

Irony in Herman Charles Bosman's Oom Schalk Stories

John William Mac Donald

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Supervisor: Professor M Lenta

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Declaration

The thesis, unless otherwise indicated,
is my own original work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J Mac Donald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

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Abstract

Herman Charles Bosman's Oom Schalk stories have made him one of the most popular writers in South Africa, and the rural Marico District in which the stories are set a popular tourist destination. This popularity is largely due to the storytelling figure of Oom Schalk, the likeable old boer raconteur, who tells the stories and ironically pokes fun at his Marico community.

This image of Oom Schalk and the Oom Schalk stories is one which was created and nurtured by Lionel Abrahams who was almost single-handedly responsible for the collection and republication of many of these stories after Bosman's death. The image of Schalk, and therefore the intention of Bosman in creating this fictional narrator, as a benign figure has been contested by some literary critics and defended by others. The debate has revolved around the extent to which Bosman's use of irony in the stories addresses the explicitly racist attitudes of Schalk and the Marico community.

Unfortunately the debates around irony have been hampered by a lack of attention to the nature and functioning of irony.

In my introduction I look at the problems that many critics have in trying to define the diverse body of writing that Bosman produced and the way in which this has defined a particular critical approach to Bosman.

In Chapter 1 I discuss how the history of publication of Bosman's Oom Schalk stories and literary criticism has defined an approach to these stories which is often inappropriate. I also discuss some of the literary critical implications of the recent recollection and republication of Bosman's work in *The Anniversary Edition*.

In Chapter 2 I address the issue of irony in the Oom Schalk stories. I deal with the way in which irony is constructed in the Oom Schalk stories. This discussion includes an analysis of the narrative structure of the short stories and the way in which the figure of Oom Schalk is used to create different levels of irony.

In Chapter 3 I examine some of the Oom Schalk stories in detail in order to demonstrate the way in which Bosman's deployment of irony produces an identifiable pattern which establishes a basis for a discussion of Bosman's ironic intent in writing these stories.

In my conclusion I discuss some of the implications of Bosman's use of irony and the implications for critical approaches to these stories.

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Introduction

Almost fifty years after his death, and nearly a century after he was born, the complete works of Herman Charles Bosman are being recollected and republished in what is the most complete collection of his complete works to date. The Anniversary Edition published by Human and Rousseau and edited by Stephen Gray and Craig MacKenzie not only includes stories and other writing which were previously unpublished but attempts to restore many of the texts to their original forms. This task is an attempt by MacKenzie and Gray to eventually “set the record straight” (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 20).

The publication of The Anniversary Edition is the first time a systematic and properly theorised literary approach has been applied to the collecting and editing of Bosman’s work. The various collections in the edition have been divided according to genre and sub-genre. Within the generic divisions an attempt has been made to reflect the chronological order in which they were originally published by Bosman. Gray and MacKenzie’s implicit acknowledgement of the importance of the literary features of Bosman’s work finally creates a solid platform from which to view Bosman’s literary production.

In taking this approach they address a long-standing problem in Bosman criticism. It is a problem recognised by Gray (1986: 26) when trying to define the body of writing which Bosman produced. He describes Bosman’s career as “higgledy-piggledy, difficult to reconstruct with any sense of sequence”. According to Gray, even within the broad generic distinctions of poetry, short stories, novels and journalistic writing, there does not seem to be any unified progression in Bosman’s work. In trying to establish a unifying pattern, Gray suggests that Bosman writes in different “modes” which he identifies as “rhapsody”, “reportage” and “irony” (Gray, 1986: 26) and assesses Bosman’s works in these categories over his career. Unfortunately, Gray’s chronological analysis of Bosman’s work does not make the picture much clearer. As Gray comments: “But, as the Chronology surprisingly shows, Bosman was not a writer who ‘developed’ from one mode to the next and the next; on the contrary, he operated in these three modes simultaneously throughout his career” (1986: 26).

I intend to argue in this study that the lack of consistency that Gray refers to here is largely a result of the way in which Bosman's work was initially collected. The circumstances surrounding the original recollection of his work for publication in book form by Lionel Abrahams, and the criteria which were used as a basis for collecting Bosman's work have defined an approach to his work which has persisted until the recent publication of *The Anniversary Edition*. The generic divisions of his work (especially the short stories) in *The Anniversary Edition* reveal that Bosman's writing is far more consistent than has been recognised in the past. This consistency only becomes apparent because of the way in which his work has now been divided into volumes and republished. The literary classification of his work by genre and the narratological framework used to distinguish sub-genres in his short stories represents a less subjective and more critically sound approach than the personal preferences of the first editor, Abrahams, which formed the basis of previous collections. It is precisely the lack of a clearly stated, objective organising principle in the collection of Bosman's work in the past which has led to confusion about Bosman's consistency and intention in writing in the various modes that he did.

While Bosman and all those who study his work owe Lionel Abrahams a huge debt of gratitude for his efforts in collecting and publishing Bosman's work, Abrahams's idiosyncratic criteria for the selection and evaluation of Bosman's work have set a precedent which has hampered a truly critical approach to Bosman's work. While the broad generic categories that Abrahams used for the classification of Bosman's work into journalism, novels and short stories have been maintained in *The Anniversary Edition*, the sub-division of the short stories into generically different categories based on their formal properties represents a significantly different approach. I shall claim that the recent editors' use of strictly literary criteria for the categorisation and evaluation of Bosman's work not only defines a more critically rigorous approach to his work, but also reveals that Bosman's use of genre and awareness of the formal properties of the genres in which he worked is an integral part of his writing. The awareness and deliberate use of form by Bosman which is so apparent in Gray and MacKenzie's recollection of his work effectively resituates critical approaches to Bosman within the sphere of literary studies rather than biographical conjecture and socio-historical analysis.

The dominance of these latter approaches in Bosman studies have derived from a desire to define Bosman's diverse literary production in one unified (and

politically acceptable) category. The contradictions inherent in this approach are best demonstrated by a critical byword which has dogged Bosman criticism – the “Bosmanesque”. In 1986 Gray defined the “Bosmanesque” as a “quality of holding together antagonisms and incongruities”. As this term suggests, the view of Gray, like that of Abrahams before him, incorporates a strong biographical inference in his assessment of Bosman’s work. The absence of any observable unified intent or “impact”, as Gray puts it (1986: 25), in Bosman’s work has led critics to look to Bosman’s life and historical context as a basis for criticism of his work.

This line of criticism has been strongly influenced by the contributions of Lionel Abrahams, particularly his biographical piece, “The Man Who Never Unmasked”, which was used as the preface to the 1957 edition of *A Cask of Jerepigo*. As Gray (1986: 18) suggests, this piece has been the major influence on biographical criticism ever since. While later approaches (Gray, 1986, Hugo, 1992) refine the more personalised approach of Abrahams and expand the scope of the ‘biographical’ to include the cultural context within which Bosman operated, the central figure in their analysis is always Bosman the man. As Gray would have it:

The man was indeed caught between many situations: an Afrikaner writing in English; an ex-con with too much freedom; a Nationalist at heart, working in the Liberal press, and its best defendant; a mad man playing sane and a sane man playing mad; a melancholic and alcoholic given to the driest good humour... (1986: 27)

The enigma of the man and the complexity of the “South African cultural dilemma” (Gray, 1986: 25) with which Bosman engaged in his writing has dominated much of the criticism of his work. It is only recently that critics (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998, MacKenzie, 2001, 2002, Lenta, 2003) have begun to question to what extent the existing body of criticism derives from the circumstances in which Bosman’s life’s work was produced and published.

The history of the publication of Bosman’s work (which I discuss in the section entitled **Reconstructing Bosman** pp 7-14) is important in that it shows the way in which the posthumous recollection of his work by Abrahams was not simply a neutral or simple recollection of the work. The way in which Abrahams selected and collected the work was instrumental in formulating an editorial and critical precedent for the evaluation of Bosman’s writing. The editorial precedent that Abrahams set by

combining generically different forms is particularly pronounced in his collection of the short stories, where Oom Schalk stories are collected alongside other Marico stories. I shall show that this precedent has ignored the distinctly different narrative forms employed by Bosman in generically different types of stories. Abrahams's desire to represent what *he* viewed as Bosman's best stories has also created a precedent for a number of other collections which are not based on any literary organising principle.

The lack of an explicitly defined literary framework has resulted in critical approaches to his work which have often overlooked the extent to which Bosman's self-conscious use of literary form is a definitive element of his fiction.

In trying to justify Bosman's place in South African literature, Abrahams also introduces a line of criticism that suggests that the value of Bosman's work derives from the uniquely South African character of his writing. This line of criticism has developed over time to incorporate political elements that are inappropriate to the politics of Bosman's time and which bear very little relation to what is textually represented in his fiction. Examples of the kind of misrepresentations, which have arisen from this lack of attention to the way in which Bosman's representations of South African society are mediated through his use of literary form, are discussed with reference to the generic distinction between Bosman's Marico stories and the Oom Schalk stories (in my section **Marico stories and Oom Schalk stories** pp 14-23). The Oom Schalk stories have been Bosman's most popular stories and I shall argue that the popularity of the fictional figure of Oom Schalk has led to a lack of distinction between the character of Oom Schalk and the authorial intent of Bosman in creating this character. This confusion is not limited to the popular perception of Oom Schalk, as critical approaches to the irony in the Oom Schalk stories reveal a similar propensity in critics to over-identify Oom Schalk's ironies with Bosman ironic intention.

The attribution of irony in Bosman's stories raises the issue of intent. It is my contention in **Representing Intent** (pp 23-27) that although we can infer a very limited amount of information about Bosman's intent from the way in which he collected his work and his comments on this process, the ironic intent of the stories can only be formulated within the stories: the possibility of attributing irony depends on the extent to which the narrative structure allows irony to happen.

From MacKenzie's research (1999) into Bosman's use of the oral-style short story it has become clear that the narrative structure of the literary imitation of the oral tale and its use of the frame narrator creates an ideal "dialogic" narrative structure within which to construct an ironic viewpoint (see my discussion in the section entitled **Narrative Basis of the Oom Schalk stories** pp 27-32). Although he establishes the narrative structure which Bosman uses to construct irony in his Oom Schalk stories, MacKenzie does not consider the way in which irony implies the particular audiences to which different ironic possibilities are made available by the narrator and frame narrator. MacKenzie fails to distinguish the different levels of irony which are directed at different implied audiences in Bosman's stories (see my section **Problems of Irony** pp 32-38). Using the work of Linda Hutcheon (1994), I examine the consequences of using irony at the different narrative levels constructed in the Oom Schalk stories. In doing so I give greater prominence to the frame narrator and the implied audience of the frame narrator than MacKenzie does. I argue that it is this level of irony which is more indicative of Bosman's intent and that the irony that Schalk's narrative generates (which has often been taken to represent Bosman's irony) is only a secondary representation of Bosman's intent (see **Setting up the Irony and Schalk as Character/Narrator**, pp 38-53).

In order to demonstrate the way in which the different levels of irony function in the Oom Schalk stories I analyse two of Bosman's early and most famous stories, "Makapan's Caves" and "The Rooinek". In my analyses I focus on the way in which the irony of these stories derives largely from the intervention of the frame narrator rather than from Oom Schalk's narrative, and on how Bosman incorporates elements of convention as an integral part of his irony (see **Oom Schalk's Origins – "Makapan's Caves" and "The Rooinek"** pp 54-74). The extent to which these stories amount to an ironised rewriting of the conventional fireside tale is analysed in relation to the stories "Veld Fire" and "Brown Mamba", in which I suggest Bosman has deliberately omitted the complex irony of the Oom Schalk stories but which are included in the body of work to represent the conventions of "non-Oom Schalk" stories.

My final section, **Even Taller Tales – Bosman's Bushveld Tales** (pp 74-88), is an analysis of the way the irony in "In the Withaak's Shade" and "Funeral Earth" is self-consciously literary and the way in which Bosman's irony clearly reveals his focus on the formal properties of his stories and their mode of construction. The

metafictional elements in “In the Withaak’s Shade” in *Mafeking Road* generate a level of irony that gives us the clearest textual indication that we have of Bosman’s intent in writing his Oom Schalk stories.

Chapter 1

Re-constructing Bosman – the publishing history

Despite his prolific production and publication in various literary journals throughout his short life, at the time of his death in 1951, at the age of forty-six, Bosman had only published three complete volumes (Gray, 1986: 1). A novel, *Jacaranda in the Night* and a collection of short stories, *Mafeking Road*, were published in 1947. In 1949 his prison memoir *Cold Stone Jug* was published. Although *Mafeking Road* earned Bosman local recognition (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 10), and *Cold Stone Jug* sold out within seven months of publication (Rosenberg, 1976: 201), this recognition came too late for Bosman. When he died two years later, he was only beginning to be recognised as an author of books rather than as a journalist.

After the local publication of *Mafeking Road*, Bosman contacted Roy Campbell in an attempt to find an English publisher for his work (Bosman in Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 9). Although Campbell managed to have at least two of Bosman's stories read on the BBC (Rosenberg, 1976: 198), this did not lead to any publication abroad. While he was not able to provide concrete success in terms of publication, Campbell and some of his contemporaries, such as Alan Paton, Anthony Delius, Oliver Walker and William Plomer, were able to establish Bosman's reputation as one of South Africa's greatest writers by their public admiration of his work (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 10).

In a radio broadcast on the SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) on the 26th of April 1954 Roy Campbell had this to say of Bosman's short stories:

There are three great South African writers still awaiting publication [in England]. The first of these three is the late Herman Charles Bosman, the best short story writer that ever came out of South Africa. His work is full of poetry, humour, pathos, tragedy and comedy, all mingled inseparably without dislocating the unity of his style which is so consummately contrived as to be unnoticeable...Bosman's name will one day be a household name in South Africa and he will be famous overseas as soon as he is published in England. (in Gray, 1986: 17)

MacKenzie (2001: 9) says that following the success of *Mafeking Road*, Bosman was in the process of putting together another collection of short stories for publication, to be entitled *Seed-time and Harvest*, at the time of his death. His failure to complete this collection meant that only about one eighth of his short stories had been collected and published in volume-form by 1951.

The reluctance of publishers to publish Bosman's work locally is largely indicative of the state of the publishing industry in South Africa at the time. As Lenta points out:

Bosman's short life, the small size of the reading public in South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s, the consequent reluctance of publishers in his lifetime to republish stories and articles in collections, and his difficulties in leading a life which would allow him to be productive until his last five years all led to a situation in which his literary reputation had to be constructed posthumously for him by others. (2003: 1)

Given this context, it is understandable that Bosman's work might have been seen as a commercial risk – a situation made worse by the kind of publications in which Bosman's work had appeared. Most of his work up to the time of his death had only been published in a variety of short-lived journals which did not offer him the mainstream exposure which might have made him a more prominent literary figure. Furthermore, the lack of observably consistent production in any one literary form and the varying quality of this output would have been cause for concern for the more 'respectable' publishers. Living the "kind of hand-to-mouth freelance existence he did" (Gray, 2002: 9), Bosman did not have the luxury of either concentrating on one mode of literary production, or consolidating his production in these diverse forms in a way which would satisfy the requirements of the publishers.

The sudden death of Bosman in 1951 produced a further setback to the process of the publication and recognition of his work: not only was his work not collected into a form that was acceptable for publication, but both his published and unpublished material became the subject of a protracted legal battle. Bosman died intestate and as a result his brother, Pierre, was able to contest the claim of Bosman's widow, Helena, to the literary heritage (Rosenberg, 1976: 241). The case went on for five years before the Supreme Court made a ruling. The outcome was reported in *The Star* of 12 October 1956 as follows:

For what is believed to be the first time in the Union, an author's copyright was put up for auction in Johannesburg today.

The author was Herman Charles Bosman, author of *Mafeking Road* and *Cold Stone Jug*, who died in 1951. The rights to all his published and unpublished works, including a new book of essays to appear shortly, fetched £155. The buyer was a Johannesburg attorney, Mr Lewis Meskin, acting on the behalf of the widow, Mrs. Helena Bosman.

The only other bidder was an attorney representing another member of the family. (Quoted in Rosenberg, 1976: 241)

The momentum which had begun to gather prior to and immediately subsequent to Bosman's death had now been to some degree dissipated. The lack of easy access to Bosman's uncollected and unpublished works meant that the painstaking task of finding, collecting together and editing Bosman's work for publication would have to be done without the benefit of the immediacy of his initial success. It was a task which was taken up by Bosman's one-time student, Lionel Abrahams.

It was Abrahams, in the years after Bosman's death until 1981 (Gray, 1986: 21), who was responsible, almost single-handedly, for the collection and publication of much of Bosman's uncollected work. Abrahams managed to recover many of Bosman's stories, and also separated his writing into different categories. The journalism was collected and published as *A Cask of Jerepigo* in 1957. A further twenty of the Marico stories were collected and published in *Unto Dust* in 1963. Thirty-nine of the Voorkamer stories were selected and published in two volumes: *Jurie Steyn's Post Office* (1971) and *A Bekkersdal Marathon* (1971). A selection of Bosman's poetry was published in a volume entitled *The Earth is Waiting* in 1974.

While Abrahams's contribution has been invaluable, I believe that there are problems with his approach to Bosman and his work which have created difficulties for more recent criticism. As Lenta (2003, 4-6) points out, Abrahams's forewords to Bosman's works often tend to valorise the man, and play down the less "genial" or disruptive aspects of his character as detailed in Rosenberg's biography (1976). This Lenta (2003: 4) suggests is also an aspect of his approach to Bosman's work. In order to maintain the audience he felt that Bosman deserved, Abrahams avoids the more disturbing implications of Bosman's portrayals of the Afrikaner community. Lenta suggests that Abrahams presents, in his selection of stories and the way in which he

prefaces them, Bosman's interest in the Boer community as being "uncomplicatedly affectionate" (2003: 4).

A criticism which is implicit in MacKenzie's introductions to The Anniversary Edition volumes challenges the validity of Abrahams's, and subsequent editors' criteria in their choice of stories for subsequent collections of Bosman's short stories. In the introduction to the Anniversary Edition of *Unto Dust*, MacKenzie cites a passage from an unpublished memoir by Lionel Abrahams which demonstrates the process by which stories were selected for the original collection of *Unto Dust* (1963) edited by Abrahams:

The stories excluded from *Unto Dust* as eventually published fall into four groups. The first was perhaps not as many as three stories I judged to be versions of others I was including and liked better; the second was stories I felt did not worthily represent Bosman's art ... the third group was the few stories I was obliged to excise from my collection when Anthony Blond decided that economic considerations required it to be reduced in quantity; the fourth was stories my research failed to discover. (2002: 9-10)

The first two categories mentioned by Abrahams imply an evaluation based on 'literary' or artistic merit. Instead of a comprehensive collection of stories sorted by period or category, Abrahams's criterion for the collection of stories for publication was primarily that of merit. There are, however, no explicit literary criteria given for what constitutes a good story and what does not. The judgement of what is representative of Bosman's art is subjective and in some cases comes down to what Abrahams liked or disliked. This idiosyncratic selection of Bosman's stories combined with the absence of the "undiscovered" stories from this collection produced certain limitations on the representation of "Bosman's art" and consequently on the critical reception of his short stories.

Like Bosman before him, Abrahams was forced by the pressure of publishing deadlines to select and make work available in publishable volumes based on what was available to him at the time. Not all of the stories that Bosman had written were collected and therefore available for analysis. While it is clear that Abrahams's selections were meant to present what he saw as the best of Bosman's work in order to do justice to a writer whom he admired and thought worthy of serious literary critical attention, his criteria for the collection of Bosman's texts created an editorial precedent which has hindered a more systematic evaluation of Bosman's work. The

absence of stories which Abrahams was unable to find has meant that, as new works were later recovered, they were published in new collections irrespective of generic differences or chronology. Sometimes the 'new' stories were published alongside previously published works, as in *Bosman at his Best* (1965) which included reprints of pieces from *Mafeking Road*, *Unto Dust*, *A Cask of Jerepigo* as well as the previously uncollected "Other Stories" (Gray, 1986: 18). Taking their cue from Abrahams, other editors have produced selections which exhibit the same degree of subjectivity. Even though Rosenberg's *Almost Forgotten Stories* (1976) and *Uncollected Essays* (1981) contained previously uncollected work, Gray (1986: 19) suggests that these volumes had editorial errors and had the "feel of containing 'left-over' work". Further examples of personal selections include Gray's *Selected Stories* (1980, revised in 1982), Mynhardt's *The Bosman I Like* (1981) and Goldblatt's *The Illustrated Bosman* (1993).

Although some of these collections added to the existing body of Bosman's work, none of them introduced any qualitatively new insights. Anthologies of his short stories based entirely on the personal preferences of the individuals (like Mynhardt's) make no attempt at a critical approach to Bosman. Mynhardt's collection relied on the popularity of his stage performances to sell the collection. The same is true of Goldblatt's edition where although the photographs and illustrations make for an interesting edition there is nothing particularly new in his approach to Bosman. This appears to be simply an exploitation of the popularity of Bosman's work by the publishers. Unfortunately this is one of the consequences of the precedent set by Abrahams in his editorial method and one which has probably been encouraged by publishers.

Abrahams's 'project', which culminated in the publication of *The Collected Works of Herman Charles Bosman* in 1981 (Gray, 1986: 21), succeeded in making Bosman a well-known South African literary figure. While Abrahams's attempts to establish Bosman's reputation overseas did not succeed – the joint publication of *Unto Dust* by Anthony Blond and Human and Rousseau did not sell well (MacKenzie, 2002: 10) – the local popularity of Bosman had in some ways made good on the promise that Campbell had made almost thirty years earlier. Abrahams made much of what Bosman had written available in collected and published form. There were, however, significant omissions from the body of collected stories (e.g. only half of the Voorkamer stories had been collected and published), and it must be remembered that

the conditions under which Abrahams was working were not ideal. In spite of these difficulties he achieved his primary objective, which was the recognition of Bosman as a serious literary figure. As MacKenzie says:

[A]ll of Campbell's comments have proved to be trenchant, and the last of them particularly so. Bosman's name *has* become a household word, and this is due in large measure to the enduring success of the Oom Schalk stories, particularly thanks to Lionel Abrahams for having launched them under this title with such flare [sic]. (2002: 22)

While Abrahams is responsible for making a large part of Bosman's work available, a considerable amount is missing from the body of work which he edited and published. It is precisely this kind of omission that has prevented the whole of Bosman's production from being evaluated in a systematic manner. Abrahams's desire to only represent what he considered to be the best of Bosman's work has not encouraged or allowed a truly critical engagement with all of what Bosman produced. It is only in the light of the Anniversary Edition that my own study, for example, has become possible.

