, flogging is banned and porridge has been put in its place — on the breakfast table. Pupils are given more free time to spend with their families. Sex education and counselling are built into the school routine. And Michaelhouse is no longer an exclusively WASP affair. The rector, John Pluke, guesses that about 15 percent of the

boys are black — Cyril Ramaphosa has a son at the school — and though the majority of pupils are from wealthy homes, about 30 percent are bursary assisted.

ADRIAN ROGERS, secretary of the Michaelhouse Old Boys Club, arrived from Britain in 1985 to teach English and History.

In 30 years he has seen the school change from a harsh, quintessentially male colony to a place that is flexible, fair and receptive to the civilising influence of its expanding female staff.

"My two youngsters want to school here and he didn't come out a snob, but was extremely grateful for what Michaelhouse had given him. Boys here learn to stand on their own feet. We strongly discourage bullying and a boy caught doing it would be expelled."

"Cocking" still exists, but these days the sort of lagging a boy is required to do for a senior amounts to polishing his rugby boots and making the prefects tea. Ritual humiliations, like making a boy push a piece of chalk along the floor with his nose, have long been outlawed.

The authoritarian excesses of the past are not forgotten, but rather romanticised by contemporary pupils. In the Michaelhouse centenary coffee-table book, the first authenticated case of caning is recorded as a colourful anecdote. Some of the boys even say they miss the quick justice of the birch.

Michaelhouse was founded in Maritzburg in 1896 by Canon James Cameron Todd, a God-fearing Scottish Anglican who set the tone for the next 100 years

when he declared: "A boy's corner with his school is not severed when he leaves, but lasts throughout life. In that his whole tone, moral and spiritual, well as intellectual, is largely determined for life by his school; and to his dying he will be different from what he would have been if he had been at any other school." Five years after the school opened, Todd gathered up his 77 pupils (many of whom were more fluent Zulu than English) and made a significant move to Balgownie — in 1901 about 200 miles away from Maritzburg as you could without leaving the province. His aim was to put safe distance between his boy and the flesh pots of Maritzburg, then a risqué town offering risqué theatricals. Charley's Aunt and Oscar Wilde's *Women of No Importance*.

Canon Todd would spin in his grave knowing the board of governors was cowering admitting girls to the school.

BUT some things haven't changed. Unsurprisingly that's half the point. Institution whose allure, still heavily on tradition, Rogers says parents still send their boys to Michaelhouse because "it's single sex and tightly isolated". And the old school network works like a charm, even in new South Africa.

Ben Parham is the school's Head Prefect. He is 17 years old, captain of rugby first team and, unlike the dynastic scholar, he is the first in his family to attend the school. If Parham is typical of anything, it is the new breed. If a girlfriend, he doesn't hail from Maritzburg and he chose to come to Michaelhouse because his best friend was enrolled.

"I've been able to live a life here being me, it's a very open-minded and I love it." Yet he has absorbed the school's ethos, served in the silhouette of ages. Michaelhouse meet people who

you opportunities for life," he says, "being remarkably like Henderson. Know you'll get a job from an Old even if he wasn't your friend at school."

The next day Parham led his 13-11 victory over Hilton College in a fiercely and festively contested rugby match. This year the event was held far and wide to set up their tables around the perimeter of the field. Invariably the event roused newspapers to take scandalous swat their wealthy ways. Rolls-Royces, caviar hampers and silver sets are gleefully sent up.

The truth of the matter is rather different. As Henderson observed, nouveau types are in the minority, a woman with big hair in black pants stuck out like a sore thumb.

This was old money (well, in Africa, anything that's been around for 50 years is approaching vintage). Spectators tucked into champagne and cold chicken à la Woolworths and coloured things. At schools like Michaelhouse and Hilton, these are the signs of the discreet charm and established power that are bred in the

Anthony Akerman (innocent dressed in cream), tried for a long "amputate" his Michaelhouse past the rugby he can't resist the tempt egg on his home team.

"You can't escape from it or out," he comments ruefully. "You part of a privileged elite and so had to rub off... I guess it's time to come out of the closet."

A quest for theatre amid millinery nightmares and kudu steakrolls

Anthony Akerman's *Old Boys* and Steven Berkoff prove there is something to the Grahamstown festival other than offensive hats and nostalgic rock 'n roll shows

The Standard Bank National Festival of the Hats is a confusing place to spend a mid-winter's weekend in the late 1990s.

