

FORUM KRITIKA: THE SOUTH AFRICAN NOVEL IN TRANSITION: 1990-2010

DARK HUMOR: SATIRE, THE BAROQUE AND THE CARNIVALESQUE IN PATRICIA SCHONSTEIN'S *BANQUET AT BRABAZAN* AND INGRID WINTERBACH'S *THE ELUSIVE MOTH*

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Abstract

Both Patricia Schonstein's *Banquet at Brabazan* and Ingrid Winterbach's *The Elusive Moth* contain an element of baroque fantasy, and in Schonstein's case the makings of a contemporary satire. They also exhibit the tension between the comic and the tragic, the city and the platteland, between flights of imagination and the magnetic pull of a dark social realism that both underpins and, in Schonstein's case, sometimes undermines the work.

This paper investigates the use of humor in writing against the grain of apartheid, and how successful these writers are at integrating history in a dynamic fiction. Published respectively in 1991 (Winterbach) and 2010 (Schonstein), these novels bracket the two decades that straddle the immediate pre- and post-apartheid era, and also question what constitutes the South African novel, as Schonstein grew up in the then Rhodesia, and Winterbach's work was originally written in Afrikaans.

Keywords

Afrikaans literature, Cape Town, magical realism, masquerade, painting in literature

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Defamiliarization is a key concept identified by Gaylard in his seminal analysis of contemporary African literature, *After Colonialism*, and his work has provided me with a conceptual lodestar in its investigation of postmodernism, magical realism, magical aesthetics, and real politics as applied to recent fiction. Apartheid's legacy may linger, but South African writers are no longer limited by its binaries and in the two novels I discuss, a surreal juxtaposition of the incongruent offers a satirical and often humorous element that, together with a sense of the aesthetic, engages with a turbulent society.

Ingrid Winterbach's return to the countryside in *The Elusive Moth* echoes the same urban/rural counter drift, satire, and minimalist elegance of her literary mentor Etienne Leroux, the great Afrikaans writer of the 1960s and leading member of the avant-garde Sestiger movement; counter to this, Patricia Schonstein's wholly urban setting carves a new space for South African fiction. The city is the trope du jour; in her words it become a baroque fantasy, filled with a sensory overload of word, texture, and a louche glamour that belies and transforms the squalor and poverty of inner city decay and of its more serious, nay, worthy analyses. Her *Breakfast at Brabazan* reflects Cape Town's ambiguous identity, the Mother City as Madonna/whore presenting the face of Europe in Africa, and also an asylum for immigrants from Europe in the past, from Africa (Zimbabwe, Nigeria) in the present.

That both authors are women underlines the growing strength of the female cohort in South African writing, a cohort that is not necessarily or exclusively defined by feminist concerns. The microcosms described in these two novels essentialize some of the fringe players in the South Africa of the past two decades, and in so doing satirize many of the elements in each world. Winterbach's novel depicts small town characters, from the brutish white police chief to the wealthy but dissolute landowner, and the shadowy, victimized presence of nameless black people sensing revolution in the air. Schonstein's Cape Town is one of vagrants and immigrants, artists and wealthy Jewish bourgeoisie. The ludic factor in both novels explores the bacchanalian—popular entertainment (dancing, theater, snooker) whose vulgar enjoyment often conceals a suppressed violence. Both writers employ a tone that is both playful and serious, generating a tension between the real and the imaginary.

BREAKFAST AT BRABAZAN

Breakfast at Brabazan is the third work in Patricia Schonstein's loosely linked trilogy set in Cape Town's Long Street, following *Skyline* and *A Time of Angels*. The overlap of place and some personalities between *Breakfast at Brabazan* and its predecessors is tenuous, and the novels, while sharing a taste for the fabulous, are also self-contained.