In a review of *The Collected Works of Herman Charles Bosman*, Driver (in Gray, 1986: 83) points out that the volume does not "constitute a 'Collected Works'", as it omits a significant number of Bosman's texts. Among those omitted are a large number of his poems, the *Almost Forgotten Stories* published by Rosenberg and the "handful" of unpublished stories in the University of Texas Humanities Research Centre. Furthermore, Driver suggests that the stories in the *Collected Works* have been taken from existing collections and "involved no checking against Bosman's latest versions" (in Gray, 1986: 83). The omissions and lack of editorial rigour leads Driver to claim that the "*Collected Works* is by no means a definitive text" (in Gray, 1986: 83).

Driver's comments are echoed by Gray and MacKenzie in their introduction to the Anniversary Edition of *Mafeking Road* when they describe the editorial changes which have been effected in this edition in order to restore the stories to their original form (1998: 11). Apart from the editorial changes which have been made, the Anniversary Edition also incorporates all of the stories which Bosman wrote, including stories which were previously unpublished (MacKenzie, 2001: 10). The method by which the stories are collected in particular volumes is also more "orderly

and correct” (MacKenzie, 2002: 9) in the sense that there is a generic and chronological division of the stories which was not evident in previous collections. The basis of this re-organisation of Bosman’s stories has its roots in a recent study by MacKenzie on the South African oral-style short story.

In this study MacKenzie (1993, 1999) builds on the “skeleton” provided by Ernest Pereira (1985 in Gray 1986) in his study of the short story form in South Africa, and develops a narratologically based model which plots the development of the oral-style short story in South Africa from the mid-nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century. The culmination of this tradition in its most complex form, MacKenzie suggests, is to be found in the “artful” tales which are “best exemplified” in the short stories of Herman Charles Bosman (1999: 9). MacKenzie makes generic distinctions between Bosman’s short stories and singles out the Oom Schalk stories as a subject for study in their own right.

It is this rationale which forms the basis for the recompilation of the Oom Schalk stories in the Anniversary Edition of *Mafeking Road* (1998), *Seed-time and Harvest* (2001) and *Unto Dust* (2002). In an attempt to isolate Bosman’s deployment of existing traditions of oral-style short stories, Gray and MacKenzie have divided the works into volumes. In doing so they have modified the selections that were made by Abrahams and effected editorial changes to all of the Anniversary Edition volumes. In justifying these changes, MacKenzie points out:

...I have been given the opportunity that neither Bosman himself, nor Abrahams in his turn, were afforded: to gather together *all* of Bosman’s short stories with the prospect of issuing them in a far less restricted and ad hoc way, and in volumes which naturally fall into categories, both generically and period-wise. (MacKenzie, 2001: 1)

This generic and chronological distinction provides the basis for a more systematic approach to Bosman’s short stories, more particularly the Oom Schalk stories and Bosman’s use of this storytelling figure. It questions and demands the revision of the editorial and critical precedents set by Abrahams. The comprehensive selection of texts and the inclusion of a systematic literary approach to the works selected establishes the field of Bosman studies as a field of literary rather than personal interests.

Marico stories and Oom Schalk stories

Because my interest is primarily in the multiple and complex ironies which appear most clearly in the Oom Schalk stories, I have chosen to focus on a small but representative selection of these. However, considering the generic confusion of the Oom Schalk stories with other Marico stories in the past it is necessary to clearly distinguish these different types of stories.

Of the one hundred and fifty short stories Bosman wrote, nearly all are set in the Groot Marico District of what used to be the Western Transvaal (North-West Province) now. It was a place which he knew fairly well, having lived and taught there for six months in 1926. This relatively short stay was an experience which affected him deeply, and was to prove the source for a large part of his writing. All but six of his short stories are set in this region (Gray, 1986: 4). In the contributor's note he submitted to *Spotlight* in January 1951 he sums up the experience in typical Bosman fashion:

After I had qualified as a school-teacher the Transvaal Education Department, apparently with the intention of doing me a disservice, appointed me to a Bushveld school in the Groot Marico. The disservice was to the Bushveld school. But while I was no good as a teacher I found in the Marico a pattern of life offering infinite riches in literary material. (in Gray, 2002: 9)

Although the Marico stories are so called because they are set in that region, the stories have differences which justify their separation into different categories. The first distinction, which was made by Abrahams, was the difference between the Voorkamer stories and the other Marico stories. The Voorkamer stories, which I will not deal with here, use multiple narrators engaged in conversation. They were also written and set in a later historical period than most of the Oom Schalk stories which form my subject. This narrative formula is used in all of the Voorkamer stories and though these stories generate ironies of their own, they are quite different from those produced by the narrating figures of Oom Schalk and the frame narrator.

Bosman wrote sixty-one short stories which are considered to be Oom Schalk stories. MacKenzie makes a distinction between the Oom Schalk stories and those narrated by an "authorial narrator", as in the story "Brown Mamba" (Bosman, 1998:

82-86). Usually the Oom Schalk stories are explicitly identified by the almost formulaic “said Oom Schalk Lourens” which appears in the opening lines of the majority of the Oom Schalk stories. Where this explicit reference is not made, the narrating voice exhibits enough of the stock characteristics of Oom Schalk to be recognisable. In the only collection of short stories which Bosman himself selected for publication, *Mafeking Road*, only three (“The Prophet”, “The Widow” and “Brown Mamba”) are not *explicitly* narrated by Oom Schalk.

The Oom Schalk stories (as well as other short stories) appeared in weekly instalments in literary journals from the beginning of Bosman’s writing career until his death in 1951. Unlike the Voorkamer stories, which were all written to weekly deadlines between April 1950 and October 1951 (MacKenzie, 1999: 159), the Oom Schalk stories were a constant feature of his short story writing from its beginning to its end. The first short story he ever published was “Makapan’s Caves” in 1930, in the December edition of *The Toulleier* (Gray, 1986: 6). The last Oom Schalk story to be published during Bosman’s lifetime, “The Missionary”, was published in the January, 1951 edition of *Spotlight* (Gray, 1986: 17) some seven months before his death. At the time of Bosman’s death there were some Oom Schalk stories which were still unpublished. Some of these stories were published for the first time in Abrahams’s *Unto Dust* (1963), and some have only recently been published in the Anniversary Edition of *Seed-time and Harvest* (2001) and in *Unto Dust* (2002) edited by Craig MacKenzie.

Apart from the eighty Voorkamer pieces which predominate in Bosman’s later literary production (MacKenzie, 1999: 159), there is no other type of story which he wrote so consistently and for such a sustained period of time. The popularity of the Oom Schalk stories is clearly indicated by the republication of a large number of these stories in different journals. Many of the stories which are published in *Mafeking Road* had been published twice in *South African Opinion*. At least a quarter of the Oom Schalk stories were reprinted during Bosman’s lifetime.

The journals in which most of Bosman’s Oom Schalk stories were published suited his intention in creating these stories with the complex ironies that are definitive of this sub-genre. Although these journals did not have the same circulation as mainstream journals like *Huisgenoot* (a much more serious publication in the 1930s and 1940s than it is today) and have been referred to by Gray as the “Johannesburg gutter press” (1980: 1), they were in fact serious though small-scale literary journals.

As a result, the audience for which Bosman was writing was one which took an interest in literary matters and was more knowledgeable about literature than the average reader. His use of the narrating figure of Oom Schalk was recognisably a literary imitation of a bygone oral form. The liberal, largely English-speaking audience could also be expected to be receptive to the ironic framing of Oom Schalk's narrative by the frame narrator and aware of how Bosman's manipulation of form compared with that of his contemporaries. The success of *Mafeking Road* shows that these stories also appealed to a wider audience.

The popularity of the stories did not cease with his death. *Mafeking Road* is, as Gray and MacKenzie (1998: 10) point out, the all-time South African best-seller. Prior to the publication of The Anniversary Edition, there were six editions of this collection, and the hardback edition, published by Human and Rousseau in 1969, went into eighteen impressions. While subsequent anthologies of Bosman's Marico stories such as *Unto Dust* (1963) and *Bosman at his Best* (1965), edited by Abrahams, have included a significant number of Oom Schalk stories, none of these anthologies have matched the popularity of *Mafeking Road*.

After the success of *Mafeking Road* certain stories were singled out for inclusion in other anthologies or were translated and republished in foreign journals. With only one exception ("Brown Mamba"), all the stories selected were Oom Schalk stories. In May 1957 the German magazine, *Atlantis*, published three of Bosman's stories which had been translated into German by Helene Menze (Volume 29, No. 5). The stories were: "Makapan's Caves", "The Rooinek" and "The Selon's Rose". In August (Volume 30, No. 8) the following year "Yellow Moepels", "The Prophet", "Brown Mamba", "Mampoe" and "Ox-wagons on Trek" were published in the same journal (Gray, 1986: 18).

Of the stories republished in *Atlantis*, one has proven to be particularly popular: "The Rooinek" is, as Gray and MacKenzie (1998: 11) point out, Bosman's most published story and it is an Oom Schalk story. In the same year as it appeared in *Atlantis*, it was translated into Danish and broadcast on Danish radio (Gray, 1986: 18). In 1960 "The Rooinek" was also selected as the opening story for the Faber collection of *South African Stories* compiled by David Wright (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 11). In May 1981 Egon Guenther published a limited, hand-printed edition of "The Rooinek" which was illustrated with original wood engravings by Cecil Skotnes (Gray, 1986: 21).

The popular success of Oom Schalk is not limited to the sale of his stories in print. Such was the success of the storytelling figure of Oom Schalk from Bosman's short stories that the character was adapted for the stage. This adaptation took the form of a series of one-man acts which portrayed the character of Oom Schalk Lourens telling his stories on stage. While Patrick Mynhardt's performances of Oom Schalk are the most famous today, the first stage appearance for Oom Schalk was in 1969 at the Little Theatre in Cape Town where the part of Oom Schalk was performed by Percy Sieff (Gray, 1986: 18). Beginning with a recording of five of Bosman's short stories on long-playing record in 1969 (Gray, 1986: 19), Mynhardt went on to make the character of Oom Schalk his own. His performances were so popular that they were televised and later released on video (Gray, 1986: 22). Mynhardt's reputation for performing the character of Oom Schalk was such that he even compiled an anthology of Bosman's short stories entitled *The Bosman I Like*. As Gray points out: "Mynhardt and his Bosman presentations have over fifteen years become a remarkable South African cultural institution, witnessed by over a million people in the theatre and more widely on television" (1986: 21-22).

This unprecedented popularity of Oom Schalk has in some ways obscured the fact that he is in fact a fictional creation. This has been further complicated by the lack of distinction drawn between the dramatic presentation of the character of Oom Schalk on stage, and the short stories from which this character is derived. In the popular imagination it seems at times as if there is very little distinction between Oom Schalk and Bosman himself. Even Gray's phrasing above is symptomatic of a position that identifies Bosman very strongly with the character of Oom Schalk.

The over-identification of Oom Schalk with Bosman has often led to questions about Bosman's intent and has been a cause for much controversy around his work. This controversy focuses on the explicit racism and sexism expressed by Oom Schalk in the stories he narrates. One of the most notorious examples of these attitudes can be found in the opening lines of "Makapan's Caves":

Kaffirs? (said Oom Schalk Lourens). Yes, I know them. And they're all the same. I fear the Almighty and I respect His works, but I could never understand why He made the kaffir and the rinderpest [...] Still, sometimes you come across a good kaffir, who is faithful and upright and a true Christian and doesn't let the wild-dogs catch the sheep. I always think that it isn't right to kill that kind of kaffir. (Bosman, 1998: 64)

According to Gray (1986: 30) the first person “to deal with any thoroughness with the interpretive implications of Bosman”, was Lewis Nkosi in 1969, followed by Hennie Aucamp in 1972. Prior to that, the extent of critical attention paid to Bosman’s work took the form of reviews of the various publications of his work and a preoccupation with the biographical details of Bosman’s bizarre life. The neglect of the texts themselves and the implications of form in them is all too clearly illustrated by a review of *Unto Dust* which appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* of March 1963:

Unto Dust is a further collection of tales by the popular Afrikaner storyteller Herman Charles Bosman who died in 1951 at the age of 46. He was once sentenced to death for murder, spent nine years in Europe in the 1930s, and worked as a journalist in South Africa. It is odd and anachronistic in the circumstances that he should have been able to make a reputation for himself by telling tales of the Boer War, and that, considering his undoubted gifts, he should have wished to.

The tales themselves seem authentic, old men’s yarns that are likely enough to be told in an isolated, pioneering, bookless community: they serve an obvious purpose of whiling away the time. Yet in fact their appeal is to the deluded nostalgia of a very different community, and their seeming authenticity dissolves into pastiche. Bosman was an uncompromisingly backward writer, a poor Boer’s, mid-twentieth-century Kipling. (f.p. 1963 in Gray, 1986: 28-29)

Although it is quite possible that some of Bosman’s popular success may be attributed to a “deluded nostalgia”, the lack of literary or historical analysis implicit in the *Time Literary Supplement* review represents not only an ignorance of South African history and fiction but also the lack of a significant body of local critical attention to Bosman’s work with which to answer such superficial analyses. In failing to understand that the figure of Oom Schalk is deliberately represented in the text as anachronistic, the reviewer has not picked up the ironic perspective created by the presence of the frame narrator. This kind of reaction to Bosman’s stories cannot simply be attributed to a lack of understanding of South African society and history, since Nkosi reacted the stories in a similar way to the *Times* reviewer.

Acknowledged by Gray (1986) as one of the first serious attempts at analysing Bosman’s short fiction, Nkosi’s article, “In Search of the True Afrikaners” (1969) addresses the issue of race in Bosman’s work. Nkosi suggests that the stereotypical

portrayal of “blacks” in Bosman’s stories amounts to representing them as no more than “flat, mechanical, sub-human clowns” who act as “foils for playing off his Boer characters for whom he has claimed the real stage” (1969: 7). It is primarily for this reason that he designates Bosman as no more than a folk humorist who “in the end, fails to evoke a country larger than a locality” (1969: 2). Nkosi sees Bosman’s narrative artifice as little more than an imitation of a local storyteller with the attendant techniques – including irony – of such a heritage. He suggests that, despite Bosman’s use of irony, his short stories are ultimately a racist representation of the conservative values of a folk humorist (1969: 2). Like the reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Nkosi does not realise that Oom Schalk is ironically presented in the narrative.

Ironically, it was a “very different community” to which Bosman’s work appealed in the seventies. It was at this time that South African literary critics turned their attention to Bosman’s work precisely because of the “anachronistic” history that it presented. As Gray suggests, interest in Bosman centred on the discovery in his work of a “missing historical memory” and an “on-going critique of society” (1986: 31). In the oppressive atmosphere of Apartheid, Bosman’s work took on “the glamour of recovering an intellectual suppleness and a resistance to sclerotic and oppressive formulae” (Gray, 1986: 31).

In Bosman’s Marico stories, Gray suggests that critics rediscovered a critical version of history which had almost been erased by the official histories created by Apartheid (1986: 31). The apparent “liberalism” and “‘non-universal’ quality” of the “small-scale localisms” in Bosman’s stories made him an obvious choice for what Gray calls the “‘read South African’ platform” (Gray 1986: 31). This local recognition of Bosman led to a line of criticism which viewed his primary literary value in terms of the realism of his portrayal of the Marico region. In 1985 Trump (in Gray, 1986: 168) pointed out that the idea of Bosman as a “regional realist” still persists in the criticism of a significant number of critics. Following on Leon Hugo’s idea of the Marico as an allegory for the whole of South Africa, Trump challenges the “pseudo-realism” of Bosman’s representation of the district (in Gray, 1986: 168). Although his approach maintains the idea of socio-historical critique as a central part of Bosman’s stories, his examination of the means by which this critique is achieved is conducted on more ‘literary’ grounds. He suggests that Bosman’s use of literary

devices such as allegory and irony are an integral part of his critique of South African society.

Irrespective of their ideological positions, the one thing that critics of Bosman's work have singled out in his short stories is his use of irony. Gray (1986) and others suggest that Bosman's use of irony is *the* definitive characteristic of his short stories: Gray designates Bosman's short stories "ironic comedy" (1986: 25); Titlestad characterises them as "ironic-realist mode" (1987: 8); and Trump suggests that the "self-reflexive irony" in Hennie Aucamp's work derives from Bosman (In Gray, 1986: 174). Even when explicit mention of irony is not made, critics almost invariably identify associated literary tropes such as allegory (Gray, 1977, Hugo 1980, Hunt, 1994) and satire, a form which, as Hutcheon points out, seems structurally to resemble irony (1994: 12). Behind the deceptively simple stories Trump suggests is "a kind of fabular account of South African society, in which both events of the historical past and current social debates can be treated" (In Gray, 1986: 170). According to this critical perspective Bosman uses particular literary techniques as a carefully constructed ironic engagement with the issues of South African society. As Hugo puts it, the "artlessness" which characterises these tales is the "product of considerable art" (1992: 160).

The acknowledgement of Bosman's adept use of literary form did not, however, elicit uniformly laudatory comment from all critics. Sheila Roberts (1985) argues that despite Bosman's seemingly subversive use of irony there are still what she claims are strongly misogynist elements in his stories.

Following a feminist line of argument, Roberts also suggests that, despite his use of irony, there is something fundamentally reactionary in the way in which Bosman uses his female characters. Although Roberts's primary purpose is not to consider the irony in Bosman's work, she addresses Bosman's use of this trope in her examination of his stereotypical presentation of women. Roberts suggests a connection between Bosman's representation of women in his fiction and the way in which this was "coloured by his own reading of Romantic poetry, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Poe" (in Gray, 1986: 155). She also suggests that, like the writers whom he emulates, Bosman's use of "wry twists and turns of the story ... humour and irony" (in Gray, 1986: 155) is tailor-made for a male audience and that the object of these sometimes grotesque ironies is often the female character in the story. Roberts argues that Bosman's "cynicism" in his portrayal of women (in Gray, 1986: 156)

leads to Bosman presenting women as “figments of a self-indulgent masculine imagination” (in Gray, 1986: 157). Roberts argues that because women “could not provide Bosman with the longed-for transcendental experience, he created it for himself in his stories” (in Gray, 1986: 156). Although her argument collapses into biographical conjecture, her textual analysis seems to reveal a disturbing tendency in Bosman’s stories, in which his irony seems to be complicit.

Nkosi’s and Roberts’s criticisms raise questions about the extent to which Bosman’s use of irony can be considered subversive and to what extent the irony identified by critics in the stories is a reflection of Bosman’s intent. It must be pointed out that certain elements of sexism and racism which would be offensive to modern readers were not so in Bosman’s day. Defining Bosman’s work as politically committed or progressive, as some critics have done, opens Bosman to charges of inconsistency. This inconsistency is created by adopting an inappropriately modern political perspective from which to evaluate Bosman’s attitudes and is a misrepresentation of his fictional intention. As Gray and MacKenzie point out, some of Bosman’s female characters were probably inspired by the silent Hollywood films of the day and that these female characters represented women “who had learnt not only to achieve equality with men, but in melodramatic love-triangles to exert a god-like power over them” (1998: 19). In the context of 1930s and 1940s South Africa, this representation would have been viewed as quite liberal.

The reception of Bosman in post-Apartheid South Africa does raise some ethical issues. In 1999 a teacher was fired by the South African Department of Education and Training for setting the short story “Unto Dust” on an examination paper at a mixed-race school (Sunday Times, 27th June 1999). Some of the black pupils and their parents were offended by the overtly racist comments made by the narrator and characters in the story and as a result lodged an official complaint against the teacher who had set this text in the examination. While some ‘sophisticated’ literary figures such as Lionel Abrahams protested that the dismissal was unfair on the grounds that the story ironically undermines the explicit racism in the story, the less ‘literary’ parents of the children found some racial references insulting and demeaning, and were apparently unaware of any irony. This example may relate more to pedagogical ethics and ethical considerations around irony, but it does highlight the fact that the assumption that irony is obvious or intrinsically subversive is a dangerous one. As Hutcheon points out:

There is nothing *intrinsically* subversive about ironic scepticism or about any such self-questioning 'internally dialogized' mode; there is no *necessary* relationship between irony and radical politics or even radical formal innovation. Irony has often been used to reinforce rather than to question established attitudes...[I]rony can and does function tactically in the service of a wide range of political positions, legitimating or undercutting a wide variety of interests. (1994: 10)

In defence of Bosman, a line of criticism developed in the 1980s and persisting today suggests that such allegations of racism constitute a "misrepresentation" of Bosman's intent (Trump in Gray, 1986: 169). Some critics (Gray, 1986, Titlestad, 1987, Hugo, 1992) have endorsed this position by suggesting that the formal properties of Bosman's stories successfully undermine the explicit racism of the stories: it is Oom Schalk, not his author, who is guilty of prejudice. In defence of Bosman's work, this position has gone so far as to suggest that the irony in the stories reveals an intent which is "democratically African, non-hegemonic and non-hierarchical" (Gray, 1986: 28). While this somewhat over-compensatory critical position assumes a political commitment on Bosman's part which is more indicative of their own critical position than of Bosman's intent, it focuses on the more literary elements of the short stories as the key to understanding the stories and the author's intention when writing them.

A view which tends to be over-compensatory seems to be popular among critics at the moment and this view is based on certain assumptions about Bosman's intention and the nature of irony which have not been adequately addressed in criticism of Bosman's work until now. Often critics talk of "irony" and "ironic intent" in Bosman's work as if these were self-evident and not a matter of narrative construction. An example of this is the way in which critics often assume that the presence of irony in Bosman's stories automatically signals an *opposite* meaning to the one explicitly stated. This is, as Hutcheon points out, a common misconception of the "relational" politics of irony. While the relationship between what is said and what is unsaid is defined by difference, this difference is not necessarily a binary opposition or "logical contradiction" (Hutcheon, 1994: 61-66).

The presence of irony in the Oom Schalk stories does not necessarily mean that the extreme racism expressed by Schalk is negated by the irony. It only indicates that the view of the ironist is something other than that which is explicitly presented.

The assumption made by the critics above derives from a position which has not theorised irony properly and therefore suggests that by simply creating irony in the stories (it is not specified how this is achieved) Bosman's intention is to address racism in South African society. Bosman's ironic intention cannot be evaluated until it has been established how that intention is textually constructed as different from the racist ironies that Schalk often creates. Therefore, not only must irony be theorised properly, but the narrative structures which are used to construct that irony must be made explicit. Furthermore, the terms in which the irony is constructed determines the direction (and therefore the target) of the irony and the intent of the ironist. Determining Bosman's intent requires first considering the way in which the frame narrator ironically frames Oom Schalk's narration and the criteria that he uses to do so, before authorial intent can be established. (The pronoun 'he' will be used to refer to the frame narrator as this narrative device is indicative of Bosman's intention).