I'm sure some die-hards, spirited away somewhere on the farthest edges of the fringe, still try to pretend that it's all about the fine and performing arts. But, for the most part, the festival is merely an opportunity for South Africa's cultural sector to generate revenue – nothing wrong with that – and for the common or garden-gnome festival-goer to indulge in his or her most perverse hat-wearing fantasies.

Grahamstown is a riot of unsightly headgear. At first I thought it was the hallucinatory effect of antibiotics and red wine (a seasonal Grahamstown cocktail that shouldn't be missed), but the sightings have been confirmed by sober witnesses.

There are jesters' caps, gnomes' hats, aviators' helmets, Ebenezer Scrooge night-caps with bells on the end, those horrible velvety Mad Hatter-type things that sag in the rain, and one especially foul headpiece resembling a stegosaurus's body armour that seems to follow me around wherever I go. I woke up screaming last night, hideous scales dancing before my eyes.

Grahamstown's creativity and inspiration seem to come from devising new and more ludicrous ways of covering your haircut. Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, here I am stuck in the middle with 'flu.

The theatrical events themselves offer blessed and all-too-brief respite from the pre-millennarian millinery madness. A personal highlight of the first weekend was the opening of *Old Boys*, Anthony Akerman's new play. The piece provides strange and almost guilty pleasures. Strange, because it operates at that nexus of fear, fascination and naked loathing that characterises the most well-balanced adults' memories of their school days. And guilty, because the milieu it evokes – the rules, rituals and senseless traditions of South Africa's private schools for boys – while endlessly, morbidly fascinating to those who have passed through that system, is largely irrelevant to the vast majority who have not.

A case, then, of elitist white male South Africa making theatre to rehash its self-obsessions for its own hermetic entertainment? Only if the same can be said of works like Greig Coetzee's *White Men with Weapons*, or Darryl Roodt's film *The Stick* or Akerman's own *Somewhere on the Border* – powerful pieces that examine and try to make sense of an experience exclusive to a few, virtually impenetrable to others, yet which played an important part in creating the fabric of our variegated national psyche.

To those who have experienced institutions such as Michaelhouse, where *Old Boys* is set, or one of their myriad government-school imitators, the play principally offers the shiver and shock of the familiar.

The story is told on two time levels: a contemporary encounter at *Old Boys*' Day

framing a flashback to 30 years previously. The flashback captures the peculiar temporal dislocation that comes with hearing the old slang, enduring the old school-spirit pep talks and even seeing the familiar pimply faces that polluted one's earlier life.

Julian Carlyle, one-time rebel and uneasy house prefect, played with slightly ambivalent charm by Nick Ashby, returns to his old school on a whim, only to confront a ghost from his past: his former friend and head of house (played with comic poise and timing by Terence Reis), who has found the outside world something of a disappointment. He returns obsessively for *Old-Boy* AGMs and rugby matches with his wife Louise (a delightful Kathy-Jo Ross), the girl who came between the two friends all those years ago.

The flashback to their schooldays – a time capsule of music, schoolyard argot and adolescent attitudes – unfolds a more intricate plot involving Louise's brother, Julian's fag in school, whose homoerotic attachment to Julian brings to a head a confrontation between principle, personal integrity and the expediency of conformity that will mark Julian for the rest of his life.

Old Boys is a slice of what must seem like a slightly surreal life to the uninvolved ob-

The play represents the acceptable face of a public appetite for theatre that has manifested itself at Grahamstown

server; a soap opera involving elaborate social and economic elitism, sophisticated traditions of genteel brutality, inhuman treatment of young boys and rituals bizarrely out of place in Africa, miles and years from their birthplace in the public schools of England.

Wisely, it is played strongly for laughs – Ashley Downes is outstanding as boorish, half-witted sports hero Miles Carruthers – but that doesn't quite erase the strong emotional resemblance the play bears to Julian Mitchell's *Another Country*, a remarkable study of individual desire and aspiration in the British public schools of the 50s. If *Old Boys* seems, in the end, to lack some measure of weight or real dramatic substance, the reason can be found in a direct comparison with *Another Country*.

That play (and the subsequent ravishing film that dripped Rupert Everett into a zillion fantasies like melted butter from a warm crumpet) was really about Guy Burgess and a system of class privilege and individual alienation that would drive a man to betray his country. But Julian betrays neither his country nor the role into which he has been manipulated.