The story revolves around the eponymous lodging house and bar, the Brabazan Bar & Lodge in the old part of Cape Town, and the eccentric characters who arrive there looking for food, drink, and companionship. Long Street is known for its second-hand bookshops, backpackers' lodgings, multicultural eateries, dodgy nightclubs, as well as a famous mosque. The hotel that forms the focus of this novel is a place filled with faded glory and a wide assortment of the city's growing demi-monde. These include four Ukrainian prostitutes, a homeless poor white man masquerading as a Nigerian drug lord, a plaster statue of the Virgin Mary, a young English doctor

who has a nervous breakdown after witnessing too much reality in a township clinic, and Duke, the South African hotel owner still traumatized by his years as a soldier in Angola. Hovering like one of Schonstein's angels is the specter of theater in the form of the famous, whacky, goonish *a capella* theater group *Not the Midnight Mass*, whose cast and props are housed in this building: "The troupe furnished their Brabazan space in Churrigueresque-rococo-baroque-romantic fusion" (30). The final banquet celebrating the end of their performance schedule is complete with masked British royalty and Cape Town's high society and is a celebration of aesthetic overindulgence. Identities are seldom what they seem to be, and although the opening character is named Oberon Yoruba, he is in fact a white man, Peter Brightstone, who by accident adopts this Nigerian name. At the heart of the novel, literally and figuratively, is an improbable and improper liaison between an ageing married Jewish import agent gloriously named Thespian Winter (the name triggering associations with *The Winter's Tale*) and his apparently dowdy secretary, Pearlie Theron, an Afrikaans girl from the countryside whose mousey exterior hides an extravagantly sensual heart. Together their erotic fantasies give him the love and indulgence denied by his wife, an escape into a make-believe world in which "Their love involved Cupid and arrows, Shakespeare and Ovid, the goddess Aphrodite-Venus, and all things gastronomic and bacchanalian" (98).

Schonstein's satires are twofold: a potentially brilliant vignette of mistaken identity that opens the novel, and an acerbic critique of the moneyed Jewish matron (Mrs. Winter) and her conservative, acquisitive world. It is the first that is the more inventive, exhibiting an imaginative flair that moves beyond real politic while questioning some basic assumptions, but its potential is not fully realized as the author fails to sustain the fiction and relapses at times into a recitation of social pathologies culled from newspaper headlines (street children, xenophobic violence, art theft in the form of dealers stripping Africa of its cultural heritage). Interspersed anecdotes—about leading figures like politician Trevor Manuel, the "Che Guevara of the Cape Flats" (108), anachronistic comments on Crossroads, a squatter settlement (attempts to demolish it took place in the late 1970s and 1980s), and the relocation of race groups in terms of the Group Areas Act—have an "op-ed" quality, part dinner party anecdote and part political criticism. Lacking integration into the fabric of the novel, these real incidents and allusions do not constitute satire and their effect is to disturb the narrative flow, while the inclusion of named restaurants, booksellers, and fashion designers edges the work towards becoming a tourist promotion of trendy Cape Town. Thus Schonstein fails in part to resist the dark centrifugal pull of social realism and to resolve the tension between the real and the imagined.

The masquerades which form the core of this novel, and which constitute its imaginative strength, are several and all involve an eye for the unfamiliar, the fringe, and the fantastic: the commercial masquerade of the theatrical group; the lovers' masquerades and their role playing;

and the racial masquerade, the exchange of white for black, of Brightstone for Yoruba. In this case of racial inversion, Schonstein prefers the Renaissance connotations of fairy king inherent in the first name Oberon, rather than exploring the African Yoruba, and Brightstone's dazed arrival at the Brabazan opens the door to the motley assortment of its other denizens.

Peter Brightstone (his name, the English equivalent of the German Schonstein, literally beautiful stone, or diamond, establishes from the start a link with the author that is later explained) is the character whose story brackets the beginning and the end of this novel. He is a poor white man living in the Salvation Army Hostel who takes a wrong turn on his daily walk, is set on by feral street children, falls down an embankment next to the corpse of an assassinated Nigerian drug lord, and wakes up next to a suitcase filled with ill gotten gains which he presumes are his own. This farcical sequence questions the nature of racial identity in Africa while also endorsing a clichéd and prejudicial perception of Nigerians as drug dealing criminals. It is also a farce with a sad face, as Brightstone is saved from near death by two homeless Zimbabwean immigrants—the man dressed as a clown who exhibits Pierrot's pathos as he begs at the city's roadside, and his wife, a healer, who uses the few amenities they have (water from the nearest petrol station, a fetish to ward off evil) to save this white stranger who has wandered into dangerous black turf.

This questioning of what it is to be white or black in Africa has a macabre doubling in the more tragic vignette of the albino child. He is another West African immigrant, murdered for his body parts "because people without pigmentation, who looked like phantoms, who were known as nobodies and ghosts, whose red-rimmed eyes reminded one of night wolves, were said to make extremely potent *muti*" (54). The arrival at the morgue of his truncated torso so disturbs the mortuary attendant, Chester April, that he leaves his job and like the other outsiders, loners, misfits, and romantics, takes refuge in the bar at the Brabazan.