The lack of attention to the way in which irony is made possible by the narrative structure of the stories and the different levels of irony which are deployed has led to misrepresentations of Bosman's use of irony in his short stories. MacKenzie points out that Bosman's "very distinctive brand of irony" has "not always been properly interpreted by all readers of the Schalk Lourens stories" (1993: 13). In order to address Bosman's ironic intent a basis for considering 'intent', which avoids assumptions for which there is insufficient evidence or for which the evidence is misleading, must first be established.

Representing Intent

Because *Mafeking Road* is the only collection of short stories which Bosman compiled himself, it is often assumed that this collection indicates a higher level of authorial intent than the stories collected after his death. It is for this reason that some studies of Bosman's short stories have focused primarily on this collection (Adendorff, 1985, Hunt, 1994). All of these studies use a common basis of analysis by focusing on the "constituent and integrative" (MacKenzie, 2000: 81) literary elements of the stories in *Mafeking Road*. The collection's use of "the same storytelling figure [Oom Schalk Lourens] in all but one of its twenty-one stories; its unified regional setting; its use of similar characters or character-types; and the

thematic continuities of the stories” (MacKenzie, 2000: 81) suggest that this collection of short stories may “legitimately” be considered a short story cycle: a form which is “positioned somewhere between the coherence of the novel proper and the disconnectedness of the ‘mere’ collection of autonomous short stories...” (Marais in Mackenzie, 2000: 84).

While the structural continuities and the consistency with which they occur in *Mafeking Road* may well form a legitimate basis for a study, this notion is based on the assumption that this collection of stories is truly representative of Bosman’s intent.

The publishing history of this volume of short stories has suggested that the compilation of *Mafeking Road* might well have been more a question of economic rather than literary imperatives. As Gray and MacKenzie (1998: 9) point out in their introduction to the Anniversary Edition of *Mafeking Road*, the stories selected and the way in which they were edited might not reflect a particular intention. Gray and MacKenzie quote from a letter Bosman wrote to Roy Campbell about the publication of *Mafeking Road*:

I collected together such stories as I could lay my hands on. But I was in such a hurry to get the book out that I didn’t do what I had always intended: i.e., to restore them as far as possible to the way they were originally, when I wrote them. Many details of the book have offended, quite a number of them. The result is that pieces of it were cut as if for reasons of space. Various editors also inflicted emendations of their own. Consequently, my stories in *Mafeking Road* now only appear in mutilated form. In the end, perhaps the picture is not much affected. But I am acutely aware of this. (in Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 9)

What is clear from this excerpt is that if the collection as a whole were to be taken as an indication of Bosman’s authorial intent, then any such suggestion must take into consideration the haste with which the collection was put together and the availability of material from which to choose. Abrahams, and more recently Gray and MacKenzie, have spent years researching, reassembling and compiling the uncollected and unpublished manuscripts which Bosman left at his death. Bosman’s letter to Campbell suggests that, in the time given, he might not have had the opportunity to formulate any coherent ‘plan’ for the compilation of the stories selected and that his primary concern was to get a collection published in the hopes of publication abroad (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 9-10).

Of the twenty-one stories which Bosman chose, ten had already been reprinted in journals other than those in which they had originally appeared. While this is not in itself an indication of the popularity of the stories, the magazine editors' choices would suggest an evaluation of merit which might have guided Bosman's choice of stories for inclusion in *Mafeking Road*. Bosman's selections may have had less to do with personal choice or overall intention than a desire to republish his most popular stories.

Bosman's own title for the collection submitted to the publishers was *Starlight on the Veld*, after one of the stories in the collection (Rosenberg, 1976: 195). "Starlight on the Veld" is a love story, whereas the publisher's choice of "Mafeking Road" as the title story indicates a preference for a more serious historical theme and therefore has had some influence on the way in which the entire collection is, and has been, viewed. The choice of publisher's title over the author's title seems even more inexplicable when one considers the preponderance of love stories in the collection. Of the twenty-one stories in *Mafeking Road*, eleven are love stories of one kind or another. A similar fate befell the second collection of Bosman's stories which was compiled by Abrahams and published under the title *Unto Dust*, after the story of the same name included in the collection. The explicit politics of the theme of the story chosen as the title story implies a thematic interest in social commentary as an organising principle of the collection. MacKenzie (2001: 9) suggests, however, that at the time of his death, Bosman was planning to publish another collection of short stories under the title of *Seed-time and Harvest*, after a story of the same name. While the contents of this proposed collection are not known, the title story, "Seed-time and Harvest" is a story which deals with a man's relationship with his son and not any historical or social theme.

Bosman's desire to have the stories in *Mafeking Road* collected in their original form (i.e. the way that they were originally written, before they were edited and printed in journals) is also significant. It precludes the idea of a retrospective unified purpose or 'intent' in terms of the collection as a whole. They were written sporadically over a period of sixteen years prior to their submission for publication. The last story to be chosen for inclusion in *Mafeking Road*, "Mampoer", was first published in *South African Opinion* in 1946. To suggest that Bosman had a particular structure for a short-story collection in mind sixteen years prior to the publication of

the latest story to be included in the collection assumes an early intention for which there is little or no evidence. As MacKenzie also points out:

Significantly, when he collected together the stories, he omitted several that came in the temporal sequence in which they were originally written, and decided, moreover, to include one 'non-Oom Schalk' story ("Brown Mamba"). These details suggest that he conceived of *Mafeking Road* as a collection of the 'best' of the stories he had published by 1946, rather than as a predetermined sequence written to an earlier 'master plan'. (2000: 82)

It is for this reason that any study of intent on Bosman's part must be grounded in an approach which not only takes into consideration the formal properties of Bosman's short stories, but the degree to which the publishing history of the stories has affected the way in which Bosman's work has been presented and consequently viewed. The basis for such an approach has recently been provided with the publication of the Anniversary Edition of Bosman's works.

Of particular interest is the way in which the editor, Craig MacKenzie, has chosen to redefine the approach to Bosman's Oom Schalk stories. As mentioned earlier, the Anniversary Edition makes a generic distinction between the Oom Schalk stories and the other Marico stories on the basis of the narrative technique used in the stories. All of the stories which MacKenzie and Gray consider to be narrated by the storyteller figure of Oom Schalk (the only exception being "Brown Mamba") are collected into three volumes. This distinction is significant in that it foregrounds the narrative function of Oom Schalk as a basis for the analysis of the stories and consequently Bosman's intent in writing these stories. It avoids the conflation of these stories with others that have the same or similar thematic or socio-historical interests or share a similar cultural or geographical milieu. The 'path' to Bosman's intention in using the storyteller figure of Oom Schalk is sought through an examination of the narratorial characteristics of Oom Schalk and the way in which he is constituted in the stories. The critical trajectory implied in this approach attempts to avoid the more subjective assumptions implicit in ideologically-loaded approaches or approaches which are based on personal preferences, by concentrating on a more formalistic approach.

The chronological ordering of the stories in *Unto Dust* and *Seed-Time and Harvest* allows Bosman's stories to be considered in the order in which they were

written and originally published. This provides for a more objective analysis of elements of progression or variation in Bosman's use of this storytelling figure over time. It also breaks with the Abrahams tradition of collecting stories together on the basis of perceived merit, thematic interest or general popularity.

Narrative Basis of the Oom Schalk stories

In *The Oral-Style South African Short Story in English* (1999) MacKenzie traces the development of the oral-style short story in South Africa from the early part of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. In his study he identifies certain authors who represent different stages in the evolution of this short story form, from a comparatively simple literary imitation of the oral tale as characterised by the stories of Drayson and Boyle, to a more complex, self-reflexive literary adaptation (MacKenzie, 1999: 9). He suggests that the most sophisticated form of the type is to be found in the short stories of Herman Charles Bosman (MacKenzie, 1999: 3). In this study he not only examines the narrative heritage which Bosman draws on as a basis for his short stories but also the complexity and self-consciousness of Bosman's adaptation of this narrative form.

MacKenzie is not the first to consider the literary precedents for Bosman's short stories. The use of the storytelling figure is not one which was peculiar to Bosman within the tradition of South African writing nor one which is peculiarly South African. Extensive research has been done on the possible genesis of Bosman's use of the literary adaptation of the oral tale. Recognising Bosman's explicit admiration for American writers such as Poe, Twain, Harte, Runyon and others, critics have examined his use of these writers as 'inspiration' or models for his own writing (Gray, 1986, Roberts, 1984, Schopen, 1984, Titlestad, 1987). Gray (1979) and Pereira (1985 in Gray 1986) discuss the possible influences on Bosman of South African writers such as Smith, Glanville, Prance, Gibbon and Scully. Abrahams (1980) also examines the possible influence that Bosman's friend and contemporary, Aegidius Blignaut, might have had on Bosman's writing. MacKenzie (1993, 1999, 2001) develops the idea of Bosman's relationship to the storytelling traditions of his South African predecessors. MacKenzie constructs a genealogy which suggests a development of the oral-style short story in South Africa, culminating, in its most

sophisticated form, in Herman Charles Bosman's short stories. A long ignored, and potentially fruitful area of influence has also been brought to the fore by the recent publication *Verborge Skatte*, a selection of Bosman's work in Afrikaans (De Kock, 2001).

What these studies clarify is not any clear-cut influence which can account for Bosman's use of the short story form, but rather a body of literature which reveals that Bosman's work in this form was influenced by an already established tradition of short story writing both within and outside South Africa. The conventions of the oral-style short story, which Bosman deploys in his stories, were already well established by the 1930s. The South African fireside tale had been an established form for over half a century by the time Bosman began to write his stories. Bosman's stories are a "redeployment" (to use MacKenzie's term) of the existing conventions of the oral-style short story form rather than a simple imitation (1993: 15).

To evaluate Bosman's manipulation of existing conventions, MacKenzie (1999: 13) adopts a formalist approach to the narratological "intricacies" of this genre. In adopting a narratological model derived from Bakhtin, he provides a more objective and comprehensive basis for an evaluation of Bosman's use of the oral-style short story. Bosman's deliberate use of a particular genre and the consequences of this self-conscious use of form can be evaluated with limited reference to biographical and socio-historical inferences. These in turn provide a valid basis from which to discuss Bosman's deployment of irony and his "ironic intent" in the short stories.

Building on the "skeleton" provided by Pereira's research, MacKenzie shows that the short stories that Bosman writes are a combination of two qualitatively different traditions of storytelling. One is the tradition of the fireside tale which derives from an oral tradition and the other is the modern short story. MacKenzie (1999: 6-7) makes the point that Bosman's stories are modern short stories and that he appears to have used the existing conventions of the fireside tale because they add another dimension to his work. Bosman's stories are not simply a literary imitation of an oral story: they deliberately exploit the characteristics both of the modern short story and the fireside tale. The elements which MacKenzie suggests Bosman exploits from each genre are made explicit in this description of Bosman's marriage of the traditional genre of the fireside tale and the modern short story:

Bosman took over the older genre of the fireside tale – for its qualities of intimacy and its congruency with the milieu he wished to describe – but introduced into this familiar genre the new requirements of economy and trenchant social commentary...he takes over many of the features of the oral tale – a narrator, a conversational narrative style, an appropriate milieu, and an implied audience - but introduces elements that are among the hallmarks of the modern short story – economy, irony, structural tautness, social critique. (1999: 142-143)

In describing the way in which the traditional fireside story and the modern short story are combined in Bosman's stories, MacKenzie's formalist approach is more detailed than those that have been previously attempted. He (1993: 3-4) adopts Bakhtin's modification of Eichenbaum's work on oral-style narratives to make the theoretical distinction between a simple imitation of an oral narrative, "*skaz*" (Eichenbaum, 1994: 87) and a more complex, self-conscious imitation of oral narration which Bakhtin terms "parodistic *skaz*" (Bakhtin, 1984: 191-192).

Eichenbaum's formulation of the term "*skaz*" was as follows: "By *skaz* I mean that form of narrative prose which, in its lexicon, syntax and selection of intonations, reveals an orientation toward the oral speech of a narrator" (in MacKenzie, 1999: 4). MacKenzie goes on to argue that, even though the *skaz* form imitates an orally presented narrative, it is nonetheless a literary form and the illusion of direct oral presentation is constructed within the constraints of literary form (1999: 5). This is achieved by constructing a fictional audience which a fictional narrator directly addresses and which exists on the same ontological plane as the fictional narrator. This direct address to the fictional audience is then mediated through a frame narrator to the reader, who exists on a different ontological level from the fictional audience and narrator (MacKenzie, 1999: 5-7).

MacKenzie suggests that in simple *skaz* the relationship between the frame narrator and the fictional narrator is clearly delineated and that there is very little difference between the ideologies or "world views" expressed by each (1999: 7). MacKenzie identifies this *skaz* form as the dominant form in the earlier "artless" tales of Drayson, Boyle, Ingram, Scully and FitzPatrick where, "a clearly identifiable audience and/or frame narrator is present, and the relationship between it and the fictional narrator is fairly simple and transparent" (1999: 7). In these stories, although the possibility for dissension exists between the frame narrator and the fictional narrator by virtue of the ontological gap between the two, the gap between them is never exploited. The lack of exploitation of this gap indicates that the author agrees

with the world view of the fictional narrator. In other words, the intent of the author approximates that of the fictional narrator to a degree which is not far removed from conventional authorial narration.

The oral-style narration then merely becomes a strategy for authenticating an exotic context. The idiolect and attitudes of the community are communicated through this oral imitation and form part of the realist presentation of the remote community of the story. Appropriation of the discourse of colonial communities in oral-style narratives set at the outposts of the empire was common in nineteenth-century colonial literature and an integral part of the colonial project. MacKenzie (1999: 56) suggests that FitzPatrick's short stories provide a good example of the *skaz* form with the attendant colonial atmosphere.

MacKenzie points out that although FitzPatrick's story, "The Outspan", for example, uses multiple narrators and a frame narrator, the different "voices do not compete in any ideological sense" (1999: 59). The result is an unselfconsciously exotic tale in which the author makes no effort to distance himself from the fictional narrator and allows the discourse to filter unmediated through the frame narrator to the reader. As MacKenzie says:

There is no discernible irony here...The various narrators may speak with different inflections, but they are all companions around the campfire and as such enjoy a kind of comradely quality. This also applies to the frame narrator, whose task it is simply to relay the ethos of the fireside yarn-swapping in nineteenth-century Africa. In the context of the period, the story's appeal would rest on its evocation of 'real-life adventure in Africa.' The close relation to 'lived experience' which the story claims gives it a quality of 'authenticity' that was no doubt intended to appeal to the metropolitan reader fascinated by the more exotic outer reaches of the colonies. (1999: 60)

MacKenzie suggests that, in contrast to the *skaz* or oral-style short stories produced by writers like FitzPatrick, the short stories of Perceval Gibbon and Herman Charles Bosman represent an evolution in the *skaz* form which signals a movement from what he terms the "artless" tale to the "artful" tale (1999: 9). This process is marked by a more covert use of the frame narrator. In Bosman's Oom Schalk stories the frame narrator is by no means identical with or even similar to the storyteller Oom Schalk, who seems to dominate the narrative (MacKenzie, 1999: 7). Paradoxically, the apparent absence of any clearly defined character as the frame narrator, does not

signal a greater degree of complicity between frame narrator and fictional narrator, but the opposite.

The relationship between the fictional narrator of the story and the frame narrator is not explicitly determined but must be deduced from the interaction between their different narrative positions: the fictional narrator in the fabular context and the frame narrator as mediator between the fictional narrator and readers. Using Bakhtin's term MacKenzie identifies this form of story as "parodistic *skaz*" (1993: 4). Unlike the earlier simple *skaz* form, parodistic *skaz* exploits the ontological space between fictional narrator and frame narrator in order to "stylize" the oral discourse presented. "Stylizing" the narrator's way of speaking distances the author from the discourse of the fictional narrator by making it "foreign" (1999: 8).

Parodistic *skaz*, on the other hand, introduces a storyteller figure precisely because of the individual attributes, attitudes and intonation that he brings to the story. These are distinct from the author's own voice and attitudes and a dialogic structure is therefore set up in which the author's intention is 'refracted' through the storyteller's act of narration. (MacKenzie, 1993: 4)

Furthermore, MacKenzie points out that unlike the "monologic (single-voiced)" structure of simple *skaz*, parodistic *skaz* produces "dialogic (double-voiced)" narrative structures which are "inherently more complex and introduce the possibility of irony and parody" (1999: 8). MacKenzie goes on to point out that this more complex form of *skaz* is to be found in the stories of Bosman where the different narrative "voices" are in competition with each other and the medium of this dialogue is often irony: "There are competing voices in the stories of Gibbon and Bosman, and the relationship in each case between the fictional narrator, the frame narrator and/or audience is mediated by layers of irony" (1999: 9). While I agree with MacKenzie's analysis of the narrative structure of the Oom Schalk stories, I believe he fails to address the implications of the deployment of irony in this narrative context. The deployment of irony in Bosman's Oom Schalk stories relies heavily on what is implied or not explicitly stated in the narrative. I will argue that what is "unsaid" in Schalk's narrative becomes the "said" of the frame narrator's narrative and that the resultant irony is an indication of Bosman's intent.

Chapter 2

Problems of Irony

The problem with the attribution of irony to any text is that this necessarily raises the issue of intention – the intention not only of the ironist but also that of the person who attributes the irony, the interpreter or reader. The reason for this is that, as Hutcheon points out, irony has an evaluative “edge” (1994: 15). According to the conventions of irony, the attribution of irony to Bosman’s work implies intent on the part of Bosman as ironist. Irony implies a certain attitude toward the subject of the irony on the part of the ironist. For the ironist, “irony is the intentional transmission of both information and an evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented” (Hutcheon, 1994: 11). Because the “evaluative attitude” is something “other” than what is explicitly stated, the “intent” of irony also involves the way in which irony is interpreted. The difficulty with interpreting irony, as Hutcheon points out here, is that the intention of irony is always unstated. Irony is “the mode of the unsaid, the unheard, the unseen” (Hutcheon, 1994: 9) in that it derives its evaluative “edge” more from what is left *unsaid* than what is explicitly *said*. “While [irony] may come into being through the semantic playing off of the stated against the unstated, irony is a ‘weighted’ mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favor of the silent and the unsaid” (Hutcheon, 1994: 37).

The “weighted” emphasis on the unsaid is partly the consequence of the role the interpreter plays in the creation of ironic meaning. Irony is not something which is simply hidden in the text to be discovered by the interpreter. Nevertheless, because ironic meaning is so dependent on what is unsaid, the role that the interpreter plays in the attribution and interpretation of irony is a demanding one. The interpreter must pick up on certain textual cues which signal the text as ironic, and then evaluate what the irony “means” or what the ironic intention of the ironist is. As Hutcheon points out, “irony isn’t irony until it is interpreted as such” (1994: 6). The interpreter must first attribute irony for it to exist and he must also interpret what the irony “means”. In this way the interpreter is also implicated in the process of creating “ironic meaning”. As Hutcheon points out, “From the point of view of the *interpreter*, irony

is an interpretive and intentional move: it is the making of **meaning** in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an **attitude** toward both the said and unsaid” (1994: 11).

Criticism, as an act of interpretation, has a major role to play both in the attribution of irony and in the interpretation of the ironic meaning. The extent to which irony is attributed at all as well as the meaning which is generated from this attribution is as much a function of interpretation as it is the intent of the ironist: “[T]he attributing of irony to a text or utterance is a complex intentional act on the part of the interpreter, one that has both semantic and evaluative dimensions, in addition to the possible inferring of ironist intent (from either the text or statements by the ironist)” (Hutcheon, 1994: 13).

This act of interpretation is not a value-free process on the part of the interpreter as he “as agent performs an act – attributes both meanings and motives – and does so in a particular situation and context, for a particular purpose, and with particular means” (Hutcheon, 1994: 12). The attribution and interpretation of irony is thus something which must take into consideration the discursive context in which irony is created.

Interpretation is a dynamic process which changes when practised in different discursive communities. Hutcheon suggests that it is these discursive communities that are essential to the attribution and interpretation of irony. She argues that it is the discursive context which “*enables* the irony to happen” (Hutcheon, 1994: 89) and that,

in ironic discourse, the whole communicative process is not only ‘altered and distorted’ but also *made possible* by those different worlds to which each of us differently belongs and which form the basis of the expectations, assumptions, and preconceptions that we bring to the complex processing of discourse, of language in use. (Hutcheon, 1994: 89)

The role that discursive communities have to play in attributing and interpreting irony is particularly evident in the role that criticism has played in the interpretation of irony in Bosman’s work. Titlestad (1987: 2) suggests that the dominance of a specific kind of South African criticism of Bosman’s work has resulted “in insular parochial criticism, which unfortunately has characterised too much of the debate about Bosman until now”. Attwell (1989: 100) argues that,

particularly since the seventies, South African culture has been dominated by a particular kind of “politicization” which is marked by, “an absorption into History that allegorizes the smallest acts”. Attwell (1989: 99) also suggests that the dominance of this historical presence in criticism has led to a situation where South African writers face the possibility, “of having their teleology, whether liberal, nationalist or radical, continually challenged, and often eroded, by a morbidly protracted historical suspension”. Hunt (1994: 6) suggests that it was only after the publication of Sach’s “Preparing Ourselves for Freedom” in 1990 and Ndebele’s *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991) that critical interest again turned its attention to the full range of literary possibilities in assessing South African literary texts.

The narrow, politically-driven line of criticism referred to above has left its mark and it is difficult to approach Bosman’s work without phrases like “social commentary”, “subversive irony” or “criticism of the community that he describes”. In many cases, however, the attribution of heightened social or political conscience to Bosman is a misreading of his irony. While it is true that Bosman had a keen eye for social inconsistency and hypocrisy, and that the absurdities of South African society did not escape his pen, to suggest that he was morally or politically committed to a particular ideological agenda in his short stories is inaccurate. It is however an assumption which has led to a misreading of the irony in his stories and of his ironic intent even in some of the more sophisticated analyses of his work.

In a sense this is inevitable, as irony is notoriously hard to pin down and is often misinterpreted. Hutcheon (1994: 14) suggests that there are “*always*” problems in the interpretation of irony: “between the intended irony that goes unperceived and the unintended that becomes irony by being perceived, there is room for many kinds and degrees of misunderstanding, misfire, and fizzle, as well as of understanding and complicity” (Chambers in Hutcheon, 1994: 14). This conceded, however, the textual basis of the construction of the irony within Bosman’s Oom Schalk stories is a concrete basis for an approach to irony that has often been ignored by critics of his work.

