Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 315

Volume 315

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short-Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Lived between 1900 and 1999, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor

Produced in association with
Layman Poupard Publishing

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 315

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN-13: 978-1-56995-765-3

ISSN: 0276-8178

Printed in Mexico
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 19 18 17 16 15

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (*TCLC*) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, "there is nothing comparable available." *TCLC* "is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own."

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TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. The great poets, novelists, short-story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey of an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Volumes 1 through 87 of *TCLC* featured authors who died between 1900 and 1959; beginning with Volume 88, the series expanded to include authors who died between 1900 and 1999. Beginning with Volume 26, every fourth volume of *TCLC* was devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers. With *TCLC* 285, the series returned to a standard author approach, with some entries devoted to a single important work of world literature and others devoted to literary topics.

TCLC is part of the survey of criticism and world literature that is contained in Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (*CLC*), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (*NCLC*), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (*LC*), *Shakespearean Criticism* (*SC*), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (*CMLC*).

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers,* 7th ed. (2009).

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as Modern Language Association (MLA) style or University of Chicago Press style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Cardone, Resha. "Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La tierra insomne o La puta madre*." *Hispania* 88.2 (2005): 284-93. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.* Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 356-65. Print.

Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations.* Ed. Reginald M. Nischik. Rochester: Camden House, 2007. 163-74. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.* Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 227-32. Print.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style,* 16th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Cardone, Resha. "Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La tierra insomne o La puta madre*." *Hispania* 88, no. 2 (May 2005): 284-93. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.* Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 356-65. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations,* edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.* Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008.

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Herman Charles Bosman
1905-1951

(Also known as Herbert Charles Boswell; also wrote under the pseudonyms Ben Africa, Ben Eath, P. de Beer, N. J. Gordon, and Herman Malan) South African short-story writer, novelist, essayist, and poet.

The following entry provides criticism of Bosman's life and works. For additional information about Bosman, see *TCLC,* Volume 49.

INTRODUCTION

A best-selling writer in his native South Africa, Herman Charles Bosman is primarily remembered as the author of some 150 short stories set mainly in the country's Transvaal region. Through gentle humor, irony, and realistic characters and descriptions, he accurately captured the tenor of life in rural South African communities. Most of the characters who populate Bosman's fiction are Afrikaners, white South Africans of predominantly Dutch descent who speak the Afrikaans language. Because these characters are often bigoted, conservative, and small-minded, critics assumed for many years that they reflected racist views held by Bosman himself. In fact, as a reassessment of his work conducted in the 1970s indicated, Bosman was an outspoken critic of the apartheid policies instituted in 1948, and he championed the notion of a distinct South African literature, free of European and American influences. Although scholars have continued to debate his position within South African literature, Bosman is widely recognized as a master storyteller.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bosman was born in 1905 in Kuils River, near Cape Town, South Africa, to Jacobus Bosman, a mine worker, and Elisa Malan, the daughter of a prominent family from the city of Potchefstroom. In 1918, the family moved to Johannesburg, where Bosman spent most of his life. Growing up in a bilingual household, he was fluent in both Afrikaans and English. Bosman demonstrated an interest in reading and writing from an early age, and he especially enjoyed the tales of American short-story writers Edgar Allan Poe and O. Henry, along with the works of French symbolist poets Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud. Bosman's first short stories appeared in the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* when he was sixteen years old. Two years later, his father died in a mining accident—Valerie Rosenberg (2005; see Further Reading) reported that he remarked, "I was almost moved to tears"—and his mother remarried. After graduating from the University of Witwatersrand in 1925, he accepted a teaching position in the Groot Marico district, a remote, sparsely populated, agricultural area in what was then the Western Transvaal. Bosman married Vera Sawyer a few days before moving to his new post under the name Herbert Charles Boswell. Although he remained in the teaching position for only about six months, his experiences in the Marico and the stories he heard from the region's old Afrikaans farmers provided him with writing material for the remainder of his life.

While he was visiting the family home in Johannesburg in 1926, Bosman shot and killed his stepbrother during an argument. He was sentenced to death later that year, but his sentence was eventually commuted to ten years of hard labor. Ultimately, he spent about four years in prison. After his release in 1930, Bosman worked for a variety of newspapers and literary magazines as a journalist, editor, and critic. His short stories appeared regularly in South African journals during the 1930s and 1940s, and his first volume of poetry, *The Blue Princess,* was published in 1931. That same year, Bosman married Ellaleen Manson, his marriage to Sawyer having been annulled in 1926 at the request of her family. The two moved to England, where Bosman continued to write. They returned to South Africa in 1940. The years between 1940 and 1944 were financially difficult for Bosman, and he took on a variety of odd jobs in order to survive. He divorced Manson in 1944 and married Helena Stegmann. That year, he became literary editor of the *South African Opinion,* a position he held until 1947, after which he began concentrating primarily on his writing, publishing more than eighty stories in weekly contributions to the South African magazine the *Forum.* His first novel, *Jacaranda in the Night,* and his best-known collection of short stories, *Mafeking Road,* were published in 1947. *Cold Stone Jug,* a fictionalized account of his prison experience, appeared in 1949. A draft of his second novel, *Willemsdorp* (1977), was complete but unedited when Bosman died of cardiac arrest in 1951.