Breakfast at Brabazan is concerned more with mis-en-scene than with narrative development. Inspired by Renaissance color, texture, music and word, filled with the "plausible absurdities" that Gaylard describes as typifying postcolonial literature (86), as well as "hyperbole and excess" (37), this novel is woven from a bricolage of event, character, structure, and cadence taken from Shakespeare and Dante which Schonstein uses to create a mythic frame for this microscopic Europe-in-Africa. Thus we have Brightstone's mistaken identity, the sudden appearance of the Duke's long-lost, or in this case, unknown son (who had been conceived thirteen years earlier during a bacchanalian street party and was washed up in a Cape known for both its storms and its good hope), and magical feasts where beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Figures grandly named Beatrice and Oberon appear and disappear, and a plaster statue of the Virgin Mary takes on a life of her own. A midsummer night's dream is the extended metaphor for the affair between the Bottomish figure of Winter, who is withered by polio, and his secretary, Pearlie Theron, who makes an

arbor of her apartment, a love nest where the two improbable lovers meet, eat, drink, love, and dress up, he en travesti. Unlike the professional actors in the theatrical company, these two are both actors and spectators of their own staging, and the carnivalesque is most evident in these private trysts where the lovers indulge their senses, building a second life outside the restrictions of their office relationship and the strictures of his Jewish family life, suspending hierarchy, privilege, norms, and prohibitions (Bakhtin 199). There is a Bakhtinian, anti-authoritarian challenge to social order in the contrast between the formal shabbath dinner at which his infidelity is revealed to his family, and the indulgent weekends and dinners tête-à-tête with his mistress which celebrate his liberation from the established order of his home. During these interludes their formal employer/employee relationship disappears in celebrations of the flesh, food, and word as the lovers converse in an arch recitation of poetry, and his exaggerated cross-dressing both elevates and debases. The truly grotesque realism, though, is evident in the comical rubber doll fetishism practiced by his judgmental son-in-law in commercial sex sessions where the exaggerated protuberances of the false labia and breasts of the body suit he wears mocks not so much the religious repudiation of the flesh (Bakhtin 21) or his father in law's excesses as the sanctimonious prudery of his mother-in-law, Mrs. Winter.

The two major narrative threads are drawn together when Oberon meets a distraught Pearlle at the Brabazan and helps her arrange a final tryst, a bizarre celebration that is funny, improbable, and subversive—satirical, carnivalesque, and baroque. Thespian, her lover, has had a stroke, has been incarcerated in a nursing home with strict instructions that he have no visitors. The family has sold the building where she lived, and Pearlle is bereft of all she holds dear. Oberon conspires with her to visit Thespian, and dressed as a doctor (another masquerade) he helps her to infiltrate the hospital. They transgress family and medical restraints, plying Thespian with delicious but dangerous food and drink far removed from sober hospital fare, and dress him up again in the women's clothing in which the nursing staff and his indignant wife find him after his final heart attack. Oberon has the authority of a *deus ex machina*, staging an easy and unobserved entrance and departure from the nursing home—a role he plays earlier, when introducing Pearlle to the delights of *Not the Midnight Mass* at Brabazan: "Here was fake opulence, black and blue-black, purple-black, gold, alizarin and glitter. Surely, Verrochio cherubs must soon emerge from behind the drapery... the banquet table, laden with bowls of plastic fruit, plastic flowers, and period-piece dinner plates, seemed waiting only for a group of revelers to sit down and call for platters of roast goose and duck." This is a fantasy of rococo excess of the same order as her lover's feasts.

Interspersed within each narrative zone is a flirtation with the visual, as Schonstein indulges her own delight in painting, providing the opportunity for both description and a magical escape

from reality. The first incident occurs when Brightstone stumbles, falls, and is saved; his fevered dream invokes Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a reception for newly dead souls described in an irreverent mixture of modernism and baroque: "The walls and vaulted ceiling are painted in the most extraordinary detail of angels, musicians, winged lions, unicorns, mythical symbols and legendary, gloriously handsome Pre-Raphaelite men and women. The place has to it the touch of Ellis Island" (15). This is mirrored in his end, in the same dream space "with its Dantesque components and elaborate interplay between angels and mythic figures, all rendered by masterful brushstrokes in a full spectrum of absolute color" (237). Invoking the Shakespearean notion that all the world's a stage, Brightstone relinquishes his mortality at the end of the novel: "his earthly garments transform into a magenta robe and angelic radiance gives the touch of a halo ... recognizing that his earthly performance is over, he smiles broadly and heroically and steps forward to take a bow, mimicking Pierrot and Pierrette in the Hopper painting" (238).