Even MacKenzie, who recognises the narrative complexity of the construction of irony in Bosman’s short stories, sometimes reverts to a more conventional interpretation of his irony. One such example can be found in his analysis of a passage from “Makapan’s Caves” (MacKenzie, 1993: 14). In this passage Oom Schalk relates his father’s advice to him and his brother as they are leaving to go to

into battle: "Don't forget to read your Bible, my sons," he called out as we rode away. "Pray the Lord to help you, and when you shoot always aim for the stomach" (Bosman, 1998: 66). MacKenzie seems to agree with Trump's suggestion that the "juxtaposition of religion and brutality in warfare is not accidental ... and serves as a powerful indictment of the strategic Boer tendency to couple self-serving militarism with the belief in divine sanction" (1993: 14). In this instance Trump and MacKenzie misinterpret the irony by imposing an historical inference which is inappropriate to the way in which the irony is constructed in this passage. To relate the advice that Schalk's father gives him to a "self-serving militarism" and a "strategic" national "tendency" is not only to misread the advice but also to misread the irony and in its place in the story.

MacKenzie, like Trump, suggests that the advice given by Schalk's father is indicative of a self-conscious, strategic mindset which is formulated at a societal level specifically by the Boers in order to justify acts of genocide. The advice is indicative of a society where brutality in war is commonplace. The advice is a reformulation of the well-known quotation attributed to Oliver Cromwell, "Put your trust in God, but keep your powder dry" (Jeffares and Gray, 1995: 262) and pre-dates by some fifteen years "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition" which has been attributed to a navy chaplain at the battle of Pearl Harbour (Jeffares and Gray, 1995: 80).

To interpret the irony of Schalk's father's advice as anything more than wry humour on the part of Oom Schalk or Bosman is to impose an ideological self-consciousness on the text which is inappropriate. While ironic intent is a largely unstated, it is limited by what is said and the context in which it is said. For the Marico audience being addressed by Oom Schalk, the advice would be amusing in the sense that although they might not know that such sentiments have a long history this sentiment would be familiar to them. The acceptability of the black humour in "Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition" in the 1940s suggests that Bosman's readers of the 1930s would not have the same objections to this kind of irony that Trump and MacKenzie seem to have. Their analysis of this passage incorporates a historical and moral perspective inappropriate or unavailable to the ironist, Bosman, and his society. Furthermore, the exact wording of the advice and the way in which it is reported by Oom Schalk is significant in determining ironic intention.

The irony of Oom Schalk's father's advice explicitly operates at a personal level as it is addressed to Schalk and his brother. Oom Schalk's direct reproduction of

the advice and commentary on it in his narrative frames the advice in an ironic way. The irony of the story is, however, more complex than critics like Trump and MacKenzie have allowed as they often ignore the degree of complicity between Bosman as ironist and the community which he describes. This complicity goes to the heart of Schalk's father's advice as it deals with morality, or more accurately, the impossibility of morality in battle. The irony of Schalk's retelling of his father's advice does not deal with the question of whether or not it is right to kill people in times of war. This is taken as given. The irony does not address the notion of divine sanction, as suggested by Trump and MacKenzie, but the notion of divine intervention.

The advice suggests that belief in divine power is all very well, but there are some things best not left to the will of God alone and it is very practical for anyone going to war. The point is that the two elements that determine the irony here are the efficacy of belief relative to the material threat posed by war. The relationship between war and brutality is seen as inevitable, not ironic. The relationship between religious belief and pragmatism is where the irony lies. This point is made more explicit by Schalk's explanation that his father's advice was "typical of my father's deeply religious nature, and he knew it was easier to hit a man in the stomach than in the head: and it is just as good, because no man can live long after his intestines have been shot away" (Bosman, 1998: 66).

As disturbing as it might seem to sensitive readers, as it stands on its own, the irony here is not an attempt to make a grand political statement but an attempt at humour, a matter of grotesque wit rather than political analysis. It is a comment which addresses its irony primarily at the fictional audience that Oom Schalk is relating his story to. Schalk's irony in this example is not inconsistent with Bosman's own sense of humour. As a friend of Bosman's, Gordon Vorster, once said about Bosman's attitude to politics: "He did not think in terms of Sir De Villiers Graaf or Helen Suzman ... To him, a few terrorists on the border or a few corpses on the street would be matters for wit. To him, Africa was far greater than these temporary little things we do to it" (in Rosenberg, 1976: 208).

Although Schalk's father's advice and the inherent irony of the passage can stand alone, the advice does take on a greater ironic significance as a constituent part of the irony of the story as a whole. When Schalk shoots the faithful servant, Nongaas, in the stomach he says, "I jumped up quickly and shot at him, aiming at the

stomach. He fell over like a sack of potatoes and I was thankful for my father's advice" (Bosman, 1998: 70). This is, however, a different level of structural irony that incorporates structural elements in the story other than the advice given to Schalk by his father, for its effect.

The point here is that not every incidence of irony in the short stories is an indication of 'serious' intent on the part of Bosman and perhaps more importantly, there is a distinctly different relationship between ironies addressed to the fictional audience by the fictional narrator and those constructed for the readership by the frame narrator. These distinctly different audiences (fictional audience and actual readers) are also not simply to be inferred from what we know about Bosman's society at the time when he wrote the stories or indeed the community described by the stories. One must first consider the way in which these audiences are constructed and positioned in the text, especially if there is to be any discussion of ironic intent. As Hutcheon says:

Unlike most other discursive strategies, irony *explicitly* sets up (and exists within) a relationship between ironist and audiences (the one being intentionally addressed, the one that actually makes the irony happen, and the one excluded) that is political in nature, in the sense that "[e]ven while provoking laughter, irony invokes notions of hierarchy and subordination, judgement and perhaps even moral superiority." (Chamberlain, 1989: 98 in Hutcheon, 1994: 17)

Prior to MacKenzie's *The Oral-Style South African Short Story in English* (1999), no-one had attempted to address the way in which the irony in Bosman's stories was formulated in terms of the audiences to which it was addressed. While MacKenzie has pointed out that Bosman's intention in using Oom Schalk is to be ironic, he has not accounted for how this irony is constructed at different levels within the stories. MacKenzie's contribution is invaluable in that he identifies the role of the frame narrator in creating a mediating structure between the fictional narrator, Oom Schalk, and authorial intent. He also establishes the frame narrator as an integral part of the modernist short story tradition. What he does not explicitly do however is discuss the extent to which the framing of the Oom Schalk stories implicitly defines two qualitatively different audiences on which the irony of the stories depends – the Marico audience and the audience which is addressed by the frame narrator.

Setting up the irony

In his discussion of the narrative structure of the Oom Schalk stories, MacKenzie describes the different narrative levels implied by the presence of the fictional narrator, Oom Schalk and the frame narrator. MacKenzie goes on to describe the way in which Schalk's manner of telling the stories implies an audience. Using a passage from "The Love Potion" MacKenzie identifies the "you" being addressed by Schalk as a fictional audience: "The 'you' mentioned by Oom Schalk is an implied interlocutor (not the reader) who exists on the same ontological plane as the fictional narrator" (1999: 7). What MacKenzie does not explicitly address is how the implied audience of the frame narrator is constituted and the effect that this has on the irony of the stories.

MacKenzie claims that Oom Schalk is a visible presence in the stories, whereas the presence of the frame narrator is only "to be deduced from the narrative structure of the stories" (1999: 7). This is not quite true as the frame narrator is explicitly present at the beginning of all of the Oom Schalk stories. While Oom Schalk's comments are directed at his Marico audience the "(said Oom Schalk Lourens)" of the frame narrator, is evidence of another narrative voice which is directly addressed to the implied reader, not the fictional Marico audience. This voice exists on a separate ontological plane from Oom Schalk and his community. This level of narrative is essentially metafictional in nature in that it textually signals that the tale that is about to be told is a retelling and recasting of the original Oom Schalk story. The frame narrator's presence is particularly important as it mediates the contact between the reader and Oom Schalk's story. The way in which the story is mediated through the frame narrator depends the way in which the frame narrator and his implied audience is constituted. This in turn, is an expression of authorial intention. The problem is that the individual characteristics which define the frame narrator and the narrative implications of these characteristics are often ignored.

The paucity of words with which the frame narrator is introduced is deceptive. The use of this narrative level introduces a complex interplay between the implied audience addressed by the frame narrator and the implied fictional audience addressed by the storyteller, Oom Schalk (MacKenzie, 1999: 145). These distinctly different audiences are distinguished narratologically, linguistically and temporally by the frame narrator. The way in which the fictional narrator of the Oom Schalk stories is

constructed is important as it affects the way in which the reader is positioned in terms of the fictional narrator, Oom Schalk.

Of the sixty-two stories which are collected by Gray and MacKenzie in the Anniversary Edition of *Mafeking Road, Unto Dust and Seed-Time and Harvest* as Oom Schalk stories, only ten do not start with “(Oom Schalk Lourens said)” or some variation on this phrase. Sometimes the word order is reversed as in “Makapan’s Caves”: “(said Oom Schalk Lourens)” (Bosman, 1998: 64) and in others there are slight modifications such as in “Mafeking Road”: “(Oom Schalk Lourens said modestly)” (Bosman, 1998: 53). Variations of this convention use other forms of parenthesis as in “Bechuana Interlude”: “– Oom Schalk Lourens said –” (Bosman, 1998: 77) and in “The Gramophone”: “Oom Schalk Lourens said” (Bosman, 1998: 92).

The simple formula “(said Oom Schalk Lourens)” (Bosman, 1998: 64) implicitly signals a rich convention that defines the discursive communities or “audiences” created by the use of the frame narrator. It simultaneously signals the presence of the two storytelling traditions which MacKenzie refers to as the “fireside tale” and the “modern literary story” but the relationship between these two narrative traditions is not an equal marriage. The narrative structure which Bosman uses subordinates one form to the other.

The “said” in “(Oom Schalk Lourens said)” does not simply determine the presence of Oom Schalk as storyteller and the oral style of his narration, but also indicates a temporal dislocation between the fictional narrator and the frame narrator by virtue of the use of the past tense. This temporal dislocation situates the oral narrative as earlier than the frame narrator’s act of narration. In terms of reception, the oral narrative has less immediacy and the temporal gap between the narrative of the frame narrator and that of the fictional narrator, Oom Schalk, foregrounds the frame narration over the direct oral-style narration of Schalk. This temporal gap introduces the possibility of a historical perspective for the reader.

In the story “Makapan’s Caves”, the events which Oom Schalk relates date back to 1854 (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 12) and earlier. The story is being retold by the frame narrator to an urban 1930s audience with no personal experience of the events described. Although Schalk is telling the story some fifty years after the events described, this is within the living memory of his community. In this way the audience being addressed by Oom Schalk and the audience addressed by the frame

narrator are distinctly different. The Marico community addressed by Oom Schalk is probably of the same generation as himself or perhaps a generation younger but the audience addressed by the frame narrator is roughly contemporaneous with Bosman. Therefore the audience which Oom Schalk addresses is at least one or two generations older than the audience which is addressed by the frame narrator.

The same hierarchical division of the two narratives is implicit in the Oom Schalk of the introductory phrase. The relationship between the frame narrator and Oom Schalk can be linguistically reconstructed as an “I – he” relationship. This first-person to third-person relationship implies a significant distance in terms of narrative authority. The frame narrator (the “I” to the implied readers’ “you”) is the highest narrative authority represented in the text and mediates the meaning of the narrative told by Schalk (constructed as “he” to the reader’s and frame narrator’s “I”). Oom Schalk and the Marico audience to whom he addresses the story (the “you” to his “I”) always exist at a lower level of narrative authority than the frame narrator and the implied reader. In this way, although Oom Schalk exploits the conventions of a first person narrator, he is a fictional narrator, a storyteller whose narrative authority is limited by the narrative position which is defined by the frame narrator. While this precludes any *direct* relationship between Oom Schalk and the implied reader or *direct* identification of his voice with the authorial voice and therefore authorial intent, the frame narrator implicitly confers some narrative authority on Oom Schalk in ‘allowing’ him the narratorial “I”.

This ‘permission’ sometimes obscures the fact that the narrative space between the frame narrator and Schalk implies not only distance but judgement. An example of this narrative ‘prerogative’ being exercised can be found in the story “Mafeking Road”, where the “(Oom Schalk Lourens said modestly)” (Bosman, 1998: 53) implies the perception on the part of the frame narrator of a certain degree of self-consciousness in Oom Schalk. It is an awareness probably shared by the implied audience of the frame narrator, the reader, but not shared by the audience addressed by Oom Schalk, the Marico community. The Marico audience and Schalk are excluded from this awareness by virtue of their existence on a lower narrative level than that of the frame narrator and the implied reader.

The use of Afrikaans in the designation of “Oom” also stands in stark contrast to the English construction of the introductory phrase. The designation of “Oom” by the frame narrator is a mode of address which comes from the Afrikaans word for

“Uncle”. It is at once a familial designation and a term of respect given to older men. The implication is of a privileged patriarchal presence within the community which is not necessarily derived from Oom Schalk’s blood ties to the community but from his position within the community – his position as a teller of tales. The use of “Oom” in an English text signals the presence of two separate linguistic communities. This designation does not confer equal status on both languages in narrative terms. The language in which the story is written is English (the chosen language of the frame narrator), but in terms of the convention, this is a translation of the language in which the oral narrative was supposedly presented. The fictional audience which is addressed by Oom Schalk is Afrikaans-speaking. The reconstitution of his narrative in English by the frame narrator creates an audience which is English-speaking. The frame narrator’s choice of English is significant in cultural terms in that it defines the audience as primarily English-speaking and the self-conscious use of a translated narrative implies a certain confidence that the language will be able to express the full range of the translated language.

While the choice of English as the medium of narration creates a particular relationship between Oom Schalk’s narration and the narration of the frame narrator, the use of the designation ‘Oom’ and not ‘Uncle’ by the frame narrator is significant. The use of the Afrikaans term goes beyond an attempt at verisimilitude. It does not necessarily suggest a direct familial relationship, but it does function as a term of regard or respect and as such confers authority on Oom Schalk. It is a narrative acknowledgement of the value of the tradition that Oom Schalk’s storytelling represents. The coexistence of the Afrikaans oral-style tale and the modern story in Bosman’s stories creates a complex dialogic structure between the two narrative traditions which revolves around the translation of the original Bushveld tales into a modern form. His stories do not seek to undervalue the oral-style narrative and the tradition and language from which they derive but they do suggest an ‘evolution’ of a modern tradition from the old. It is for this reason that Bosman’s fictional practice belongs more firmly in the modernist tradition of storytelling than in the oral tradition. His stories are more ‘literary’ than they are oral and as result display the narrative complexity of other modernist texts.

As MacKenzie (1993: 2) points out, the form that Bosman uses as a basis for his stories is a well-established form, and the formal conventions of the oral-style short story when he was writing were well-known. Familiarity with this form of story

means that the audience would recognise the conventions of the oral-style short story and would also be conscious of any departure from the conventions of this type of tale. While not all of the readers of Bosman's stories were (or are) literary critics, they would nonetheless be familiar enough with the established conventions to engage meaningfully with Bosman's use of formal devices such as the frame narrator. However, the degree to which the frame narrator mediates Oom Schalk's narrative is often underestimated. The absence of any clearly defined personality belonging to the frame narrator in the stories related by Oom Schalk has sometimes created problems of interpretation. While the Oom Schalk type of narrator would be familiar to Bosman's readers, the way in which he is used by Bosman is different from the mode of the conventional oral-style short story. The way in which the stories conform to or depart from well-established conventions may not always be an expression of the skill of the storyteller, Oom Schalk, but a result of the intervention of the frame narrator in the narrative.

The use of the frame narrator in itself signals a narrative strategy which is characteristic of modernist fiction rather than the oral tale. The assimilation of the oral tale into the conventions of the modern short story implies a narrative hierarchy in which the literary conventions of modern fiction supersede those of the embedded oral tale. The relationship between Oom Schalk's oral discourse and the literary discourse of the story is structured according to the demands of a more self-consciously 'literary' hierarchy of form. The illusion of the realism of the oral discourse and the authority of Oom Schalk as fictional narrator is subverted by the implicit omnipresence of the frame narrator and the way in which the frame narrator is constituted in terms of the conventions which this narrative position employs.

In an article entitled "Bosman and Self-Conscious Fiction" Meihuizen (1991) places Bosman's short stories firmly in the realm of modernist fiction. In this article Meihuizen discusses Bosman's use of modernist narrative techniques in "Unto Dust" and "Old Transvaal Story". Although these two stories are not explicitly narrated by Oom Schalk, "Unto Dust" is considered to be an Oom Schalk story by MacKenzie and is therefore included in the Anniversary Edition of *Unto Dust*. Meihuizen examines how Bosman exploits the narrative conventions of the storyteller and suggests that Bosman's narrative practice is consistent with the "general practice" of modernist forms of involuted fiction. He suggests that although Bosman's narrative technique employs "conventional" narrative strategies that these techniques were

utilised in a way that is comparable to the “techniques and devices of the most sophisticated of self-conscious texts” (Meihuizen, 1991:42).

In order to demonstrate the sophistication of the narrative strategy of “the literary use of the storyteller”, MacKenzie (1999: 12) refers to Pereira’s example of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Although it is a novel, in terms of narrative practice it is a comparable modernist text which uses distinctly Modernist textual strategies to relay the narrative. *Heart of Darkness* uses a storyteller figure, Marlow, as a fictional narrator and an unnamed frame narrator who narrates the context of Marlow’s storytelling. Pereira (in MacKenzie, 1999: 12) argues that the way in which Marlow is used as a fictional narrator precludes his personality from being directly identified with that of Conrad. At the same time Marlow’s personality cannot be separated from the narrative in which he is a character. He suggests that the effect of this narrative structure is to create a more prominent distinction between author and fictional narrator: “What we have here is a shift from a fairly straightforward and inarguable distinction between teller and tale ... to an equally pronounced distinction between the author on one hand, and on the other, the fictional narrator through whom the story is mediated” (Pereira, 1985 in Gray, 1986: 103).

The comparison with *Heart of Darkness* is more useful than even Pereira or MacKenzie acknowledges when it comes to narrative structure. While Marlow functions as a kind of “framing device” (Pereira’s term) for Kurtz’s narrative, he is not, strictly speaking, the frame narrator. He is a character/narrator who relays Kurtz’s story to the reader but he, in turn, is framed in the narrative by an unnamed frame narrator, the narrating “I” of the opening sequence of the novel (Conrad, 1969: 3-10) and the concluding passage (Conrad, 1969: 131-132). The overall narrative structure is analogous to the structure of the Oom Schalk stories in the sense that the same multiplicity of narrative levels can be found in Bosman’s short stories.

In “Mafeking Road” Oom Schalk relates a story, in which he has a part to play (albeit only in his role of re-telling the story ‘properly’), to the reader. The position which he adopts here as fictional narrator/character is very similar to that of Marlow. Schalk in turn is framed by the unnamed narrative voice at the beginning of the story, “(Oom Schalk said, modestly)” (Bosman, 1998: 53). The difference between the frame narrator in *Heart of Darkness* and “Mafeking Road” is the degree to which the frame narrator in *Heart of Darkness* is more explicitly constructed and is therefore a more tangible presence in the narrative. The very tangibility of the frame narrator in

Heart of Darkness is interesting in that it makes explicit what is implicit in (not absent from) Bosman's Oom Schalk stories: the construction of an audience (the "you") to correspond to the narrating "I" of the frame narrator. Although the narrative structures of Bosman's stories and *Heart of Darkness* are similar, the way in which the structure is exploited by Bosman and Conrad is different.

In order to consider the possible implications of using the device of the frame narrator in Bosman's narratives it will be instructive to consider them in their more explicit form in Conrad's narrative. Conrad's novel opens with a clear indication of the presence of a frame narrator with the narrating "I" of the opening sequence. Not only does this reinforce the ultimate narrative authority of the frame narrator, but it indicates the presence of an interpretive community of which the frame narrator is a part. The "I" of the frame narrator is part of an audience of peers. In *Heart of Darkness* this 'audience' is physically present at the telling of the tale: the frame narrator, "The Lawyer", "The Director", "The Architect" and Marlow (Conrad, 1969: 4). The frame narrator and this group share a collective identity. They are all professional men who have a common bond, "the bond of the sea" (Conrad, 1969: 3) having all "'followed the sea' with reverence and affection" (Conrad, 1969: 5). It is this common understanding that forms the basis of this community and has "the effect of making us tolerant of each other's yarns – and convictions" (Conrad, 1969: 4). The lengthy introduction of the shared beliefs of this community describes the conventions and assumptions which underlie the frame narrator's mediation of Marlow's tale.

This introduction is marked by the frame narrator's differentiation of Marlow from the group in that he "was the only man of us who still 'followed the sea'" (Conrad, 1969: 6) and that his stories depart from the accepted convention of seamen's tales:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (Conrad, 1969: 7)

The explication of the conventions of the seaman's "yarn" and Marlow's self-conscious and explicitly stated departure from convention is part of the way in which

the frame narrator draws attention to and mediates Marlow's narrative to the reader. This tone of 'judgement' is more pronounced just prior to the beginning of Marlow's narrative when the frame narrator comments: "we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences" (Conrad, 1969: 10).

In differentiating Marlow's tale from the expectations of his audience and the conventions on which these expectations are based, the frame narrator explicitly provides a framework which 'sets up' the elements which must be considered in any evaluation of Marlow's seemingly "inconclusive" tale. The means by which Marlow's tale is differentiated from the norm are based on the shared beliefs of the audience which is defined by the frame narrator. By implication, the conventions made explicit by the frame narrator also form the basis of the reader's evaluation of Marlow's tale.

As Lenta (1989: 19) points out, the assumption is that the narrative is "addressing itself primarily to a group of readers with similar beliefs and attitudes". She goes on to point out that the way in which the narrative context of Marlow's tale is constructed "invites" the reader into complicity with the narrator: "The effect of Marlow's narrative is to make the reader one of the group of listeners on the deck of the yawl on the Thames. His language is full of appeals to experience and attitudes which it is presumed are common to the group" (1989: 28).

Although the narrative structure in Bosman's Oom Schalk stories is very similar, and in some ways identical to, the narrative structure in *Heart of Darkness*, the explicit explanation of the convention by the frame narrator in Conrad is not apparent in Bosman's stories. The absence of any *explicit* explanation of what terms the frame narrator uses to mediate between Oom Schalk as the fictional narrator, and the reader, does not mean that no convention is implied in the use of the frame narrator. It means that the audience is constructed by implication rather than explicitly. Furthermore, the audience which is addressed by the frame narrator in Bosman's short stories is constructed as being different from the community addressed by the narrator, Oom Schalk. The linguistic and temporal distinctions between these different implied audiences creates a significant distance between the values of the audience directly addressed by Schalk and the audience addressed by the frame narrator. The effect of Schalk's bigoted attitudes is more likely to convince his readers of his distance from them than to invite complicity. As a result the readers'

interpretation of Schalk's often all-too-conclusive tales is less likely to approximate to Schalk's interpretation than to the implied interpretation defined by a more 'modern' sensibility which is suggested by the frame narrator.