The primal scene, the moment of truth, in both pieces involves a flogging as a means of peer-group punishment. But whereas Burgess is flogged, Julian is called upon to

witness the beating rather than receive it. He is never outwardly punished; his is a sin of complicity rather than commission.

Julian takes up his position as an ambivalent participant in the ongoing chain of violence that is visited on the father and the father's sons until the last generation. Perhaps, ultimately, the dramatic strategy is more appropriate to a country and a class in which complicity with the order was more culpable than any act of defiance.

Old Boys is very effective as a traditionally well-fashioned play. It should prove successful. If so, it would represent the acceptable face of a public appetite for "theatre" that has manifested itself in Grahamstown in the overwhelming popularity of nostalgic cover-band rock 'n roll shows like *Sixty-Something-Wild*. The shows are tailor-made for punters whose idea of a daring artistic weekend is a kudu steakroll (I'm not joking) and a Savannah Dry cider in the beer tent before trooping off to watch someone sing Donovan's greatest hits. It's the kind of attitude that would make Steven Berkoff snarl.

Undisputed centre-piece of the first weekend was Berkoff's *One Man*. Tickets were sold out months in advance, mainly to blue-rinsed culture-tourists who didn't know his work and wouldn't have liked it if they did. It was fun watching them smile bravely through his savage one-man assault on their theatrical sensibilities.

Don't get me wrong: this was not Berkoff at his most ferocious. The three short pieces he performed – Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* and his own *Actor and Dog* – were fairly innocuous compared to previous works like *Decadence*, *Greek*, or my personal favourite, *East*.

This time he confined his ferocity to people who coughed in his performances. You haven't had a good time in a theatre until you've watched several hundred flubbed pillars of society trying to hold their breath for two-and-a-quarter hours.

Berkoff's writing has always been able to renew one's faith in the theatre; in Grahamstown the force of his performance had the same effect. In a way I was pleased the material was as comparatively bland as it was – it allowed the concentrated power of his performance to attract most of the audience's attention.

Berkoff alone on a darkened stage in a single spotlight is breathtaking, riveting. Physically he looks like Hannibal Lecter doing an impersonation of Rowan Atkinson, but in describing the effect of his performance one fumbles for adjectives implying an admixture of Mike Tyson, Johnny Rotten and the great Grimaldi. It is pointless trying to describe a Berkoff performance; it is far more than the sum of its parts.

Let me rather say that if you're feeling jaded with the state of the performing arts, if you've seen one silly hat too many and need to be reminded that theatre can move and stir you and leave you better than you were before don't miss Berkoff at the Market Theatre this week. And don't forget the cough drops.

7. Jordan, Mary. 1998. Drama about Michaelhouse in a class of its own. *Business Day*. 8 October.

Drama about Michaelhouse in a class of its own

THEATRE

OLD BOYS directed by Anthony Akerman (The Agfa Theatre on the Square)

ANTHONY Akerman has written a play about Michaelhouse which is both evocative in its setting and subtle in its characterisation.

Part of the remarkableness is that the work transcends its origin. You do not have to have been to a private school yourself to enjoy it. If you did, however, the truth of the experience is made uncomfortably believable.

School, like all other miseries, has to be accepted, though for some, like Adrian Baynesfield (Steven Raymond) it is the formative and defining period of his life. He wears the cross of Christ on his blazer and as captain of house, tries to tell the truth and keep others on the straight and narrow path. Miles Carruthers (Ashley Dowds) is completely physical, the team player who thinks with his fists. Julian Carlyle (David Butler) is the full-time rebel, his cigarette tucked into his towel on the way to the showers; and Vaughan Cockburn (Antony Coleman) is the new boy who lives in ignorant terror in a world where everyone seems hostile.

The four actors are each seriously good in their roles.

There is burning sincerity in Raymond's upright dullness. Bathos and pathos come in the



Adrian and Louise at the matric dance in the Vita award winning Old Boys.

determination of muscular Dowds to follow the hidden meanings in an ordinary conversation. Watch long words confuse him utterly. Butler sneers and taunts, rejects and argues; to the secret delight of Coleman, whose quiet smile suddenly illuminates his twisted, agonised features.