Schonstein's style is as baroque as the paintings she describes, endorsing the Renaissance concept that form follow content; this is evident not only in the excess of detail, but also in the incorporation of disparate quotations, accretions, and diversions. These include quotations from Shakespeare, a glossary of South African terms, art references, and a list of web and print sources for factual references, more acknowledgements than are usually included in fiction.

A coda labeled "Addendum: Self-Portraits" both contextualizes her novel and becomes the closing bracket for the introductory narrative. With its false conclusion this creates the story within a story, the narrative reflexivity that, together with parallelisms and digressions, Gaylard describes as being a feature of the postcolonial challenge to linear progression (112). At this stage Schonstein includes the reader in the collusive "we" of her authorial gaze upon the players: "Now, we look back at Peter Brightstone, as we did when Oberon Yoruba first booked in at Brabazan Bar & Lodge" (237). As an unreliable narrator, she introduces herself as the estranged sister and benefactor of Peter Brightstone, claiming to be the author ready to put the finishing touches to the "final rehearsal" because "the fine line between truth and fiction in her personal narrative has lost definition" (239). A grainy black and white photograph of three children, supposedly taken in Rhodesia in the 1950s, provides a wistful trigger to the memory of a time "before the Chimurenga War and all its sad, brutal, unnecessary death, and repercussions. The image holds them before they grow up and apart, thrown out with so much flotsam when Rhodesia and later Zimbabwe implode, creating a diaspora in white and black to pepper the world, under the plaintive notes of *mbiras* and tin guitars" (241). Thus does Schonstein return to an Africa that is both as real and imaginary as the Cape Town of Brabazan.

THE ELUSIVE MOTH

Originally published in Afrikaans in 1993 as *Karolina Ferreira* (the name of the chief protagonist), Ingrid Winterbach's *The Elusive Moth* is as evasive of easy capture and neat pinning as its title. The Afrikaans edition, published under the author's then pseudonym Lettie Viljoen, was awarded the M-Net Book Prize in 1994 and the Old Mutual Literary Prize in 1997, and generated substantial analysis and comment from Afrikaans and Dutch critics. Generally, Afrikaans critics chose to ignore the socio-political context of the novel in favor of a psychological approach. This novel became available to a wider audience when Winterbach herself translated and reworked it in 2005 (Lenta 168).

The quest for *Hebdomophruda creniline*, a moth belonging to the Geometridae family (described as "a small inconspicuous moth, difficult to find, pale as a shroud" [18]) is what drives Karolina to Voorspoed (meaning prosperity, success, or good luck), a small fictional dorp in the north-eastern Free State, the landlocked province in the heart of the country. She is accompanied by Basil September, a "Colored" herbalist researching indigenous healing flora in the area and reporting, improbably, to a Mr. Quiroga, an Argentinian herbalist in whose house he stays. As in Schonstein's work, action in *The Elusive Moth* centers round the hotel in the town center where the protagonist initially lodges, a mechanism that provides the opportunity to meet the locals in the bar, play snooker, and join in the nightly *opskop* or country dance. The setting, the early 1990s, is a turbulent time as South Africa prepares to jettison apartheid and move into an uncertain future, with conservatives reluctant to release their control, violence erupting in the name of both democracy and stability as the townships erupt, and the police moving in to quell dissent.