The close identification of audience and frame narrator in *Heart of Darkness* seems to suggest a different narrative strategy from that of Bosman's Oom Schalk stories. While the effect of Conrad and Bosman's uses of the frame narrator are different in some ways, the methods that they employ are similar. Both writers use implicit structural cues which mark the constant 'presence' of the frame narrator rather than intruding obviously on the fictional world of the narrative. Both Oom Schalk and Marlow are permitted complete narrative control *within* the parameters defined by the frame narrators. An example of this constant presence in *Heart of Darkness* is the use of double parentheses which is a constant reminder that Marlow's narration is being constituted within the framework of the frame narrator. Another example is the symbolic 'parenthesis' of the image of the "preaching buddha in European clothes and without a lotus flower", (Conrad, 1969: 9) at the beginning of the novel, which is repeated, slightly modified, at the end in the "pose of a meditating buddha" (Conrad, 1969: 131).

This meditative image is repeated in the reaction of the audience on the boat who sit immobile until the Director says "We have lost the first of the ebb" (Conrad, 1969: 131). This is an implicit reference to the earlier comment about Marlow's inconclusive tale, and acts as a conclusion to Marlow's indeterminate ending "But I couldn't. I couldn't tell her. It would have been too dark – too dark altogether" (Conrad, 1969: 131). Reflecting on Marlow's tale and the lie to Kurtz's "intended", the frame narrator then raises his head and concludes the narrative. His final words also seem to reflect Marlow's and implicitly endorse his point of view: "the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness" (Conrad, 1969: 132). By using these repetitions at the beginning and end of the novel with slight variations Conrad signals the different levels of narrative authority and their relationship to one another. It is his frame narrator who mediates the meaning of the tale as the highest narrative authority and makes the judgement of Marlow's narrative possible. The containment of Marlow's narrative in these implicit structural devices defines the terms on which the narrative must be judged – terms which have been defined explicitly by the frame narrator. In this novel there is only a slight difference between

the points of view of the frame narrator Marlow, his audience and the implied reader. This is not the case with Oom Schalk and the frame narrator in Bosman's stories although some of the structural elements exploited by Conrad to create the narrative space to make this judgement are also used by Bosman.

The implicit cues which mark the presence of the frame narrator which are so evident in Conrad's work are less apparent in Bosman's short stories and are therefore often overlooked. What is immediately apparent in Bosman's stories is the use of English. Apart from implying another audience, as I suggested earlier, it also has implications for the role of the frame narrator as mediator of Oom Schalk's narrative. The seeming absence of the frame narrator from Schalk's narrative is an illusion. It is the original tale told by Schalk which is in fact 'absent'. The stories are an English retelling of the original tale, and the focus is not so much on the tale itself but on the way in which it is narrated. The frame narrator's retelling covertly narrates his own version of Oom Schalk's stories.

In essence there are two narratives in operation simultaneously; the 'original' Afrikaans story narrated by Oom Schalk and the translated narrative of the frame narrator. As in *Heart of Darkness*, the terms or conventions by which Oom Schalk's story is mediated by the frame narrator must be understood for the reader to evaluate the reconstitution of the original story. Unlike *Heart of Darkness*, where the distinction between the frame narrator and Marlow is clear, the distinction between Oom Schalk and the frame narrator in terms of narrative function is often quite difficult to make. Based on Schalk's explicit descriptions of his storytelling method and some of his more covert strategies, it appears that the frame narrator's retelling is very similar to Oom Schalk's retelling of old tales. The main difference lies in the conventions demanded by their different contexts – Schalk's Marico farming community and the frame narrator's highly literate urban audience, the readers of the magazines in which the stories appeared.

Ironically enough, sometimes Oom Schalk is more 'honest' about his use of other stories and his narrative method than is the narrating voice of the frame narrator. Because the frame narrator does not exist in any substantial sense as a character, his ideological characteristics of this device must be inferred from the way in which Oom Schalk is mediated to the reader. In other words, the means by which Oom Schalk's stories are mediated through the frame narrator to the audience are indicative of the frame narrator's ideological and aesthetic view. The judgements which are provoked

by the frame narrator of Schalk's stories and his part in telling them implicitly define the position of the frame narrator and ultimately the intention of Bosman as author. The means by which this is most often achieved in the Oom Schalk stories is by the use of irony – "this unsaid that is nevertheless said" (Foucault, 1972: 110). The "said" of Oom Schalk's narration is the "unsaid" of the frame narrator's narration, as the stated character of Oom Schalk is 'other than' the unstated character of the frame narrator.

In order to establish what is "unsaid" or implicit in Bosman's stories and his use of the frame narrator, we must first consider what is said. This first requires the situating of irony within the text. The reader must understand how irony is constructed through the text in order more accurately to consider ironic intention, rather than interpret ironies to which a particular historical perspective gives access. In a discussion of authorial intention or ironic intention, ironies which are the result of a more recent historical perspective than that of the author must be precluded. It is for this reason that this study will start from what is most explicit in the Oom Schalk stories: the character of Oom Schalk, and the way in which this character/narrator is mediated through the frame narrator.

Schalk as character/narrator

One of the first stories that Bosman published, "Makapan's Caves", introduced the old, boer, storyteller figure of Oom Schalk Lourens. It is difficult to find a simple definition which fits Oom Schalk as a literary device. At times he seems to be the archetypal bigoted Bushveld farmer and yet in the stories that he tells he appears to expose the bigotry in which he is complicit. MacKenzie (1999: 147) suggests that this dual function is the result of the combination of two narrative functions within the character of Oom Schalk. MacKenzie and Gray argue that in contrast to other South African writers who had written in the oral-style short story form, Oom Schalk is a synthesis of character and narrator:

Whereas Glanville, Gibbon and Slater all rather clumsily used first person narrators who are present at the storytelling event and who then satirically 'relay' the story to the reader, Bosman collapses these functions into his one figure. Oom Schalk is therefore both a comic character and a skilful narrator, a backveld bumpkin and a far-sighted sage. In him is invested

all the complexity and 'double-voicedness' that was latent, and largely dormant, in the earlier works. (1998: 17)

In *The Oral-Style South African Short Story in English*, MacKenzie suggests that the "competing" voices in the Oom Schalk stories are contained in the figure of Oom Schalk. He also suggests that the frame narrator's function is in some way incorporated into the storytelling figure of Oom Schalk.

Unlike Gibbon, Bosman does not use a narrative structure in which the narrator's sentiments are destabilized and subverted by the frame narrator, whose attitudes can be taken to approximate an authorial perspective. Instead these competing voices are located within the single figure of the storyteller himself, and interpreting this character and his pronouncements therefore requires greater circumspection on the part of the reader. (MacKenzie, 1999: 147)

Although MacKenzie acknowledges the presence of the frame narrator in the Oom Schalk stories, his description of the way in which this position is incorporated into the character/narrator, Oom Schalk, suggests that the frame narrator ceases to function as a separate entity. In doing this, he ignores the hierarchy implicit in the construction of the frame narrator. In any consideration of authorial intention, the terms by which this intent must be judged are determined by the frame narrator as the highest narrative authority that is textually represented. The voice of the frame narrator, which is an altered representation of the voice of the fictional narrator, implicitly constructs an audience which determines the expectations and conventions by which the fictional narrator's performance will be judged. The difference in narrative authority and audience of the frame narrator and the audience of the fictional narrator means that there is a fundamental difference between the original, orally presented narrative in Afrikaans and the written, English version of the narrative presented by the frame narrator. It is this difference which creates the possibility of irony in the text and the reader's awareness of this difference which enables him to attribute ironic intention to the author.

The presence of Oom Schalk in the Oom Schalk stories is constructed by the frame narrator. The actual stories presented to us are stories about how the story is told by Oom Schalk to a particular audience. That these stories include Oom Schalk's stories does not change the fact that the stories are being re-written by Bosman using a frame narrator who addresses a different implied audience from that being addressed

by Oom Schalk. It is the implied English-speaking urban audience addressed by the frame narrator to whom the stories are addressed. They are not addressed to the Afrikaans-speaking rural Marico audience (and Schalk).

The dominant and explicit presence of Oom Schalk in the telling of the stories is a highly effective illusion used by Bosman to conceal the mechanism by which the irony in his stories is constructed. He uses the conventions of the oral-style story to draw the reader into Schalk's story. Convention demands that we accept the authority of the narrating voice of Schalk while the story is being told, but his context is part of the narrated world of the frame narrator. We accept the conventions of the oral tale told by Schalk only because it is presented to us by the frame narrator. The storytelling context constructed by the frame narrator confers some narrative authority on the narrator, Oom Schalk. This authority is, however, by no means absolute.

The explicit presence of the frame narrator at the beginning of the stories signals that there are limits to Schalk's narrative authority. Although he is allowed to perform as narrator in telling his stories, he is essentially a character who is defined by the way in which he tells stories. The frame narrator's story is a story about a storyteller and the way in which he tells stories. That Schalk's stories are entertaining and often humorous and ironic does not mean that the ironic and humorous possibilities of the stories are limited to the events or characters which he describes in his stories. Much of the humour and irony derives from the way in which Schalk's character and characteristics as a narrator are narrated by the frame narrator. The reader's understanding of Schalk does not derive from Schalk himself, but from the manner and context in which he is presented by the frame narrator who positions him within the fiction.

MacKenzie's description of Oom Schalk as a "larger-than-life presence" (2001: 10) is telling. It suggests that Schalk's character extends beyond the conventions of a realistic character in a narrative that depends on the reader's acceptance of the realism of the fictional context for effect. His description of Schalk as simultaneously being a "comic character and skilful narrator" as well as being a "backveld bumpkin and far-sighted sage" attributes qualities to Schalk which do not belong to him. While it is true that Schalk is a skilful narrator and is a keen observer of his community, he does not intend, in the stories that he tells, to present himself as a comic figure. A good example of this can be found in his attitudes to the schoolteacher in "Starlight on the Veld": "He seems to be one of that kind of new

kind of school-teacher,' I said, 'the kind that teaches the children that the earth turns round the sun. I'm surprised they didn't sack him.' 'Yes,' Jan Ockerse answered, 'they did.' I was glad to hear that also" (Bosman, 1998: 24).

In trying to undermine the authority of the schoolteacher, Schalk reveals his own ignorance and that of the community which fired the schoolteacher. This is not, however, his intention. His intention is to show that the teacher was mistaken. In this case, the story that Schalk tells ironically reveals something 'other than' what Schalk intends it to. It seems that the story is somehow at odds with the teller. Of course the presence of this irony is not a mystery but is made possible by an external view created by the frame narrator and even when the frame narrator's voice is not explicitly 'voiced', it is always present.

MacKenzie's suggestion is that the frame narrator's voice is contained within the figure of Oom Schalk in his dual function as character/narrator. As the above example shows, however, there is a distinct difference between Schalk's voice and intention, and what the story reveals. The problem here derives from a lack of distinction between the story, the narrator and the storyteller. The Oom Schalk stories are relayed to the reader in English by the frame narrator. In this sense the stories tell the story of how the storyteller, Oom Schalk, tells stories to his Marico audience. The English version of the story which we receive as readers is an Oom Schalk story which *narrates* at second-hand the stories that are 'originally' *told* (in Afrikaans) by Schalk. Because these stories are literary adaptations of the original oral form, the *telling* of the tale is translated into a narrative form. Therefore, although Schalk's narration appropriates the narrative authority of a primary narrator, his narration is always subject to the mediation by the frame narrator of Schalk's performance to the reader. This process allows Schalk certain narrative privileges (such as first person narration) but also censures his narrative authority by revealing Schalk's limitations of character and consequently limits his narrative authority in determining the meaning that the narrative conveys. The Oom Schalk stories as English literary representations of the original Afrikaans oral tale therefore not only incorporate Oom Schalk as character, his storytelling and his stories, but also the frame narrator and his judgements of Schalk and his stories.

The delineation of Schalk as character is particularly important, as is the way in which his character and the context in which his stories are told affect the way in which the stories are told. MacKenzie's description of the construction of Oom

Schalk as character and narrator (1999: 147) is not entirely accurate. Although he is correct in saying that these two functions are collapsed into one, Schalk in the English stories is less of a narrator than he is a representation of a narrator of a particular kind. It would be more accurate to say that he is a 'characteristic' narrator who represents a particular tradition of storytelling. The elements of his 'characteristic' narration reveal the conventions of this form of narration and its limitations. The construction and evaluation of this character and his 'characteristic' narratives is achieved through the use of the frame narrator by Bosman. In foregrounding Schalk, Bosman is not only presenting Schalk's stories but also the means by which they are constructed in terms of clearly defined convention.

The "double-voicedness" of the Oom Schalk stories does not derive from one narrative voice but from two: the mediating frame narrator and Oom Schalk himself. Bosman does not get rid of the frame narrator in the Oom Schalk stories: the frame narrator, relaying Schalk's story to the reader, is still present. As MacKenzie correctly points out, Bosman modifies the conventional use of the frame narrator in the Oom Schalk stories. The seeming elision of the frame narrator represents a development on the practice of an author such as Gibbon, in that Bosman avoids the obvious, "clumsily-used" frame narrator (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 17). But this does not mean, as Gray and MacKenzie suggest, that Bosman has incorporated the frame narrator into Oom Schalk; he has merely replaced the conventional first-person frame narrator (as used by Gibbon) with a frame narrator without an explicitly defined personality. The separate identity of the frame narrator has not however been surrendered to Oom Schalk, and Schalk's all-too-human character is not a substitute for the frame narrator's lack of individual traits. Rather the 'character' of the frame narrator is defined by implication as something 'other than' the character of Schalk. The story is Schalk's but the meaning that the story has for the reader is determined by its mediation through the frame narrator.

Schalk's 'character', the 'characteristics' of his narration and the conventions which they represent are in constant dialogue with the frame narrator and the conventions implied by the frame narrator. This transformation is not achieved by the imposition of the subjective view of a first person narrator but by foregrounding Schalk's method of narration and the way in which this narration is a matter of convention. While the nature of this dialogue often places Schalk and the frame narrator in opposition to one another at an ideological level, because of the different

audiences which they address, in terms of narrative practice there are points of similarity. This similarity is easily mistaken for 'sameness' and this is what leads to the confusion of the frame narrator with Schalk as narrator.

The general differences between the frame narrator and Oom Schalk's narrative positions, and the way in which they are textually signalled have been discussed earlier (p 34-39), and are defined in terms of general convention. The broader linguistic, literary and historical characteristics, which distinguish the frame narrator from Oom Schalk's narrative position and frame the stories, are also present *within* the stories. The frame narrator not only creates a 'frame' around the stories but is a constant presence in the stories. Although this presence is not signalled by intervention in a distinctive voice the traits are implicitly constructed in opposition to Schalk's character and method of narration. The frame narrator does not reveal himself by obvious first person commentary but by implicit exposure of the limitations of Oom Schalk's narrative. This process is achieved by a trope well suited to that which is not said – that of irony.

Chapter 3

Oom Schalk's Origins – “Makapan's Caves” and “The Rooinek”

The complexity of the ironic interaction between the frame narrator and Schalk cannot be demonstrated in a single incident but is a consistent narrative strategy employed by Bosman in all of his Oom Schalk stories. While the relationship between Oom Schalk and the frame narrator may vary, the consistent use of particular narrative elements in the stories reveals an identifiable and strategic pattern in Bosman's use of Oom Schalk. In his introduction to *Seed-Time and Harvest* MacKenzie argues that the collection demonstrates “the development of Oom Schalk Lourens from an unnamed and undefined character to a larger-than-life presence in the later stories” (2001: 10). While Bosman's use of Oom Schalk might have produced a range of different narrative effects over time, the original conception of this device in two of Bosman's first Oom Schalk stories“, *Makapan's Caves*” (December 1930) and “*The Rooinek*” (January and February 1931) comprehensively establishes the elements which are generically definitive of the Oom Schalk stories. The range of different narrative effects in the Oom Schalk stories over time represents the natural consequence of a significant volume of stories using the same narrative basis. This does not mean that the narrative strategy embodied in the Oom Schalk stories evolves from the earlier to the later stories. In fact, it is precisely the consistent use of the same narrative ‘formula’ that makes the Oom Schalk stories an identifiable sub-genre of Bosman's literary production. The range of narrative possibilities explored in the Oom Schalk stories is dependent on the identifiably consistent use of the same narrative strategy throughout this sub-genre. Not only are most of the generically definitive elements of the Oom Schalk stories present in the early stories, but the complexity of the narrative effects in these stories are widely acknowledged.

Gray (1986: 26) suggests that “*Makapan's Caves*” is one of Bosman's “greatest achievements in the ironic mode” and that “*The Rooinek*” is a very “mature” piece of writing in the same mode. Despite what MacKenzie suggests about the progressive evolution of the Oom Schalk stories over time he, like Gray, also comments that:

Bosman's Oom Schalk series is not characterised by tentative, rough beginnings, proceeding steadily towards ever greater sophistication and technical accomplishment. The first two stories in the sequence – "Makapan's Caves" and "The Rooinek" – are as carefully crafted as any Bosman later wrote, and the narrative structure, the humour, irony and pathos which are hallmarks of Bosman's style, are already impressively present. Indeed, the gentle pathos at the conclusion of "The Rooinek" is arguably more skilfully achieved than anything that was to come later... (1999: 139)

As a character, Oom Schalk is part of a community which is socially, geographically, historically and ideologically recognisable. The Marico community which Bosman chooses for his stories is not, as has often been assumed, representative of the majority of Afrikaners. It is essentially a dissident and extremist group. As Gray and MacKenzie (1998: 14) point out, the community of which Oom Schalk is a part cannot even be properly called "Boers"; they are "Takhaars". Only one generation before, they had declared themselves independent of the Transvaal (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 14). They are frontiersmen whose alienation from their own former cultural and administrative centre in the Transvaal, as well as the extreme harshness of their environment, has produced a culture which is often contradictory in nature. As Bosman once stated more explicitly:

They were strongly attached to the bible and to their church. They were potential schizophrenics through generations of trying to adapt the rigid tenets of their Calvinist creed to the spacious demands made by life on the African Veld. There was the veld and there was John Calvin. And the Voortrekkers assumed without enquiry that the truths the veld taught them of life were one with the rigidities of sectarian doctrine, as embodied in the more starless conceptions of predestination and original sin. The spirit of the veld was large. Calvin's was not so large. (in Rosenberg, 1976: 147)

The journey which brought Oom Schalk Lourens to the Marico district is related in the first two Oom Schalk stories which were published in consecutive months in *Touleier* ("Makapan's Caves" in December 1930 and parts 1 and 2 of "The Rooinek" in January and February 1931). This personal history, which spans two generations (as improbable as the chronology is), incorporates both Schalk's father's trek to the Dwarsberge when Schalk was a youth (Bosman, 1998: 64), and Schalk's own journey there with his wife after the Anglo-Boer War (Bosman, 1998: 127).

Other 'biographical' history appears in these stories with a density which is not present in subsequent stories. These first two stories give details of Oom Schalk's family which rarely ever appear in any subsequent stories. In "Makapan's Caves" Schalk mentions that he has two sisters, about whom we never hear anything afterwards. His brother appears as character in this story but nowhere else. His father, who also appears in this story and in a much later story, "When the Heart is Eager", first published in *The Forum* 12.21 (1 October 1949): 20-21, is not mentioned anywhere else. His mother is mentioned in "Makapan's Caves" and never again, and perhaps more significantly, his wife, Sannie, only appears in the two early stories, "The Rooinek" and "Veld Fire". The opening sequence of "The Rooinek" also includes the story of Oom Schalk's nephew, Hannes (Bosman, 1998: 125-126).

Besides detailing Schalk's biography, "Makapan's Caves" and "The Rooinek" are based on two documented historical events. "Makapan's Caves" is based on what Gray and MacKenzie call "the commando extermination campaign against Chief Makhapane of the Tlou people in 1854" (1998: 13) and "The Rooinek" is based on the "Thirstland" (Dorstland) Trek just after the Anglo-Boer War. It is impossible for Oom Schalk to have been twenty-one (Bosman, 1998: 65) in 1854 and to have served with the commandos in the Boer war at the turn of the century. The historical accuracy of the context is a textual 'warning' that Oom Schalk's claims to truthfulness are not always valid. MacKenzie and Gray comment that, "Although Bosman is scrupulously accurate on frontier history...Oom Schalk's own biography does not bear much scrutiny. Not for nothing was he called the greatest liar that ever trekked" (1998: 12).

MacKenzie acknowledges that Schalk's "fallibility" as fictional narrator means that the "relationship between the author and narrator is thus a complex one" (1999:145). He suggests that this indicates that Bosman doesn't share Schalk's "unabashed racism" (1999: 145). Although MacKenzie implies that this difference between Bosman and Schalk is ironically constructed, he approaches the irony as if it were self-evident and does not explain its mechanics of construction. The mere presentation of unashamed racism would not necessarily be ironic unless it were mediated by a convention that textually signals it as ironic. The mechanics of the mediation of such racism is important, as the terms in which this mediation is to be judged determines the extent to which it can be considered to be ironic. It is, for

example, possible to put racist comments in the mouth of a character or narrator without any ironic intention.

The first sentence of "Makapan's Caves" incorporates two distinctively different forms of address, which represent ontologically different positions. The potentially offensive (although not quite so offensive in Bosman's day) first word of the story "Kaffirs?" (Bosman, 1998: 64) is the first word that the reader encounters. This word is not, however, addressed directly to the reader, as the subsequent "(said Oom Schalk Lourens)" (Bosman, 1998: 64) indicates. This rhetorical question and the racist diatribe which follows textually signal the presence of a fictional audience which Oom Schalk, as storyteller, is addressing. Not only does the implied audience exist on the same ontological plane as Oom Schalk, the fictional narrator, but the communication implied by the rhetorical "Kaffirs?" and "Yes, I know them" (Bosman, 1998: 64) suggests a degree of consensus between the narrating voice and the implied Marico audience. It is this complicity and degree of consensus which has often led to misunderstanding of Bosman's intent.