Enter Louise Cockburn (Jennifer Steyn). She is elegant and mesmeric, thoughtful and intelligent. She is crucial to the plot, a reminder of the blazing power wielded by women, a catalyst

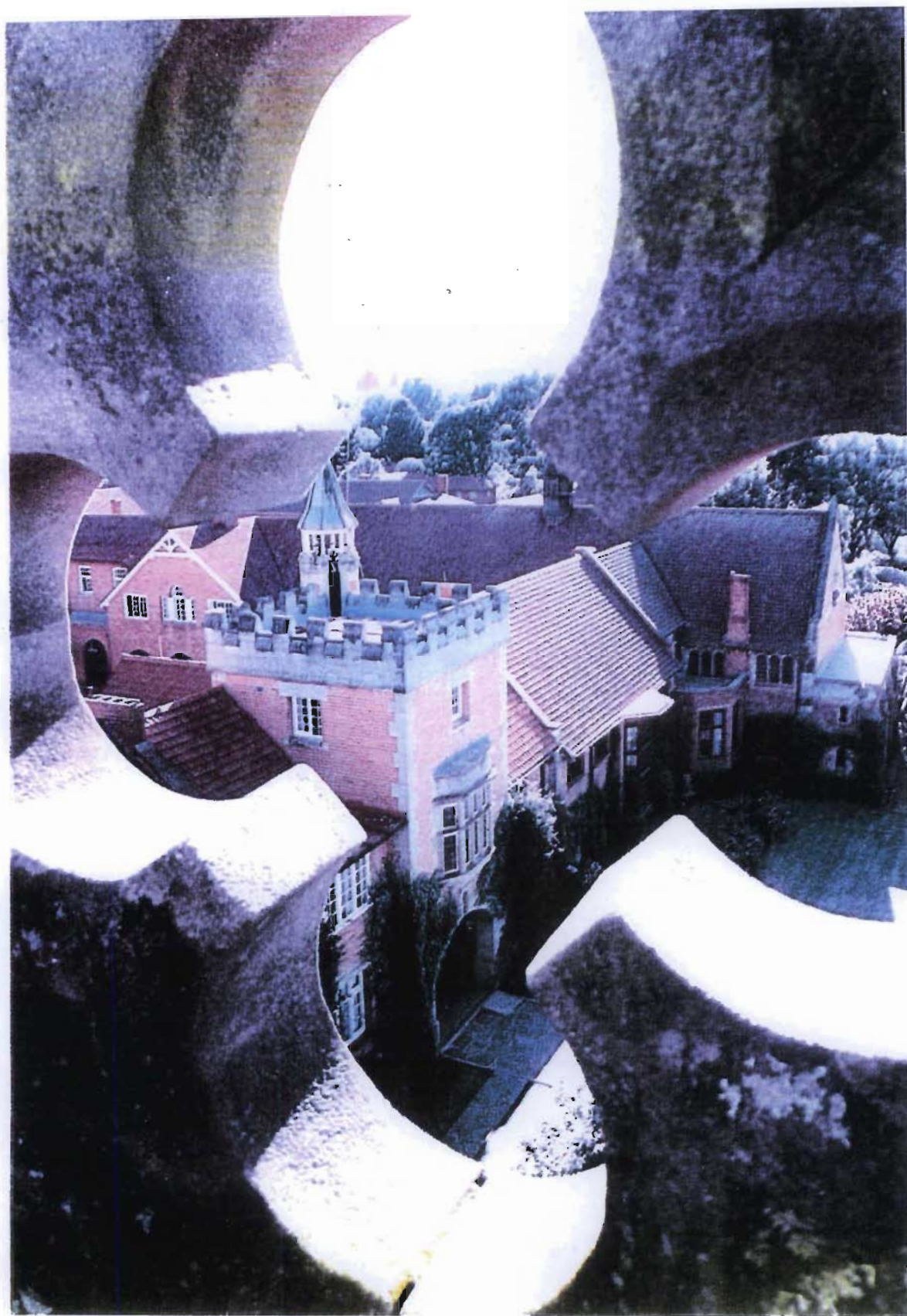
counterpointing the inane attitudes struck by boys, who will grow into men striking similar attitudes.

Later they will send their children to the same establishment so that they, in turn, can be subjected to the same ridiculous rituals and be unhappy. Therein lies the stupidity of men.

Do not miss it. You are unlikely to see anything as good on any other stage in the country.

Mary Jordan

APPENDIX F



S. Michael's Chronicle

1886-1887