Karolina had known the village as a child when her father had been engaged in similar research some twenty-five years earlier, and in some ways her journey is a quest for memory, for that lost innocence, and for a resolution to an undisclosed tragedy relating to her father. She has moved up from Durban and brings with her a degree of big city sophistication; the politics of the place is an incidental backdrop to her scientific investigations that are as searching of personalities as of the insect world. The men she meets appeal to different aspects of her personality—Basil, the wise healer and shaman (his name significantly changed from the bland Willie September in the original Afrikaans version); the lawyer Pol Habermaut, who keeps her informed of political activity in the town; her dancing partner Kolyn; her Buddhist lover Jess Jankelowitz, who is engaged in economic research and whose name implies an Eastern European, possibly Jewish, identity that is never explored; and the frightening police chief, Gert Els. There are deaths—by suicide, suspicious car crash, and murder most foul. The denouement consists of a face-off between striking township residents and a police chief determined to suppress them. A petrol bomb is lobbed into the hotel,

setting the snooker table alight; the injuries are not fatal, the famous painted wall panels survive but the snooker sessions end, and with this Karolina concludes her research, leaving the town with Jess and returning only on nostalgic visits—a denouement that is a metaphor for and presages the relatively easy transition (an absence of civil war) that South Africa had from apartheid regime to democracy. Thus far, then, the novel seems to reflect real politics of the time, but in an interview with Margaret Lenta, Winterbach remarks that:

My first three novels ... were “struggle” novels. The state of emergency certainly left a mark.... With *Karolina*, things had already started changing. The novel concerns itself with the implications of that change for a small Free State town. During the eighties there was a big debate about the writer’s moral duty to write engaged novels. The country is liberated now; I can go on with whatever I want to go on with. But what novel does not reflect at least some of the country’s social and political circumstances? *Karolina* Ferreira presents a stranger from Durban who arrives in search of a rare moth in a remote community. The novel explores what the men of the village reveal of themselves in their reactions to this city woman. If Karolina disrupts the rigid community she does so not only as someone from the city, but also as a woman. There’s a moment where she says that she won’t be taken seriously, and neither will Basil September, because she’s a woman and he’s a colored. (qtd. in Lenta 165-66)

Human analyzes *The Elusive Moth* from the perspective of depth psychology and argues convincingly for its Jungian nature, that the four men in Karolina’s life represent four faces of individuation and Buddhist thought, though Winterbach herself claims to be influenced more by Freud’s concern with the unconscious than with Jungian individuation. In this paper I eschew depth analysis in favor of a concern with the surface structure and with the signifiers and appearances inherent in the novel, from fleeting relationships to the vulgar, popular entertainment in the town, the nightly dances with their carnivalesque overtones to the rococo excess in the design of a hotel sited in the rolling grasslands of South Africa’s hinterland. This site is redolent with the memory of the great battles of the past where Boer, Brit, and black struggled for mastery at Isandhlwana, Majuba, and the Siege of Ladysmith, battles depicted on the painted wall panels that line the hotel dining room. This serves to contrast the African landscape with the European style of the built environment, the beautiful craftsmanship in the carved and wrought interior of the hotel, and the implications it has for future white hegemony. The choice of a hotel as a locus for diverse characters also carries echoes of European works like Joseph Roth’s *Hotel Savoy* and Thomas

Mann's *The Magic Mountain*—both published in 1924 and, like Winterbach's (and Schonstein's) work, provided metaphors for a disturbed society in a time of flux.

The Elusive Moth is not an overtly political novel, but its social depictions contain political inferences, deconstructing the cliché of Afrikaners as farmers, deconstructing also the nature of the pastoral and picturesque. Winterbach remarked that “The Afrikaner hasn't been rural for a very long time. I do not want to define the Afrikaner” (qtd. in Lenta 167). The wealthiest landlord Tonnie de Melck, for example, who exhibits some similarity to the landed gentry described in Leroux's *Sewe Dae by die Silbersteins*, is of unsound mind, a depressive unhinged by his beautiful autistic wife, and he self-destructs in a prescient metaphor of the ending of white privilege.