The confusion has largely arisen from the mistaken conflation of the fictionalised first person narrative voice with the authorial intent. Critics who have accused Bosman of racism have often equated Oom Schalk too closely with the authorial voice and largely ignored the deliberate use of the frame narrator to mediate Schalk's narrative. On the other hand, critics who have sought to characterize Bosman as "politically committed" have often over-emphasised the extent to which Oom Schalk is conscious of the ironic possibilities of his stories. As a result critics have overestimated the extent to which Bosman creates an ironic consciousness in the character of Schalk. Because it overlooks the frame narrator's function, the claim that Oom Schalk consciously tells stories which undermine the ideological consensus in his audience ignores Schalk's explicit pronouncements in many of his stories.

If we consider the opening passage of "Makapan's Caves", there is nothing which would suggest that Oom Schalk is being ironic, or that the community that he is addressing would necessarily see this statement as ironic. Even when he says that it is not right to kill "a good kaffir" (Bosman, 1998: 64), he qualifies this claim by saying that a "good kaffir" is one who is a good Christian and a good servant. The story that follows is the story of Nongaas, who becomes the family servant and is accidentally killed by the young Schalk while he is attempting to save Schalk's brother, Hendrik. For Bosman's contemporary reader there would not necessarily have been anything

particularly new in the story of a faithful servant who gives up his life for his master. The only narrative cue that the reader is given to suggest that the story should be understood in terms 'other than' those defined by Schalk is by the presence of the 'other' voice in the narrative – the voice of the frame narrator.

Oom Schalk's telling of the story to the fictional audience does not contain sentiments alien to the community that he addresses. It is a story in which he plays an integral part as a character and his actions and the way in which Schalk relays and justifies his actions to his audience is in keeping with their expectations. The circumstances leading up to and the events around the assault on the Tlou people in the caves are related in a graphic, matter-of-fact way. The only source of dispute on the occasion for Schalk and his compatriots seems to be on the most effective method to kill what remained of Makapan's tribe:

So, as the Boers could not storm the kaffirs without losing heavily, the kommandant gave instructions that the ridge was to be surrounded and the kaffirs starved out. They were all inside the caves, the whole tribe, men, women, and children. They had already been there six days, and as they couldn't have much food left, and as there was only a small dam with brackish water, we were hopeful of being able to kill off most of the kaffirs without wasting ammunition. (Bosman, 1998: 66)

This dispassionate account of the brutality of the military tactics of the Boers on this occasion, and the callous disregard for the lives of women and children is narrated by Schalk in the first person plural form. The "we" that he uses here indicates his complicity in the attitudes of the other "Boers" mentioned at the start of the passage.

This is more explicitly dramatised in a later incident. After a failed attack, led by Paul Kruger, contrary to the wishes of Marthinus Pretorius, has resulted in the death of Kommandant Potgieter, Pretorius criticises Kruger and his "Dopper clique" for their overzealous stupidity. Schalk's comment on this criticism is revealing of his own position: "But I don't think it was right of Pretorius. Because Paul Kruger was only trying to do his duty, and afterwards, when he was nominated for president, I voted for him" (Bosman, 1998: 69). Schalk's defence of a fellow-Dopper defines his character within a particular ideological position.

Not only does this indicate Schalk's ideological allegiance, but he also adopts the narrating "I" which is at once an indication of subjectivity as well as authority.

His narrative is in the present tense and as such addresses the Marico audience and invokes the privilege of his position as storyteller while also expressing his solidarity with that audience. This is possible within the convention of storytelling as the communicative structure which defines this context as unequal. The “I – you” relationship which exists between the storyteller and audience is hierarchical. It is however the frame narrator and not Schalk who finally determines the meaning of this passage. Schalk’s explicitly stated allegiance to Kruger undermines his reliability as character and narrator, as his view of the events is at odds with the way in which the story is relayed to the reader. The disastrous attack and the explicitly presented rationale of the Doppers (Bosman, 1998: 67) related by an English-speaking narrator to a modern audience have a very different effect to that which Schalk intends in his original tale to his Marico audience.

The subjectivity of Schalk’s opinion is at odds with the outcome of the incident which he describes, as Kruger’s action has unnecessarily cost the lives of many men. Ironically, Kruger’s desire to force “the hand of the Lord” has achieved the reverse effect. Although this irony is available to the reader in Bosman’s English version of the story, it is totally lost on Schalk. He merely views it as a simple miscalculation. Furthermore, this irony is not an accidental irony but is carefully set up in the narrative through the way in which it is relayed within the text through the frame narrator.

The sub-plot of the conflict between Marthinus Wessels Pretorius and Paul Kruger develops over three different passages. The first passage is a description of the argument between Pretorius and Kruger (Bosman, 1998: 67). The arguments advanced are in terms of practicality and a religious pretext for revenge. While it is clear that Pretorius’s proposal (however repugnant to the reader) is more sensible, Schalk and the majority of Boers support Kruger’s suggestion. The possibility that this opinion is guided by any sense of God’s will, on the part of Kruger, is undermined by the next passage which specifically describes Pretorius’s preparation for the assault. One of the hymns that Pretorius chooses in the prayer meeting before the attack is singled out. It is ““Rest my soul, thy God is king”” (Bosman, 1998: 68). The irony of Pretorius’s almost prophetic choice of hymn is revealed in the complete failure of the attack and yet there is no sign that Schalk is aware of the irony. It is merely reported as detail.

The third passage is most revealing of how the irony of these passages is constructed. In this passage, Schalk goes to ask Pretorius to send another party out to search for his brother. Although in this case Schalk's motives are more humane than those behind Kruger's original idea, Schalk is still implicated in the same stupidity as Kruger. It is Pretorius who emerges not only as a man of vision and good sense but also a man of principle who perceives the dangers of "Kruger and all his Dopper clique" (Bosman, 1998: 68-69). What is interesting at this point in the story is that a minor character in the sub-plot not only has a more enlightened perspective than that of the narrator, but is also allowed the privilege of direct speech. Schalk's request which directly precedes this passage is reported, but Pretorius's opinion is given particular emphasis. Pretorius's voice once again emerges as the voice of reason:

"I will not allow one more man," he replied. "It was all Kruger's doing. I was against it from the start. Now Kommandant Potgieter has been killed, who was a better man than Kruger and all his Dopper clique put together. If any man goes back to the caves I shall discharge him from the commando."

But I don't think it was right of Pretorius. Because Paul Kruger was only trying to do his duty, and afterwards, when he was nominated for president, I voted for him. (Bosman, 1998: 69)

Oom Schalk's intervention in the telling of the story to offer his opinion shows him to be firmly in Kruger's camp, even with the value of hindsight. There is no textual indication of irony in Schalk's retrospective evaluation. The irony derives from the careful juxtaposition of incidents within the story by the frame narrator in his English version of Schalk's tale.

Convention dictates that the original Afrikaans story was Schalk's but the English literary imitation of this 'original' Afrikaans Bushveld tale allows for the frame narrator's modification of the tale. While this modification does not allow for changing the events of the story, it does allow the frame narrator to re-organise the sequence of events and to determine the perspective which is created within the narrative. The process of translation from the original tale to Bosman's story is not a simple re-telling. It is a translation of an oral form into a textual form. The presence of the frame narrator in the story textually signals a change in convention from the original tale. The purpose of the narrator is not to replace the voice of Schalk, but

merely to place it in a narrative context in which it serves a different purpose from that of the original.

This method is not peculiar to the frame narrator in the Oom Schalk stories. Schalk, by his own admission, transforms the stories which he is told by the way in which he tells them. His methods differ from those of the frame narrator because of his oral medium and the audience which he addresses, but the method is comparable. As he says in the oft-quoted passage from “Mafeking Road”:

For it is not the story that counts. What matters is the way you tell it. The important thing is the way you tell it. The important thing is to know just at what moment you must knock out your pipe on your veldskoene, and at what stage of the story you must start talking about the School Committee at Drogevelei. Another necessary thing is to know what part of the story to leave out. (Bosman, 1998: 53)

Although the self-conscious nature of these comments has been pointed out, it deserves further comment. They are not only a self-conscious explanation of the methods employed by Schalk as narrator but implicitly refer to the comparable method of the frame narrator. Many of the methods which Schalk describes are bound to the fictional world of the Marico and have no direct bearing on the way in which the reader reads the stories. We never read a description of him knocking out his pipe, as this would be a qualitatively different presentation of the story to which we only have access through the frame narrator and the printed text. The frame narrator never describes Schalk's knocking out his pipe, as it is not appropriate to the textual context in which his narration is constituted. He does, however, use narrative techniques which are analogous to Schalk's, if one takes into consideration the different medium, audience and expectations of that audience. In this way Schalk's self-conscious explanations of the conventions of his method of storytelling are a implicit textual cue that the conventions which he describes may be adopted and modified by the frame narrator in a way which is appropriate to his medium. Through the frame narrator, Bosman adapts the techniques of the oral tale for his Oom Schalk stories, using the conventions of Schalk's story as a narrative precedent for his own retelling of existing stories.

In the same way as Schalk's digressions and other explicitly presented storytelling techniques are a part of his storytelling, the frame narrator also exploits

the possibilities of his narrative medium. The position which the frame narrator occupies allows Bosman to reconstruct Schalk's stories in a way that reveals the limitations of Schalk's character and the type of narration that he offers. The frame narrator, without departing from established conventions, can represent Schalk's stories in such a way that the resultant story means something different from the original.

A clue to Bosman's use of the frame narrator can be found in MacKenzie's description of Bosman's method of constructing the Oom Schalk stories. The description of his method provides a possible connection between the method that the frame narrator uses to reconstitute Schalk's story and the way in which Bosman constructed his stories. MacKenzie describes this process in some detail in his introduction to *Unto Dust* and it is worth quoting in its entirety as it explicitly describes a process the result of which is the frame narrator:

He typically began by drafting a story in pencil on half-leaves of jotting paper (the 'half-scaps' favoured by journalists). This draft he revised extensively before typing it up, again on half-leaves. (He did this in order both to reduce the amount of retyping necessary should a major change be required and also to be able to lay out the various movements of the story in jigsaw-puzzle fashion.) Changes to this draft were again added by hand, and it would be followed by a near-final typed version on full pages. Often this penultimate draft was again corrected and fine-tuned before a final version was sent off to a magazine for publication. (2002: 20)

Bosman's method illustrates the way in which the 'original' elements of the story were manipulated into different positions to serve the purpose of the particular story Bosman wanted to write. The various refinements and emendations along the way combined the fragments into a cohesive text. The perspective that Bosman uses as his cohesive device in the texts belongs to the frame narrator, while the elements of the story originate in Schalk's narrative. This change is not a simple translation from one form into another. By seemingly maintaining the characteristics of the original tale and introducing another narrative level *within* the narrative, the story remains intact but its function is transformed. The possibility then exists for the reader to recognise two different levels of irony. One level of ironic possibility is constructed within Schalk's narration. The possibility of another level of irony is created by the frame narrator's mediation of Schalk's narrative to the reader. A failure to distinguish

between these distinctly different levels of ironic attribution has often led to confusion about Bosman's use of irony and his intention in creating different levels of irony.

The ending of "Makapan's Caves" is a good example of how Bosman's irony has often been confused with Schalk's and the qualitatively different types of irony that are represented by these different perspectives. Not only are these different perspectives present in the narrative but they are textually signalled. The ironic twist at the end of "Makapan's Caves" is a feature of many of the Oom Schalk stories, and although this is not something which is unique to Bosman, the way in which it is done is particular. While I would agree with MacKenzie when he says that the ending "retrospectively casts a new light on the story as a whole," (MacKenzie, 1999: 147) I would not agree that the ending is as 'shocking' or as 'concealed' as MacKenzie suggests.

It is not simply the last line which is the ending of the story but rather that there is an end sequence which is a process of revelation rather than a moment of revelation. The last line only concludes a sequence which begins with the accidental shooting of Nongaas. It is at this point that Schalk reveals what he has been withholding from his audience. Having rescued his brother and listened to his account of how Nongaas had rescued him, Schalk carries his brother out of the cave. As he does so he kicks against the body of the "kaffir" he had shot earlier and sees that it is Nongaas whom he has shot. He then lies to his brother when he says that Nongaas will come back.

What is interesting is the way in which this is related to the audience by Schalk. In saying that he lied to Hendrik at the time, it also becomes clear that Schalk has been withholding information from his audience as well as from his brother. On the level of storytelling, however, this lie is sanctioned for the sake of a good story. In Schalk's story the deception is a technique which is used for dramatic effect and the omission of the acknowledgement of the fact that it is the corpse of Nongaas, whose face he has seen, sets up a conventional ironic twist. The audience to whom Schalk addresses the story knows something that another character, Hendrik, does not and this is the way in which the irony is constructed.

While this ending might have been surprising for members of Schalk's audience who were hearing this story for the first time, their reaction would probably be less 'shocked' than that of a present-day audience. Like Schalk, whose explicit intention was to tell the story of a "good kaffir" as the exception to the general rule,

they would probably not be particularly grieved at Nongaas's passing. They might well, however, agree with Schalk that it was a shame that a good servant should die in such a way.

As in the case of the earlier sub-plot of Pretorius, Schalk's narration here tries to play down Hendrik's real concern for Nongaas. The end sequence which I have discussed earlier is introduced by Schalk's narrative summary of what Hendrik tells him about the events since he disappeared. When the story gets to the point when Nongaas finds Hendrik, the narrative changes character. The movement into direct speech again gives voice to Hendrik, rather than Schalk. When Hendrik expresses remorse at having thrown stones at Nongaas as a child, Schalk tries to attribute this to the fact that Hendrik is sick. The repetition, "As I said, my brother Hendrik was feverish" (Bosman, 1998: 71), is a vain attempt to maintain control over the significance of Hendrik's words.

The "As I said" directly addresses the Marico audience and not the reader. It highlights the context in which the original tale was told and the audience to whom it was addressed. The exclusivity of address signals that the reader is distinct from Oom Schalk's direct addressee, the Marico community. The way in which this comment is textually presented highlights the fact that Schalk is addressing his Marico audience. While the frame narrator does not explicitly say "he said to them", this is implied. This implication recalls the "(said Oom Schalk Lourens)" at the beginning of the stories and therefore includes Schalk's way of telling the story. The way in which Schalk narrates this passage shows his active intervention to define Hendrik's actions in a particular way. For the reader the external view created by the frame narrator makes this manipulation evident, whereas for the Marico audience it merely seems like part of the story. While Schalk uses this sequence to set up the dramatic irony, the mediation of the events and context through the frame narrator sets up a very different irony. The meaning that Schalk wants the story to have takes on another significance because of the frame narrator's narration of Schalk's telling of the tale.

The real revelation of the story is not the ending of Schalk's story but the way in which Schalk's method is revealed by the frame narrator. The irony of the story is not in the twist in the tale but in the way in which Schalk's narration and his deception fail to achieve what it sets out to achieve. In the frame narrator's manipulation of the mode of narrative presentation, he implicitly signals Schalk's

deception before the end is revealed. In other words, the reader already expects the twist at the end of the tale, and it comes as confirmation rather than revelation.

This process of anticipation starts with Schalk's father's advice to his sons before they leave. When Schalk shoots Nongaas he comments, "I was thankful for my father's advice" (Bosman, 1998: 70). This structural repetition is not merely a thematic connection to the shared attitudes of father and son but a cue which signals a significance other than what Schalk explicitly says. This same kind of repetition is apparent in Schalk's insistence that Hendrik is feverish and that Nongaas is not dead.

The reader anticipates Schalk's deception, thus reinforcing the unreliability of his version of what meaning the story should have. Schalk's attempts to control the meaning in the narrative reveal the frame narrator's irony. This irony reveals the way in which the racism of this community, and Schalk's as representative of the community, leads to the tragic events of the story. Schalk's shooting of Nongaas is not really an accident as Schalk implies. He shoots Nongaas because at the time his racist fear obscures any other consideration. He does not recognize Nongaas, whom he has known for most of his life, but sees him as an immediate threat simply because he is black. This level of knowledge is something which in terms of the way in which the story is presented, is only available to the reader as a result of the frame narrator's intervention.

The structural repetitions and other cues which define the characteristics of the frame narrator are developed over a number of stories. Bosman establishes these elements in his first two stories by creating obvious links between them. By reproducing certain elements from one story to the next, he defines the terms on which the narrative is to be evaluated. His conforming to and departure from convention forms the basis for his method. The conventions of the oral-style story as embodied by Oom Schalk's and the frame narrator's use and modification of convention are the generic terms of engagement with the Oom Schalk stories. The conventions implied by Bosman's use of both Oom Schalk and the frame narrator in "Makapan's Caves" establish a working narrative vocabulary with which to judge the stories which follow.

Subsequent stories define themselves in terms of those that precede them either by difference or similarity in their use of familiar convention and Bosman's manipulation of these conventions. Bosman's Oom Schalk stories all use generically recognisable story forms as their basis. There are Anglo-Boer War stories, like

“Mafeking Road”, “Karel Flysman” and “The Question”, and Bushveld love stories like “The Selon’s Rose” and “The Love Potion”. Not only do these stories share common thematic interests, but the stories have common structural elements which are definitive of their genre. It is these conventional generic elements that Bosman exploits to create not only the illusion of authentic oral tales but also a narrative ‘vocabulary’ which forms the basis of the reader’s understanding of the way that Oom Schalk tells stories.

The consistency with which Bosman employs narrative techniques in the Oom Schalk stories through the frame narrator sets up implicit textual cues for the reader. It is these textual cues which form the basis for irony and for establishing ironic intent on the part of Bosman. The convention used in one story is often directly related to the repetition of a similar narrative pattern in another story. “Graven Image”, “The Missionary” and “Funeral Earth” all have common elements which are related to the aesthetic sensibility of the black people in the stories. The same is true for stories about storytelling like “In the Withaak’s Shade” and “Splendours from Ramoutsa”. What is said in one story ironically forms the basis for what is unsaid in another. It is through the repetition of these narrative components that an ironic relationship between the stories is set up. These repetitions do not function as motif or on a simple thematic level. Rather they perform what Hutcheon calls “a meta-ironic function.” This function is defined by Hutcheon as:

one that sets up a series of expectations that frame the utterance as potentially ironic. Signals that function **meta-ironically** [Hutcheon’s emphasis], therefore, do not so much constitute irony in themselves as signal the possibility of ironic attribution and operate as triggers to suggest that the interpreter should be open to other possible meanings. (1994: 154)

The tendency of Schalk to define the parameters of his story at the beginning of each story is typical of this meta-ironic function in Bosman’s stories. The elements that are introduced in these introductory passages define the terms in which the irony of the story is constructed for both Schalk’s and the frame narrator’s ironies. The second story which Bosman published, “The Rooinek”, is not only another Oom Schalk story but it shares structural and thematic interests with “Makapan’s Caves” and highlights the elements which become general practice in his Oom Schalk stories. Published in two parts in January and February, 1931 in *Touleier*, this story

immediately follows "Makapan's Caves". Like "Makapan's Caves", "The Rooinek" is based on a documented historical event. It also shares a similar theme, which is that of group prejudice. Not only are the thematic concerns the same, but the way in which the story is constructed and the narrative devices used are very similar.

The beginning of the story describing an event from the Anglo-Boer war is narrated by and includes Schalk Lourens as a character participating in the action. Within the conventions of the story as told by the narrator, the presence of Schalk does not present any problems, but in terms of consistency from one Oom Schalk story to the next, there is a problem. For Schalk to be considered a reliable narrator, he must be consistent in his use of the conventions of realism in his narrative. In this case he clearly transgresses the convention. He narrates a story in which he is a character and which is inconsistent with the biographical information that he has given in his first story "Makapan's Caves". If he was twenty-one in 1854, he would be sixty-six at the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899. It is unlikely that he would be able to escape through barbed wire fences in the way that he describes (Bosman, 1998: 125) or have young children (Bosman, 1998: 127). This 'deception' is all the more pronounced because of the other biographical information in the stories and the accuracy of the historical information. As in "Makapan's Caves", the unreliability of Schalk as narrator is not simply a way of portraying his human failings, but a deliberate textual strategy to undermine the authority of his narrative position. It is essential to the irony of the stories that Oom Schalk be an unreliable narrator. Considering the sequential publication of "The Rooinek" and "Makapan's Caves" in consecutive months and the structural and thematic similarities of the stories it is unlikely that the discrepancies described above are coincidental.

The sequencing of different stories in "The Rooinek" follows the same pattern as that in "Makapan's Caves". The story starts with Schalk's view on Englishmen: "Rooineks, said Oom Schalk Lourens, are queer" (Bosman, 1998: 125). This strangeness is made more explicit by the story he tells of an incident in the Anglo-Boer war in which Schalk's nephew Hannes prevents him from shooting an English soldier who is helping a wounded comrade. The implication that it is not right to shoot an enemy who shows unusual bravery and loyalty is reminiscent of his feelings for the faithful servant Nongaas. As Schalk points out, however:

It seemed that not only was that Englishman queer, but that Hannes was also queer. That's all nonsense not killing a man just because he is brave. If he is a brave man and he is fighting on the wrong side, that is all the more reason to shoot him. (Bosman, 1998: 126)

Having allowed the English officer to live, Hannes is executed by the English for possession of dum-dum bullets. Schalk's inclusion of this element in the story suggests that Hannes's idealism was misplaced and endorses Schalk's cynical point of view. This view becomes more understandable in the sombre irony of Schalk's description of the aftermath of the war:

My wife came out of the concentration camp, and we went together to look at our old farm. My wife had gone into the concentration camp with our two children, but she came out alone. And when I saw her again and noticed the way she had changed, I knew that I, who had been through all the fighting, had not seen the Boer War. (Bosman, 1998: 127)

Like "Makapan's Caves", the first section of "The Rooinek" defines Schalk's (and by implication, his community's) prejudice against another ethnic group. It also sets up the terms by which this prejudice is to be evaluated. Like Hendrik in "Makapan's Caves", Hannes is given the privilege of direct speech in opposition to Schalk's stated belief. This 'other' voice which is foregrounded in the narrative by the frame narrator, redefines Schalk's notion of 'queerness' as bravery and loyalty. Like the affectionate relationship that develops between Nongaas and Hendrik, the significance of the English officer's bravery is important for the irony in "The Rooinek", as is the relationship that the Englishman, Webber, develops with Koos Steyn's family.

While Schalk, for comic effect, exploits Webber's attempt to integrate himself into the Afrikaans farming community, the friendship which develops between Koos Steyn and Webber is carefully constructed. Koos Steyn is singled out by the community as a traitor (a "hensopper"). Schalk's comment about Koos's involvement in the Boer War, however, recalls the story of Hannes in that Koos did not have to fight in the war against the English and that "if at any time the English had caught him they would have shot him as a rebel, in the same way as they shot Scheepers and many others" (Bosman, 1998: 130). Like Pretorius in "Makapan's Caves", Koos Steyn is a man of principle who comes into conflict with the intransigent Gerhardus Grobbelaar.