Nor is *The Elusive Moth* overtly funny—there's too much death, disaster, and soul-searching for that—but its satirical over- and undertones question the notion of rural innocence. Like J.M. Coetzee's *Dusklands*, it subverts the notion of an idealized, simple farm life depicted in the traditional Afrikaans *plaasroman*. It's also a frontier novel; Karolina is the existential stranger who rides into town on a mission, confronts her destiny, and after the catharsis rides out again to an improbably happy ending. Van Collier compares this aspect of Karolina (both persona and novel) to the satirical travel stories of Etienne Leroux, in turn influenced by Swift and Rabelais (227). Karolina is both spectator and observer in the carnivalesque activities in the hotel; she is the only woman playing snooker (though Basil comments that “once the ants started flying [i.e., in the cooler rainy season], the women would come” [32]) as she fends off the advances of the men in the snooker room. They are described in a mix of Brueghelesque tones and grotesque Bakhtinian realism as oleaginous, lecherous, ill-clad in cheap clothes—descriptions amplified by the seer Basil, who comments of the magistrate: “He pisses a forked green stream ... Probably rejected by the mother at an early age ... Unquenchable thirst. Iron constitution. Irritable. Critical. Malicious. Manipulative. Predisposition to anal warts. Migraine lodged in the left eye” (15-16). Kieliemann, the lecherous lieutenant, Basil describes as “Schizoid disposition and a tendency towards fetishism ... cruel to his subordinates, submissive to his superiors. Cool exterior, burning interior.” This is the policeman who constantly brushes up against her, the cheap Terylene of his trousers bulging with desire; she seems unable to avoid his grasp as he corners her in the passage leading to the toilets. Kolyn (the Kolyn fellow, as she labels him in a rather awkward translation from the Afrikaans “die Kolyn-kêrel”), the silent partner who embraces her dancing with growing sensitivity, wears short trousers and sneakers. He is involved in agricultural development but, judging by a few Delphic comments, could also be a police spy. There's an element of parody in this portrait of a small town ballroom dancer lacking the elegance of the Latinate lounge lizard; it's unlikely that he could effect the seamless glissade of the tango wearing shoes with rubber soles. Despite their close embrace

on the dance floor, there's little erotic tension between Karolina and Kolyn, and she describes his testicles as "cool and relaxed" (129).

He was dressed in short trousers because of the heat, and he wore trendy white American sneakers that laced up to the ankle. He had large, shapely calves; delicately jointed ankles, knees and wrist; a sturdy stomach and buttocks. An early eruption of acne had left his skin scarred and pitted. These scars were now camouflaged by a neatly trimmed, though lush Voortrekker beard. (36)

This is not a particularly elegant picture, nor one associated with ballroom dancing. In comparison, the Colombian art dealer Fernes Ramirez, whom she meets in the hotel, looks far more like a Latin dancer: "eyes like gemstones ... a high skin color, like a flush of blood to the face ... jet-black hair like a raven's wing, cropped short in front, but with a long, seductive lock in the nape of his neck. He was clean-shaven but with the shadow of a bluish black beard, and he seemed extremely restless" (89). For Karolina, the dance is more than enough: "She no longer expected immediate gratification. The study of moths and the refinement of her dance technique, these were the objects of her passion" (37). It's a dance that eventually leads her into an altered state of consciousness, like the trance dance of the San/Bushmen whose presence is remote in this novel; they appear only in a distant locale, when Basil tells her of his escape (as a political activist) from South Africa in the seventies, how he had been tracked down in Botswana, had jumped from a moving truck, been shot at and wounded and rescued by "a small band of desert people" who "rubbed animal fat into his body, rolled him in mud, and covered him with leaves" (87). This treatment triggers his interest in natural remedies and eventually leads him to Quiroga.

Rather like the static photographs by David Goldblatt and Pieter Hugo of unsmiling burghers and their equally dour womenfolk sitting on hard upright chairs around the periphery of a bleak sitting room, the other occupants of the hotel's public rooms, the ladies' bar, and snooker table come close to being stock Boer characters. These include teachers Kriek, Botha, and Baluschagne (called Balls by everyone) who talk about rugby; a few salesmen in transit; a local doctor "with a pronounced limp and a lecherous eye"; three farmers including the two extremely wealthy De Melck brothers who discuss Hereford bloodlines, "sperm counts and testicles"; and the police contingent Sergeants Frikkie Visser, Yap Buytendach, and Boet Visagie.

It is here, in the public rooms, that politics, parody, and fantasy fuse—and part of the fantasy is not only the baroque but also the delusion that white rule can withstand the forces of history. The hothouse atmosphere around the snooker table induces a hallucinatory state in Karolina, "the green surface of the table, the whisky, the heat ... a menacing yellow glow bounced

off the walls" (33), as she senses imminent crisis, a rising pressure in anticipation of a hunt, and the antelope heads mounted on the wall bear testimony to the hunting ethos in the town. Tensions heat up in the snooker room, tensions both racial and sexual, and "the atmosphere grew dense with inarticulate longing, with concealed fear and prejudice, with latent hysteria rising gradually to the surface. It was bound to break through tonight—a raid would perhaps be organized, or a midnight pillaging party" (33).

Breaking free from Kieliemann's embrace outside the snooker room, she asks what their plans are for the night, and he replies, "There's big shit in the location ... Come along by all means if you really want to see" (34). From this point the novel shifts from parody and the personal to politics, to the world outside the limitations of this small white community and to the bigger canvas of black aspiration. Lacking the regenerative qualities of humor, these events have instead a sulphurous miasma.

Isolated though Voorspoed may be, it is not immune to the great forces playing across the land. Her enigmatic companion Basil September is from the Cape, specifically the Cape Flats, the windswept surrounds of Cape Town to which Colored people were consigned in the 1960s by the infamous Group Areas Act which kept the best suburbs for white occupation. With their heady mix of poverty and politics, the Flats became a breeding ground for insurrection, and there are two more Cape Flats characters in Voorspoed—Manie de la Rey and Beyers, whose names mirror those of two great Boer generals from the previous century, are agents provocateurs operating under the guise of travelling players. De la Rey flirts with danger at another level; he is having an affair with a beautiful white woman, the wife of the town clerk, Sarel de Klerk. Though sex across the color line was by then no longer a criminal offence (President P.W. Botha had amended the so-called Immorality Act in 1985), an obvious public display of inter-racial passion, particularly if it were adulterous, would not have been a wise move in a conservative Afrikaans community in the early 1990s. The choice of names, one of several pairings in this novel, is another glancing reference to the myth of Afrikaner purity, underlining the fact that Colored (mixed-race) people were frequently sired by white men, and by the very same white Afrikaners who denied their distaff offspring in name and in fact, consigning them to "poor relation" status, forever begging at the back door. This is all implicit in a novel originally written in Afrikaans whose readership would have known and recognized these racial nuances and dangers. The two men have ostensibly come to town as travelling players, the Delarey and Beyers Theatrical Company, to mount a production called *The Jealous Husband*, an intertextual reference to Shakespeare's *Othello*, both masquerade and parody.

Exotic influences are more evident than those of indigenous Africa in both novels. Schonstein's infatuation with the baroque and with Italian art are evident in the delight she displays in incorporating painting in her texts, the ekphrasis which J.U. Jacobs has discussed in

relation to her previous work, *Skyline*. This exotic influence is less evident in Winterbach's work, but her Africa is largely the Africa of the Afrikaner, the settler, rather than the indigene. Her style is for the most part austere where Schonstein's is lush and languid. Winterbach acknowledges the influence of J.M. Coetzee "who keeps me on the straight and narrow with the example of his 'stripped narrative exposition' (his phrase) and unflinching eye," adding that her intention is to create text that is dense: "Tightly knit, carefully composed. I do not believe in tying up all the loose ends—in 'resolution' in a conventional sense" (qtd. in Lenta 165). This is evident in the surreal fantasy of the opening sentence with its exotic and macabre image that is neither explained nor pursued: "Long ago, Karolina Ferreira had a dream: of a promenade by the sea with a row of palm trees growing down the center, and the body of a man, hacked in two, with blood spurting from it" (7).

The magical and the bizarre find their voice in Basil September, the enigmatic shaman who guides Karolina Ferreira through the maze of dream and event with his strange analyses of blood and urine, and who contacts neither Sotho nor Zulu herbalists in the area. Instead he reports, improbably, to a Mr. Quiroga, an Argentinian herbalist living in Voorspoed. This name echoes the Argentinian writer Horace Quiroga whose modernist stories, particularly *Tales of Love, Madness and Death*, reveal an obsession with disease; he is a writer influenced by Edgar Allan Poe and Rudyard Kipling, a writer whose surrealist imagination anticipates the magical realism that came to typify South American writing in the twentieth century. There is another intertextual reference in the persons of Adelia Farber and her partner Fernes Ramirez, Colombian artists touring the country whom Karolina and Basil meet at the hotel, unlikely tourists who trigger dobbelganger associations with Mexican painter Frida Kahlo and her husband, the art dealer Diego Rivera (Human), and who provide the avenue for Winterbach to import magical realism into the South African landscape. Adelia is half Spanish; her mother had married a South African and she had spent her childhood in South Africa before moving to South America. Many of Adelia's paintings have the same surreal quality as Kahlo's, lush and ominous: "In her paintings she was trying to portray herself as a hero, but it seemed it was not easy for women to be heroes" (127). These paintings include "a woman in a coffin in a vast open plain, with a city in the background ... a self-portrait with an elaborate headdress of plaited rope and a beaded necklace. On her shoulder a crow was perched and in her hand she held a skull." Still lives include "a pawpaw that had been cut in half and that resembled female genitals ... a burnished copper bowl, overripe fruit, dark roses, snails, and a small hidden snake." Another self-portrait shows the organs inside her body, and yet another shows Adelia in a nun's habit, surrounded by the luxuriant tresses of her own hair. "Karolina studied these and thought, whatever Adelia may say, they doubtlessly were heroic portraits," though ironically it is Karolina herself who is heroic (127-28).