An early exchange between Grobbelaar and Steyn comically foreshadows the events to come. In response to Grobbelaar's prejudice towards the Englishman, Steyn says:

When we get to understand one another perhaps we won't need to fight any more. This Englishman Webber is learning Afrikaans very well, and some day he might almost be one of us. The only thing I can't understand about him is that he has a bath every morning. But if he stops that and if he doesn't brush his teeth any more you will hardly be able to tell him from a Boer. (Bosman, 1998: 130)

In this dialogue it is clear that Koos Steyn's use of self-deprecating irony reveals insight into his own community which even Schalk does not seem to have. What is interesting in this case is the way in which Schalk's comment acknowledges that there might be some truth in what Koos is saying when he says, "Although he made a joke about it, I felt that in what Koos Steyn said there was also truth" (Bosman, 1998: 130). Schalk's comment is conditional, however, and it is clear that he partly disapproves of Koos's humour. It is a disapproval which is not shared by the reader, and again the way in which the narrative is relayed to the reader allows the degree to which Schalk's recognises Koos's irony, to be seen as ironic. A similar kind of ironic intervention occurs later in the story as the fateful journey into the desert is about to begin.

"The Great Dorstland Trek," Koos Steyn shouted as we got ready to move off. "Anyway, we won't fare as badly as the Dorstland Trekkers. We'll lose less cattle than they did because we've got less to lose. And seeing that we are only five families, not more than about a dozen of us will die of thirst" (Bosman, 1998: 134).

Like Pretorius's choice of hymn before the abortive attack on the caves in "Makapan's Caves", Steyn's reference to the Dorstland Trek is, in the context of the story, prophetically ironic. On another level Koos Steyn's reference to the Dorstland Trek is not simply a historical reference but a covertly intertextual reference. "The Great Dorstland Trek" to which Koos refers is textually represented as historical fact. The "Great" in Koos's phrase and the capital letters imply a historical consciousness which is unlikely in a member of the Marico Community. This phrase reveals the presence of a retrospective, literate understanding of history which is indicative of the

more modern understanding of the frame narrator and his audience. Koos's prophetic reference is self-referential from the point of view of the frame narrator's audience. The narrative in which the reader is engaged is the story of the Dorstland Trek retold, rather than an earlier incident being narrated. As Gray and MacKenzie point out, "on the original Thirstland Trek there was a character called Webber (actually Weber)" (1998: 12). Koos's statement is therefore also an intertextual reference to other accounts of the Dorstland Trek. That such accounts exist in fiction as well as in the history books is confirmed by Kannemeyer in *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur*:

Ander werke wat in hierdie jare verskyn en oor spesifieke historiese gebeurtenisse handel is Th. Blok se studie-in-verhaalvorm oor die stryd teen die Basoetoë (*Grensboere*, 1918) en oor *Die Adendorff-trek* (1927). Belangriker werke oor die Dorstlandtrek is A.J. van der Walt se *Noordwaarts* (1919) en veral J.A. Coetzee se *Dorstland-trekkers* (1924), waarby ook sy twee bundels *Die swerwers* (1925) en *Die trekgees* (1926) aansluit (1978: 151).

[Other works which appear during this period and deal with specific historical events are Th. Blok's "studie-in-verhaalvorm" (an historical fiction) about the conflict with the Basutus (*Grensboere*, 1918) and [the] *Die Adendorff-trek* (1927). More important works about the Dorstlandtrek are A.J. van der Walt's *Noordwaarts* (1919) and J.A. Coetzee's *Dorstland-trekkers* (1924), which also includes his two volumes *Die swerwers* (1925) and *Die trekgees* (1926).]

The historiographical reference introduces a parallel between existing accounts of the Dorstland Trek and "The Rooinek". Schalk's reaction to Koos's comment implies that the fate of the Dorstland Trekkers was common knowledge amongst the community when he says, "I thought it was bad luck for Koos Steyn to make jokes like that about the Dorstland Trek, and I think that others felt the same way about it" (Bosman, 1998: 134). The explicit knowledge of the Dorstland expedition and its consequences ironically sets up the futility of the trekkers' determination to continue on their journey. The heroic way in which Schalk narrates the story is at odds with the knowledge that the journey is doomed to failure. The original Dorstland Trekkers did not have the advantage of hindsight which Schalk's community do, and this knowledge makes their decision to go all the more questionable.

After a full day of trekking into the desert with no sign of water Abraham Ferreira suggests turning back but “the rest” do not agree. Schalk explains their determination by saying, “And, anyway, we were Doppers and having once set out, we were not going to turn back” (Bosman, 1998: 134). Schalk’s attempt at portraying the decisions as a kind of heroic stoicism falls flat and their illusions are stripped away to the point where even Schalk must admit, “But, of course, we told those lies only to one another. Each man in his own heart knew what the real truth was. And later on we even stopped telling one another lies about what a good chance we had of getting out alive” (Bosman, 1998: 135). The inevitable failure of the Trek, the decision to turn back and the consequences for the Trekkers brings one story to a close. The decision of Koos Steyn to continue and Webber’s decision to stay with him is foregrounded by Schalk’s repetition of what he said at the beginning of the story: “That’s why I have said that Englishmen are queer” (Bosman, 1998: 137). This connection is reinforced by his description of the way in which Webber waves to Schalk as he goes to certain death with Koos Steyn and his family: “He saw me and waved his hand. It reminded me of the day in the Boer War when that other Englishman, whose companion we had shot, also turned round and waved” (Bosman, 1998: 137).

The story ends with a description of Webber’s corpse with Koos Steyn’s child’s clothes still in his hands. The pathos of the ending and the eerie sadness of the closing passage serves a double function. It closes the narrative in the only way that Schalk and his community can conceive of it. The inexplicable nature of Webber’s decision and the bravery which it implies is articulated in terms that suggest the unknowable, “It seemed to us that the wind that always stirs in the Kalahari blew very quietly and softly that morning. Yes, the wind blew very gently” (Bosman, 1998: 138). It is a deliberate mystification of the ‘queerness’ of the Englishman which avoids an analysis of the folly of the complicity of the community in creating the situation. Koos Steyn’s seemingly irrational decision to continue into the Kalahari is something which is beyond Schalk’s understanding but in terms of the way the story is told, more understandable to the reader.

Unlike “Makapan’s Caves” where Nongaas is allowed to speak directly, Webber does not. This silence is also shared by the women and the children. The repeated references to the women and children and Webber’s attachment to the child, Jemima, are not incidental references but are a crucial part of the irony of the story.

The victims of the attempted crossing of the desert are the children and Koos Steyn's group. The other adults all survive. It is no accident that we are told that Jemima is only born after Koos and his wife have been married for seven years (Bosman, 1998: 129). It is after the death of one of Ferreira's daughter's that Grobbelaar decides to turn back, too late to prevent the death of his own child, whom he leaves in a shallow grave in the desert. It is not his own death that concerns Koos Steyn but the death of his child. The silent assent of Koos Steyn's wife and Webber to his decision to continue is born out of a determination to share the fate which they have imposed on the child and to avoid a life which would be devoid of meaning without her. The final embrace of Koos Steyn and his wife suggests consensus in their decision and is mirrored in Webber's 'maternal' embrace. The 'feminine' devotion of Webber's final act stands in stark contrast to the bitterness implicit in the silence of the women who survive and the divisions which it creates between the men and women:

They wept, some of them. But that made no difference then. Nobody tried to comfort the women and children who cried. We knew that tears were useless, and yet somehow at that hour we felt that the weeping of the women was not less useless than the courage of the men. After a while there was no more weeping in our camp. Some of the women who lived through the dreadful things of the days that came after, and got safely back to the Transvaal, never again wept. What they had seen appeared to have hardened them. In this respect they had become as men. I think that is the saddest thing that ever happens in this world, when women pass through great suffering that makes them become as men (Bosman, 1998: 135).

The suffering of the women and children as a result of the intransigence of the men in this passage stands in silent judgement of the men. It recalls the earlier description of Schalk's wife, Sannie, when she returns from the concentration camps and the stillness and quietness of the Kalahari wind which blows over the bodies of the Steyns and the Englishman in the final passage also recalls their silence. It is their silence, the 'unsaid' of the narrative which operates in opposition to the explicit narrative elements to create the irony of the text.

While "Makapan's Caves" and "The Rooinek" share many of the same structural and thematic elements, the way in which Schalk is positioned in "The Rooinek" is slightly different. Although he is a character and his wife Sannie are part of the story, and they are both part of the community, the way in which their family

unit is constructed in Schalk's narrative puts them outside the tragic events of the story.

The most significant feature of Schalk's family is that he has no children at the time that the Trek takes place. He and his wife have already lost their children and are therefore not personally affected by the worst consequences of the journey into the desert. Unlike in "Makapan's Caves", Schalk's function in the story is less affected by his personal involvement and he acts more as observer than agent. The loss of his children in the Anglo-Boer War, however, creates a position from which he can empathise with those whose children die on the Trek, though he is not complicit in the death of his own children. Even before the death of Ferreira's daughter, Schalk says, "My wife Sannie put her hand in mine, and I thought of the concentration camp. Poor woman, she had suffered much. And I knew that her thoughts were the same as my own: that after all it was perhaps better that our children should have died then than now" (Bosman, 1998: 134).

This distancing from the actions of the community which he describes in the story is also reflected in the more moderate attitudes which he seems to express about the Englishman at the beginning of the story. When Webber comes to shake hands with the farmers of the community, all of them refuse except Koos Steyn. From the way in which Schalk narrates his reaction it is not clear whether he shakes Webber's hand or not. Retrospectively, however, he takes care to explain his thoughts: "He came to me last of all; I felt sorry for him, and although his nation had dealt unjustly with my nation, and I had lost both children in the concentration camp, still it was not the fault of this Englishman" (Bosman, 1998: 128).

This narrative evasion on the part of Schalk is not an attempt at irony but it does ironically highlight the fact that he is retelling this story with full knowledge of the end of the story. He does not alienate his audience by admitting to shaking Webber's hand but he also implies that he had the foresight to see something good in the Englishman when others did not. This level of irony is only made possible by a knowledge of the conventions of the short story and context in which the story is being told. This level of knowledge is only available to a reader who views Schalk within this context from a point external to the action. This point of view can only be constructed at the level of the frame narrator, who controls the way in which the story is told by Schalk and the context in which it is told.

Even Taller Tales – Bosman's Bushveld Stories

The absence of an explicitly designated frame narrator in "Veld Fire" clarifies the role of the frame narrator in the first two Oom Schalk stories and raises the question of Bosman's intention in writing these stories in the sequence that he did. "Veld Fire" was the third short story that Bosman published and it first appeared in the *New L.S.D.* in April 1931 (MacKenzie, 2001: 135). Compared to the two stories that preceded it, "Veld Fire" has very little of the narrative complexity that characterises "Makapan's Caves" or "The Rooinek". Although there is an ironic twist at the end of the story, it does not have the same impact as either of the other two stories and the irony is mostly limited to the ending and the petty prejudice of the narrator. There is no indication in the story of any significant dissenting voice or the presence of a higher narrative authority in the form of a frame narrator. This raises the question of whether or not this is an Oom Schalk story at all. Although MacKenzie says that it is, I would contend that it lacks too many of the elements which are characteristic of an Oom Schalk story.

MacKenzie suggests that it is an Oom Schalk story on the basis that it includes "a few pieces of distinctive Oom Schalk humour" (2001: 10) but that apart from these "few pieces" that "it is a fairly conventional first-person narrative" (2001: 11). MacKenzie's suggestion that the humour is distinctively Schalk's is based on the character of Oom Schalk in other stories where it is explicitly indicated that Schalk is the narrator of the story. This intertextual inference suggests that the definitive characteristic of an Oom Schalk story lies in the personality of Oom Schalk alone, and not the complex narrative strategy that *explicitly* uses the personality of Schalk and his storytelling context as relayed to the reader by the frame narrator. The complexity of Oom Schalk depends on the way in which he tells his story, to whom he tells his story, when the story was originally told and the way in which his story is transformed by the frame narrator's reformulation of the storytelling event. The ironies which are set up by this narrative interaction form the basis of Bosman's ironic strategy. It is this complexity which is absent from the story of "Veld Fire".

By writing a traditional 'local colour' story on this occasion Bosman distinguishes between this rather dull form and his adaptation of the form in the Oom Schalk stories. It is the authorial voice of Bosman that is fictionally constructed in the stories related to us by the frame narrator in the Oom Schalk stories. A similar use of

a 'local colour' story to demonstrate how Bosman's Oom Schalk stories differ from conventional stories can be found in his use of Bushveld animal stories.

In the appendix to the Anniversary Edition of *Mafeking Road* in, "Notes on the text" MacKenzie and Gray (1998: 150) question Bosman's decision to include the story "Brown Mamba" in the collection. As they point out, there were many other Oom Schalk stories which could have been included but were not and that in their opinion, it is the only story in the collection which is not an Oom Schalk story. They conclude that, "it is possible that, in throwing it together, Bosman did not give much attention to the question of the collection's internal coherence; perhaps he really did just use what came to hand" (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 150). As Gray and MacKenzie point out, while it is true that Bosman's life was at times 'disorderly', his approach to his writing was meticulous (1998: 20). Given that there is no evidence to suggest that he was dissatisfied with the selection of the stories (especially since he did express dissatisfaction with the way in which they were edited) one must assume that he had a good reason to include a story which is obviously not an Oom Schalk story.

Bosman includes this story because, like "Veld Fire", it represents a typical bushveld story. The elements of this kind of story are established in the description of this geographical region along with the stock characters of Piet Uys, Hendrik Van Jaarsveld, and the "kaffir" servants. The attitudes of the two Afrikaners are employed as literary convention demands of this particular kind of regional tale. The conventional romantic view of the intrepid frontiersman is implicit in the description of Piet Uys who goes out with one bullet and returns with either the bullet or the game he has killed with it. On its own this story is not a very interesting example of a traditional form which is deliberately put in juxtaposed with the Oom Schalk stories in order to emphasise their differences.

What is so markedly different in this story (apart from the absence of Schalk) is the lack of narrative self-consciousness and the consequent lack of any major structural irony. Narrated by an omniscient narrator, this story is a "veld" story set in the Marico District and tells the story of two men who are killed by a venomous snake. One of these men is a "kaffir herdsman", a servant of the other man, Hendrik van Jaarsveld, who eventually dies. The 'surprise' in the story revolves around the recurrence of the same incident twice within the same day at the same place, which runs counter to the conventional wisdom of Hendrik's friend, Piet Uys. The story

turns on the repetition of Hendrik's words at the beginning of the story by his friend: "‘God, how terrible’ Piet Uys said, ‘and how easily it could have been me’", (Bosman, 1998: 86) which brings the final realisation to Hendrik of what has happened to Piet. The irony derives from the fact that the reader already knows what Hendrik does not. This kind of irony is fairly conventional as is the twist at the end of the story. "Brown Mamba" not only represents well-known convention in that it is a exotic Bushveld tale about an animal, but it has a special status as a 'snake story'.

The conventions of snake stories are explicitly addressed by FitzPatrick in the notes accompanying *Jock of the Bushveld* (first published in 1907). The notes start with a reference to snake stories and state that: "SNAKE stories are proverbially an 'uncommercial risk' for those who value a reputation for truthfulness" (FitzPatrick, 1966: 467). It seems that at the turn of the century in the tradition of Bushveld animal stories, snake stories were considered to be particularly tall tales. It is precisely this knowledge of the convention that Bosman implicitly invokes in his inclusion of "Brown Mamba" in *Mafeking Road*. The inclusion of this kind of conventional story in the collection provides a reference point for his exploitation of the conventions and the knowledge of these which Bosman expects in his readership in some of his other stories such as "In the Withaak's Shade" which, like "Brown Mamba", is an animal Bushveld tale. It is not, however, about a snake but a leopard. The story nevertheless includes a story about a snake which is essential to the structure of the story.

Posing as a simple literary imitation of a Bushveld tale about an encounter with a leopard in the veld, this story is in fact a complex engagement with the conventions of this sub-genre. The story not only includes Oom Schalk's encounter with the leopard but also the way in which he tells the story and the way in which it was received by his Marico audience. Schalk's inclusion of the reception of the story in his telling effectively makes this something other than the tall tale which it seems to be. The element of self-consciousness that is introduced by this inclusion makes this like other Oom Schalk stories about storytelling, such as "Mafeking Road" or "The Selon's Rose". However, unlike these stories, Schalk's description of the storytelling process is not used to reveal the 'truth' of the incident which he recounts, but to obscure the truth in order to have an exciting tale to tell. This strategem is revealed by the frame narrator's mediation of the tale to the reader. In making this revelation, however, the frame narrator introduces metafictional elements which suggest that Schalk's deception is being mirrored in the frame narration. The self-

conscious implication of the frame narrator in the fiction-making process suggests another level of narrative intervention – that of the authorial presence of Bosman. The authorial presence introduces the possibility of establishing Bosman's intention in writing a literary imitation of such a tall tale.

As in other Oom Schalk stories about storytelling, the opening passage defines the terms on which Schalk's story must be judged. Schalk not only indicates what kind of story it is, but also introduces the elements that make up this kind of story:

Leopards? – Oom Schalk Lourens said – Oh, yes, there are two varieties on this side of the Limpopo. The chief difference between them is that one kind of leopard has got a few more spots on it than the other kind. But when you meet a leopard in the veld, unexpectedly, you seldom trouble to count his spots to find out what kind he belongs to. That is unnecessary. Because, whatever kind of leopard it is that you come across in this way, you do only one kind of running. And that is the fastest kind. (Bosman, 1998: 34)

His dubious distinction between the two varieties of leopard suggest that what is to follow falls well within the conventions of the tall tale. Although the Marico audience to whom the story is addressed would know that this distinction is nonsense, it is a kind of exclusive in-joke which might be used on unsuspecting outsiders who did not know any better. It is an invitation to his immediate audience to grant him a certain degree of licence in his telling of the tale – a kind of wink at the truth which is shared by his Marico audience. This is balanced by the more obvious truth of the common-sense reaction to seeing a leopard in the veld. This element of truthfulness gives a certain amount of credibility to Schalk's story while also setting up the humour at the end of the passage quoted above. It is this element of humour and the exclusivity that is created by stretching the truth, that forms the basis of the tall tale genre and the means by which Schalk holds the attention of his audience. The complicity of his audience in the fiction of the story determines their reaction to the story. As long they are part of the deception and the story is entertaining, the audience accepts a certain amount of latitude with the truth. It is when vital information is withheld and the audience is aware of being lied to, then the fictional contract breaks down and the story is likely to be dismissed by the audience. This is exactly what happens when Schalk first tells his story.

The story starts with a description of Oom Schalk's encounter with a leopard while he was out looking for lost cattle. The way in which he relates the incident

follows the pattern set up in his introduction by carefully balancing the demands of an entertaining, humorous story with enough elements of common sense to appeal to his audience. Schalk's description moves between a very detailed description of the physical sensation of the leopard sniffing at his body and the terror that he feels, and his flippant comments about his embarrassment at the state of his clothes (Bosman, 1998: 35). The humour of this description is tailor-made for his audience and includes a reference to his escape through the barbed wire from the government tax collector (Bosman, 1998: 35). Schalk imposes the credibility of his narrative on the lack of credibility of other kinds of tall tales and the propensity of other storytellers to tell these kind of stories. He singles out an element of storytelling which often characterises the stories of "big-game hunters" to draw a distinction between his story and a typically colonial tradition of storytelling.

Every big-game hunter I have come across has told me the same story about how, at one time or another, he has owed his escape from lions and wild animals to his cunning in lying down and pretending to be dead, so that the beast of prey loses interest in him and walks off. Now, as I lay there in the grass, with the leopard trying to make up his mind about me, I understood why, in such a situation, the hunter doesn't move. It's simply he can't move. That all. It's not his cunning that keeps him down. It's his legs. (Bosman, 1998: 35)

The humour of this example appeals to Schalk's Marico audience as it is directed at the archetypal great white hunter who tells this kind of story. The problem comes when Schalk's story comes to an end. His story ends with the leopard lying down next to him under the withaak tree. Despite the careful balance that Schalk maintains in his story, his every effort to make it credible and to include his audience, the reception he receives when he tells the story the next day to the people assembled in Fanie Snyman's voorkamer is not what he expects. When he reaches the end of the story his voorkamer audience do not believe him and they question him about the end of the story:

"And how did you get away from the leopard in the end?" Koos van Tonder asked trying to be funny. "I suppose you crawled through the grass and frightened the leopard off by pretending to be a python" ... I told my story over several times before the lorry came with our letters, and although the dozen men present didn't say much while I was talking, I could see that they listened to me in the same way that they listened when Krisjan Lemmer talked. And

everybody knew that Krisjan Lemmer was the biggest liar in the Bushveld. (Bosman, 1998: 37)

The tale is incomplete and no matter how many times he retells it, Schalk gets the same reaction from his friends. They know that Schalk is withholding information from them, and that this exclusion from knowing the ending potentially makes them the victims of Schalk's lies. Their reaction is particularly vehement and they attack Schalk's credibility as a story-teller. Koos van Tonder's comment about the python is indicative of the consensus of the audience when they characterise Schalk's story as a particular kind of tale – a deliberately absurd tale which is typified by the inclusion of a snake in it. Koos implies that Schalk's story is the kind of tall tale which Krisjan Lemmer would tell. Unfortunately for Schalk, Krisjan Lemmer is present and seizes the opportunity to take advantage of Schalk's fall from grace:

To make matters worse, Krisjan Lemmer was there, too, and when I got to the part of my story where the leopard lay down beside me, Krisjan Lemmer winked at me. You know that sort of wink. It was to let me know that there was now a new understanding between us, and that we could speak in future as one Marico liar to another. I didn't like that. (Bosman, 1998: 37)

Krisjan's reaction to Schalk's story is all the more humiliating to Schalk because of the reputation which Krisjan has for telling incredible stories (particularly snake stories), which according to Schalk, are little more than "stupid lies" (Bosman, 1998: 37). As if to seal their new understanding Krisjan tells one of his snake stories about Hans the twenty-foot long mamba. Although Schalk claims not to "take any notice of Krisjan Lemmer's stupid lies" (Bosman, 1998: 37) he claims that even he is beginning to doubt the existence of the leopard. It is only when there are sightings of the leopard that the community can feel certain that Schalk is not trying to make a fool of them by having them believe his story. Even with this evidence, however, Schalk still has problems in characterising the encounter he had with the leopard because he still cannot give the story a conclusive ending. The deliberate mystification of the tale as "unearthly" and dream-like is only an evasion of having to give the story a proper ending: "Even now, as I am telling you this story, I am expecting you to wink at me, like Krisjan Lemmer did" (Bosman, 1998: 38). Finally, Schalk gives the story an ending which satisfies the community and hints that they too may have had a part in the story.