The baroque, in material manifestation, is also a feature of Winterbach's anonymous country hotel, particularly the "remarkable reception area, which was pure baroque—imported by lord knows who into a region renowned for its sheep and maize. The reception desk, the baldachin above it, and the staircase balusters were of dark oak, elaborately carved with ornate scrolls, leaves, flower motifs, and cherubs; sensuously curving and swelling forms" (10). Subsequently Karolina and Basil attend the funeral of Tonnie de Melck where she notes that:

The pulpit was in a style identical to that of the baroque staircase and the reception area of the hotel ... The same grand, extravagant flower and leaf patterns, the same swelling, rounded forms in dark oak ... The architect or sculptor must have had extraordinary powers of imagination to have ventured into these baroque excesses in the midst of the stark severity of this sheep and maize region. (122)

These baroque excesses are even more misplaced in the severe environment of this Protestant church. The Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) of the Afrikaner followed an often unforgiving and iconoclastic Calvinism stripped of any Catholic excess. The baroque is evident again during a picnic when Fernes plays Renaissance music, "motets by Orlando di Lasso and Cristobal de Morales, five part madrigals by Gesualdo" (146). Much later, after their return to South America, Adelia writes to Karolina to describe the painting she was making of a picnic they had had, "of the four of them dancing in the dry bed of the spruit," creating their own dance to the music of time, full of the detail of grasses and stone, insects, food, blankets, trees, clouds, a painting in the baroque style in which "figures are dominated by the immensity of sky and landscape" (194). This nostalgic vision is half African, half European Other, like the Cafe Europa in Ivan Vladislavić's *Restless Supermarket*; it becomes a wistful pastiche, a half-remembered fantasy of an elsewhere.

Bracketing as they do the two decades under consideration, these two novels illustrate many of the directions South African writing is taking in this millennium. Fiction writers, breaking free from the previous political imperative, are experimenting with imaginative forms. Both these novels evidence the magical realism and carnivalesque hyperbole that Gaylard describes as a "violatory impulse" (37), that is, a violation of the norms of a European fiction associated with colonialism (or, in South Africa's case, apartheid). There is a new diversity and cultural inclusivity; Afrikaans (and African) writings, driven largely by commercial necessity, have become available in English, thus both questioning and extending the definition of South African literature. In discussing this issue with Lenta, Winterbach commented that "I don't know if it would be possible ever to merge Afrikaans literature with other South African literatures, but I would like it to be part of a South African literature, because I think the separation between an Afrikaans literature and a

South African literature in English has continued for too long" (qtd. in Lenta 170). Schonstein, who was raised in the former Rhodesia but left before the regime and name change to Zimbabwe, is one of many immigrants to make South Africa her home, and the coda of this novel encapsulates her nostalgia for that lost African childhood.

Both Winterbach and Schonstein exhibit a *jouissance* in their light-fingered and often humorous selection of events from the country's dark past and contemporary criminality, rather than the mimesis and linear trajectory of social realist Nadine Gordimer or the deep pessimism of J.M. Coetzee. Their narratives offer innovative perspectives of small town intrigue and the nascent strength of women and black people challenging patriarchal and apartheid-era structures (Winterbach), and of a Cape Town whose beauty is both magical and ominous (Schonstein). Their flirtation with satire is tempered by social realities, which in Schonstein's case provide a parallel reading that hobbles the soaring fantasies of her imagination, whereas Winterbach integrates sufficient detail to provide a socio-political context to her novel without rupture. Varied though their locales are, both reflect different aspects of the white middle class in which black characters play only bit parts, and it remains for new young black writers to open the doors on a different vista.

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