After all the shooting at and running away from the leopard, Schalk is given an opportunity to give the story a satisfactory ending. Some time later he returns to the spot where he had seen the leopard for the first time only to find the leopard already there. This time the leopard does not move because it is dead as it has been shot. The implication of the tale for the audience that Schalk is addressing is that the leopard has been shot by someone in the community (he specifies a Mauser rather than a Martini-Henry bullet). In this act of inclusion he manipulates his audience back into the symbiotic complicity between storyteller and audience.

In this way the original tale told to the voorkamer audience has been retold to another Marico audience (the second Marico audience) in a way that concludes the story in a satisfactory way. After the reaction of the voorkamer audience Schalk anticipates the reaction of the second Marico audience and gives the story an ending which will satisfy the audience and their expectations. The second Marico audience to whom Schalk directly addresses the story (the “you” in the introduction to the story and at the end) is given the whole story. The members of this audience accept Schalk’s story based on their knowledge of what constitutes a reliable story and what does not and the inclusiveness of the story. Taken on this level Schalk’s story has achieved what he intended. He has told a very unlikely story which can nonetheless be believed. This is, of course, an elaborate deception on the part of Schalk as there is another level of ‘truth’ and hence a level of irony in the second Marico’s audience’s acceptance of the truthfulness of the tale.

This level of the story is made available to the reader by the mediation of the story through the frame narrator. This mediation of Schalk’s narrative through the frame narrator provides the possibility of a third version of the story, based on the textual presentation of Schalk’s narrative which facilitates the possibility of a more literary analysis of the story. As in other stories the external view which is created by the presence of the frame narrator allows the reader an awareness of the way in which Schalk is narrating the story and to what end. The frame narrator provides narrative cues to elements within Schalk’s narrative that are inconsistent with what he explicitly indicates in his narration. Like “Makapan’s Caves” and “The Rooinek”, the repetition of certain phrases alerts the reader to a significance other than that which is explicitly presented. These cues are made for the reader and not for the Marico community as they are based in literary rather than oral conventions. This gives the reader access to the possibility of ironic attributions which are unavailable to Schalk’s Marico

audiences. Bosman himself makes a distinction between oral and literary humour. Talking about Shakespeare in a short piece entitled “Humour and Wit” Bosman says:

And I regard Shakespeare as the greatest humorist I have ever struck. And the singular thing about it is that he seems to me to be a humorist primarily in the literary sense (as the Americans of the last century were humorists in the literary sense), for his jests seem to have a spontaneous magic in form of the written word that they lack spoken. (Bosman, 2001a: 13)

The first ‘literary’ cue that we are given is at the end of the story in the repetition of the description of the way in which the leopard is lying: “He was lying on the same spot, half-curved up in the withaak’s shade, and his forepaws were folded as a dog’s are, sometimes” (Bosman, 1998: 38). This description is almost exactly the same as when the leopard first lies down next to Schalk at the beginning of the story: The leopard lay half-curved up, on his side, with his forelegs crossed like a dog, and whenever I tried to move away he grunted” (Bosman, 1998: 36). This repetition not only underlines the strange behaviour of the leopard but directs us back to other anomalies in the leopard’s behaviour. The grunting of the animal after lying down is a sign of distress, as is the way the animal moves. Schalk specifically mentions that the animal moved clumsily and knocked his hat off and that the animal was breathing unevenly (Bosman, 1998: 36). This information leads to another possible explanation of an otherwise inexplicable incident: the leopard had already been shot and was dying when Schalk encountered it.

This narrative possibility sets up new ironic possibilities such as the possibility that the original voorkamer audience were shooting at a phantom beast that had in one sense “walked out of Schalk Lourens’s dream” (Bosman, 1998: 37). It also means that the sequence of events which Schalk describes in his narrative are a deliberate manipulation to achieve his own ends and that his omission of certain crucial information is an integral part of his storyteller’s repertoire of tricks. The omission of information in his stories in order to create the possibility of irony is explicitly discussed in “Mafeking Road” when he says that the storyteller must know what part of the story to leave out (Bosman, 1998: 53). In other words, the level of knowledge of the conventions of storytelling, and the literary imitation of this oral form, determine the extent to which any particular audience has access to the irony of the story. There are multiple ironic possibilities in “In the Withaak’s Shade” which are

determined by the extent to which the various audiences “get” the irony or not. As Hutcheon points out:

Irony may create communities, as so many theorists argue, but I have also suggested that irony is created *by* communities too. In a negative sense, irony is said to play to *in-groups* that can be *elitist* and *exclusionary* [author’s emphasis]. Irony clearly differentiates and thus potentially excludes: as most theorists put it, there are those that “get” it and those that don’t. (Hutcheon, 1994: 54)

The extent to which the various audiences “get” the irony depends on how familiar they are with the conventions of the oral tale or the literary imitation of the oral tale. This is why the Marico audience does not get the irony, whilst the reader does. The literary nature of the story and the conventions through which this ironic possibility is made available to the reader by the frame narrator excludes the Marico audience.

“In the Withaak’s Shade” ends with the description of the leopard lying in the same spot as Schalk had seen him the last time. Schalk continues, “But he lay very still. And even from where I stood I could see the red splash on his breast where a Mauser bullet had gone” (Bosman, 1998: 38). The penultimate paragraph of *Jock of the Bushveld* goes as follows: “He was stretched on his side - it might have been in sleep; but on the snow white chest was one red spot” (FitzPatrick, 1966: 466). The conventions which are implicit in Bosman’s story are explicitly dealt with by FitzPatrick. In the preface to his novel FitzPatrick qualifies the “truthfulness” and originality of his story. In doing so he recognises that the truthfulness of the story is challenged by the similarity of the last chapter to another well-known dog story:

It is not a diary: incidents have been grouped and moved to get over the difficulty of blank days and bad spells, but there is no incident of importance or of credit to Jock which is not absolutely true. The severest trial in this connection was the last chapter, which is bound to recall perhaps the most cherished of all dog stories. Much, indeed, would have been sacrificed to avoid that; but it was unthinkable that, for any reason, one should in the last words shatter the spell that holds Jock dear to those for whom his life is chronicled - the spell that lies in ‘a true story’. (FitzPatrick, 1966:x).

The “spell that lies in a ‘true story’” is at the heart of Bosman’s tale. The appeal of the story depends on the audience accepting the “truthfulness” of the tale,

and their acceptance is based on the degree to which they are included in the narrative. Bosman's use of the convention that FitzPatrick explicitly addresses in the notes to a story which Bosman has implicitly made reference to in "In the Withaak's Shade" is more than coincidence. It is a deliberate textual signal to the literary reader about the nature of the "truthfulness" and originality of these kinds of Bushveld tales.

Gray and MacKenzie also suggest other possible precedents for Bosman's story. One suggestion is Honoré de Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert", first published in 1832 (Gray and MacKenzie, 1998: 18), and the other is Drayson's "The Crafty Leopard" which was first published in 1862 (MacKenzie, 1999: 154). While it is very difficult to say conclusively what exactly Bosman took from each tale in order to construct his story, it is clear that he uses elements of these tales because they represent the 'tall tale' genre. "In the Withaak's Shade" is a story which is constructed out of existing stories of a similar generic type. This is a story which has been appropriated and modified by Schalk for his Marico audience, and which has in turn, been appropriated and modified by the frame narrator for his modern English speaking audience.

There is an important difference between the ways in which the frame narrator and Schalk's stories are appropriated and the way in which the irony works in relation to the Marico audience and the frame narrator's audience. While Schalk's appropriation of existing stories is based on the *type* of story which they represent, the frame narrator's version of the story deliberately recalls specific literary imitations of the oral tale. The repetition of the description of the leopard at the beginning (Bosman, 1998: 36) and end of the story (Bosman, 1998: 38) is a thinly disguised paraphrase of FitzPatrick's description of Jock's death.

The use of Krisjan Lemmer's mamba story to represent the kind of tale which is intended to be seen as absurd, as an integral part of the textual strategy of the tale, is in direct reference to FitzPatrick's explanation of the convention. Bosman's appropriation of this convention is also one which is used in another snake story, "Martha and the Snake" in which Krisjan Lemmer also features. In this story Krisjan Lemmer tells one of his "stupid lies" about a mamba: "He suspected that this snake was in the habit of milking one of his cows" (Bosman, 2001a: 63). Because Krisjan is telling this story to an outsider, a writer from the city, Oom Schalk and the rest of the community are willing to be complicit in Krisjan's story and corroborate his lies: "Of course we all knew that certain snakes were in the habit of getting friendly with a cow

and draining her milk” (Bosman, 2001a: 63). The man at whom their lies are directed is Robert Guise, who writes animal stories for the *Huisgenoot* and the *Boereweekblad*. He writes, “quite a few [stories] about snakes – mostly rinkhalses and mambas” (Bosman, 2001b: 62). He has also written a story about an encounter with a leopard (Bosman, 2001b: 62). In this story it is the outsider whose stories are the object of the Marico farmers’ laughter because, according to them, his stories are poor imitations of a bushveld tale.

The focus is therefore not on the originality of the elements or conventions that are present in the story but on the way in which these elements are manipulated by the storyteller and the frame narrator for their audiences. The process of storytelling (textually represented as narration) is what defines the skill of the storyteller (and frame narrator). The intention of Bosman as author is to demonstrate his skill in orchestrating these multiple levels of narration. As Oom Schalk says at the beginning of “The Selon’s Rose”:

One thing that certain thoughtless people sometimes hint at about my stories is that nothing seems to happen in them. Then there is another kind of person who goes even further, and *he* says that the stories I tell are all stories he has heard before, somewhere, long ago – he can’t remember when, exactly, but somewhere at the back of his mind he knows this is not a new story. (Bosman, 2002: 80)

The vague sense that the hearer/reader has heard the story somewhere before questions the notion of originality in Oom Schalk’s tales. For Oom Schalk it is not important whether or not the story is original; the thing that is important is the way in which the story is told. The same is true of Bosman and the way in which he uses the frame narrator to reconstruct Schalk’s tales. The frame narrator’s use of a self-consciously literary medium transforms the vague sense of having heard a story before into an intertextual reference to existing stories and the conventions which govern the presentation of those stories.

The implication of the construction of intertextual irony in “In the Withaak’s Shade” makes it almost impossible definitively to interpret the meaning of the story as there is no *definitive* reality or truth in the story. The significance of the story lies in the process by which the various levels of irony are made possible. The reception of the story by the various levels of listeners or readership, fictional or implied, is based

not on the truth of the story, but the extent to which that readership is aware of, and accepts the validity of certain conventions.

The story systematically deconstructs the notion of originality and reveals that it is a self-conscious and ironic imitation of well-known convention. The way in which the story includes the description of the reception of Schalk's original tale is not incidental, but at the very heart of the irony. The recognition of the implicit conventions of the story does not allow final access to truth. It is the unselfconscious acceptance of convention at which Bosman's irony is directed. The story itself is not as important as the way in which it is constructed in terms of the conventions. This textually inscribed self-consciousness of the way in which texts are constituted is a metafictional intervention and as such foreground the construction of the stories rather than the idea that the stories are important in themselves. As Ommundsen suggests:

Metafiction presents its readers with allegories of the fictional experience, calling our attention to the functioning of the fictional artefact, its creation and reception and its participation in the meaning-making systems of our culture. (1993:12)

Bosman's stories show a self-consciousness of the formal properties of his short stories and the audiences to which they are addressed. While this self-consciousness represents a break from the convention of the earlier simple campfire tale, he still uses those conventions within the stories. In doing so he fictionally represents not only the convention, but the way in which the conventions function in terms of the audiences which they address. His method is constructed by implication rather than what is explicitly said. An example of how Bosman uses one of the most conventional kind of story to a very different end can be found in "Funeral Earth". Although "Funeral Earth" does not display the same level of self-consciousness as a story like "In the Withaak's Shade", it is no less innovative in its structure and use of convention.

This story incorporates two different kinds of stories in the structure. One is a story from the wars against the Mtosas and the other is from the Anglo-Boer war. Anglo-Boer War stories and 'Kaffir' War stories were well-established sub-genres by the time that Bosman published this story in 1950, and he had also written many Oom Schalk stories about these conflicts. What is interesting here is the way in which he combines the stories to create a new kind of story – a story in which Schalk seems to

take on another voice. As in other stories, however, it is not Schalk acting out of character, but the fictional context created by the frame narrator's version of Schalk's tale that allows Schalk's voice to take on a different significance.

The story begins with one of Schalk's characteristic comments about how unenlightened the Mtosas are even after all the attempts by the commando to civilise them: "We had a difficult task, that time (Oom Schalk Lourens said), teaching Sijefu's tribe of Mtosas to become civilised. But they did not show any appreciation. Even after we had set fire to their huts...the Mtosas remained just about as unenlightened as ever" (Bosman, 2002: 108).

The opening passage, as in other Oom Schalk stories, sets up the narrative elements which form the basis of the irony in the story. The primary element in this story is the idea of the "unenlightened" nature of the Mtosas. The attitude expressed here is a characteristic element of Schalk's stories. In terms of Bosman's fictional practice there is nothing particularly new or surprising in the racist attitudes of Schalk and the commando. The way in which the presence of the frame narrator is used to create an ironic perspective on these bigoted pronouncements is also a well-established practice in Bosman's Oom Schalk stories. In this story it is the young Fanie Louw, "who liked saying funny things" (Bosman, 2002: 108) who performs a similar function to that of Koos Steyn in "The Rooinek" in that his humour is at times prophetic and also ironically exposes the lies of the other characters. Fanie's reference to a selon's rose at the beginning of the story is an obliquely prophetic reference to his own funeral at the end of the story (Bosman, 2002: 108). In "The Selon's Rose" Schalk explains the significance of this flower: "Any story (Oom Schalk Lourens said) about that half-red flower, the selon's rose, must be an old story. It is the flower that a Marico girl most often pins in her hair to attract a lover. The selon's rose is also the flower that here, in the Marico, we customarily plant on a grave" (Bosman, 2002: 80).

Fanie specifically identifies the significance of his comment as not being about love but about death: "The selon's rose that you come across in graveyards" (Bosman: 2002: 108). It is Fanie's death at the end of the story that is the catalyst for Schalk's revelation about the significance of the Mtosa's gift of earth. It is also significant in terms of storytelling that Fanie is a young man. In "Unto Dust" Schalk's observes: "I have noticed that when a young man or woman dies, people get

the feeling that there is something beautiful and touching in the event and that it is different from the death of an old person” (Bosman, 2002: 49).

Apart from this oblique representation of convention, Fanie is also used in the story for comic effect in undermining the false bravado of the commando. When the commando retreats to open the “open turf-lands” on the pretext that the Mtosas would be there, Fanie says: “‘Maybe we should even go back to Pretoria to see if the Mtsosas aren’t perhaps hiding in the Volksraad,’ he said. ‘Passing laws and things. You know how cheeky a Mtosa is.’” (Bosman, 2002: 109).

Other elements common to Oom Schalk stories reappear, like the dubious courage of the commando and their loud-mouthed claims. The encounter with Sijefu’s chief advisor and his “tribal courtesies” recalls the character Rapidalong in “A Graven Image” in the way in which he represents the Afrikaners. Although it is clear that Schalk and his compatriots are aware that Ndambe is insulting them it is not something that Schalk will explicitly admit. When Jurie Bekker discovers that part of the peace offering came from his own livestock, he makes a comment that Schalk does not repeat, although he specifically says that he remembers what he said (Bosman, 2001b: 111). The suggestion is that it is contrary to what the Veldkornet had just said about the Mtosas being ignorant. The silent implication in this example is the basis of the irony of the story. This irony derives from Schalk’s lack of understanding of the Mtosa’s gesture in offering them a bowl of earth. The symbolism of the gesture is at this stage lost on the Schalk and his compatriots as is their manipulation by the Mtosas into accepting the peace.

Although Schalk seems to understand that his perception of things is not always valid, he cannot express it in this type of story. It is only in the second part of the story, where the conventions of the particular story which he is telling allow him to represent the Mtosas in a different way. Because the second part of the story is set in the Anglo-Boer war, the enemy is no longer the Mtosas. In this narrative context, their character need not be set in opposition to that of the Afrikaner. Rather their common characteristics as farmers and the context in which they find themselves is not one of competing interests but one which is characterised by their connection to the soil.

This recognition does not indicate a change in Schalk’s attitude to the Mtosas, but it does indicate the circumstances under which there can be a common understanding. In combining these two types of stories with common generic

elements, Bosman creates the possibility of a new kind of story – a kind of story that can accommodate distinctly different discourses harmoniously within the same narrative. Bosman's irony derives from the way in which these kinds of war stories have conventionally been used to perpetuate conflict: the kind of narrative intervention that Bosman's stories represent are a very complex use of this convention in order to create something new. To achieve this, however, the stories must reflect a self-consciousness of the conventions from which they are constructed and the audiences to which these conventions are addressed. Using the character of Oom Schalk, Bosman represents a tradition of storytelling and the conventions inherent in that tradition. Using the literary convention of the frame narrator and the characteristics which this literary adaptation of Schalk's oral narrative implies, he provides the reader with an external view of Schalk's method of storytelling. In placing these two narrative voices alongside each other he generates a dialogic structure which enables the reader to engage with the skilfully constructed 'originals' that Schalk tells and to evaluate his telling of them at the same time.

Conclusion

In a recent article in a travel/lifestyle magazine, *South African Country Life* (September 2003), there is a feature on the Groot Marico district. As the article points out, the region gets many of its tourists because of the stories that Bosman wrote about the region. While the region has Bosman to thank for its popularity, it seems that he is not remembered fondly by the Marico inhabitants:

Firstly, not everyone loves Herman Charles Bosman around here. Just by reading his fabulous stories you get the idea that he was born and bred in the cradle of the Bushveld. Not so. He spent a scant six months in the area as a young man, teaching in a two-room schoolhouse. And to hear certain folk tell it, he didn't have great people skills to boot. On top of that, they feel he didn't portray the Bushveld Afrikaner in a 'correct' light. He was having too much fun at their expense....And the thing that brings the tourists into the Groot Marico is the range of characters Bosman created. But there is no Oom Schalk Lourens, no Jurie Steyn (well there is one, but he's not the same one), no Johanna Snyman, Frik Bonthuys or Gysbert van Tonder. Those magnificent people – ironically, much-beloved by most South Africans who have encountered them in the Bosman books – all lived in the fertile brain of the rather frenetic author who was, by most accounts, actually a 'Joburg boy'. (Marais, 2003: 61)

Although Bosman is almost single-handedly responsible for the popularity of the Marico district it is quite clear that the Marico community does not necessarily appreciate his particular brand of humour. Even today these people feel that Bosman was poking fun at them. This is not because any of the community ever met Bosman himself or indeed that in his time as a teacher there he made any great impression on them. What they still object to is his fictional portrayal of the region and its inhabitants. They mistake his stories for an attempt at realistically portraying the community. More than this they feel that they and their forebears are the victims of an unjust portrayal. By the same token it is unlikely that Bosman's stories are particularly popular with black people in South Africa. My experience of trying to teach Bosman even at post-graduate level at a historically disadvantaged university would suggest that black students are extremely uncomfortable with his stories, irony or not.

The popularity of Bosman during the Apartheid years in South Africa was not only due to the intervention of enlightened literary critics. In the troubled 1980s Gray

points out that neither C. Louis Leipoldt nor Herman Charles Bosman, “is exactly out of favour with the reading public at the present time; on school syllabuses and among the canonisers of South African literary taste they receive regular and monotonous homage, the just dues, one presumes, of sacred cows” (1980: 1). Quite apart from appearing on the National Party’s syllabus for National Christian Education, Bosman’s popularity was such that Patrick Mynhard’s dramatic sketches were aired on state television (the SABC) in the 1980s. Either the National Party didn’t “get” the irony or it is possible to read Bosman without recognition of the irony and see his stories as a series of affectionate jokes about the Afrikaner in the past. I would suggest that it is easy for an ordinary reader to fail to appreciate much of the irony in the Oom Schalk stories because so much of the irony depends on the audience being a ‘literary’ audience rather than the ordinary reader.

Not only is the audience that Bosman addresses with his irony a more literary audience, but it is also an English-speaking audience. This does not mean that someone from a different audience cannot “get” his irony, but that he or she is not necessarily invited into the “spontaneous magic” (Bosman, 2001a: 13) of Bosman’s ‘literary’ humour. On the other hand, to ignore the more literary irony is to engage only with Schalk’s humour, which is often unacceptably racist. This is one of the problems of putting Oom Schalk on the stage. The narrative framing of the “(said Oom Schalk Lourens)” by the frame narrator all but disappears. Without the framing of the frame narrator the stories take on a very different character where Schalk’s narrative dominates over that of the frame narrator and therefore redefines Bosman’s purpose in creating this narrative level.

Bosman’s stories were made to be read and not performed, and it is likely that the irony in these stories can only be properly constructed in a textual medium. Moreover, these stories assume a certain level of literary awareness in the audience which would enable these readers to ‘decode’ Bosman’s complex ironies. While his stories appeal to a much wider audience now than that for which they were originally intended, the highly literate audience which he envisioned has left an indelible mark on his fictional practice. It is for this reason that reductionist approaches to his writing do not work. These stories are not simple in terms of the narrative structure which they employ nor the knowledge of literature that they assume the reader commands.

It is only since MacKenzie's study of the history of the oral-style short story that the link between the conventions of an already existing body of South African short stories in this genre has been recognised. An understanding of the characteristics of the genre and Bosman's manipulation of these elements in his Oom Schalk stories is necessary in establishing an appropriate narrative vocabulary to assess Bosman's use of form.

What I wish to add to MacKenzie's work in this study is some refinement of the elements of Bosman's narrative strategy and a properly theorised position on the implications of irony within the narrative framework of the Oom Schalk stories. I have suggested that extra-textually determined political and biographical approaches to Bosman's Oom Schalk stories can now be seen as inappropriate. It is clear that Bosman's intent in his authorial capacity can only be determined by how this position is textually constituted in the stories. I have not attempted to deal with the details of Bosman's intent in all of the Oom Schalk stories, as to do so would ignore the way in which the individual stories deal with different issues. What can be determined however is the direction of Bosman's intent and the terms in which his intent must be understood. This analysis must incorporate the audiences which are constituted at the different narrative levels and the way in which these different discursive communities are positioned in terms of each other and the story that they tell. It is the combination of these elements in ironic relation to one another that produces the irony and consequently the ironic intent of the narrative.

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