MAJOR WORKS

Bosman's best-known works are his stories featuring the narrator Oom Schalk Lourens and his so-called Voorkamer tales, which take their name from an Afrikaans word that roughly translates to "front parlor." Like all of Bosman's fiction, the Oom Schalk pieces, collected principally in

Mafeking Road and *Unto Dust* (1963), are set in the region then called the Western Transvaal. These fireside stories are narrated in the first person by the old Afrikaans farmer and raconteur Oom Schalk. The tales concern such topics as the hardships of farming, the impact of the Second Boer War, and the endurance of the local people in the face of adverse natural conditions. In the story "In the Withaak's Shade," Oom Schalk recalls encountering a leopard while searching for lost cattle. In "The Rooinek," he tells of a family whose members perish while attempting to escape British rule in the Transvaal by crossing the Kalahari Desert to what was then German West Africa (now Namibia). Many of the stories are comic in tone and focus on the ways of wily, tightfisted, or lazy farmers. However, there are also ghost and murder stories, such as "Old Transvaal Story," and darker tales, such as "The Music-Maker," in which a musician ultimately learns about the impossibility of changing one's life in the backcountry.

Scholars have praised Bosman's ability to capture the folksy spirit of the farming community and commended his realistic portraits of the characters who interact in the tales. Although some early commentators believed that the narrow-mindedness and bigotry of Bosman's characters mirrored his own attitudes, more recent commentators have emphasized how his use of irony and sarcasm actually serve to expose such views. These critics have pointed to stories that condemn their white characters' racism, such as "Makapan's Caves," which entails a mission to punish a black tribe, and "Unto Dust," which satirically undermines Afrikaans farmers' belief in the superiority of the white race. Even though Bosman's stories show the farmers' personal failings and lack of self-awareness, his satire was never unduly harsh. He captures the spirit of life in South Africa's rural regions through his compelling descriptions of the landscape and his authentic rendering of the cadence of the farmers' Afrikaans dialect.

The Voorkamer stories are partly collected in *A Bekkersdal Marathon* (1971) and *Jurie Steyn's Post Office* (1971). These stories were originally published weekly in the *Forum* between April 1950 and December 1951. Less cohesive and more informally structured than the Oom Schalk stories, the Voorkamer pieces feature speakers who come and go from postmaster Jurie Steyn's anteroom, where they pick up their mail and await the delivery truck's return of empty milk cans. The tales are told by various narrators and concern subject matter often sparked by desultory conversations about current events. For instance, the story "Go-Slow Strike" refers to a strike among postal workers. The wise old farmer Oupa Sarel Bekker serves to provide comic relief, frequently contrasting modern life with the old ways of the Afrikaans farmers. The comic element is also present in such stories as "A Bekkersdal Marathon," about a hymn-singing marathon in a local church. While the Oom Schalk stories celebrate community and tradition, the Voorkamer tales depict an increasingly fragmented society struggling in a changing world but resistant to anything new. In "Local Colour," a writer comes to the area to interview the regular characters of the Voorkamer tales and is astounded at their dullness and indifference toward the landscape around them.

Cold Stone Jug, one of Bosman's longer prose pieces, is a semiautobiographical account of his four years in Pretoria Central Prison. The book records Bosman's observations about the prison atmosphere and its effects on prisoners, chronicling his deeply degrading work as a prison laborer and his relationships with fellow inmates. *Jacaranda in the Night* has been largely regarded as uneven in style and inferior to his short fiction. A sensational narrative about corruption, sadism, and brute sexuality in a small town, it centers on the character of Hannah Theron, a schoolteacher who moves to a town in the Northern Transvaal. After a series of disastrous relationships with men who abuse her in diverse ways, she loses her social standing and self-respect and then begins the slow process of rebuilding her self-esteem. Critics have generally been more positive in their appraisals of *Willemsdorp,* a study of South Africa's worsening race relations, particularly the dire consequences of the Immorality Act, a set of two laws passed in 1927 and 1957 that made interracial sexual relations illegal.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Although Bosman's stories have always been popular with the reading public, some scholars of South African literature have questioned his place in the country's literary canon. This situation changed in the 1970s, however, when the release of new editions of Bosman's work prompted a critical reassessment of his legacy. Since then, critics have continued to examine various aspects of his life and work. M. C. Andersen (1998) presented a survey of Bosman's literary career, emphasizing his productivity and his tenacity in pursuing a writing career despite numerous personal and professional setbacks.

Many critics have focused on Bosman's treatment of the narrator in his Oom Schalk and Voorkamer tales. Christopher English (1989; see Further Reading) noted that Bosman's stories exhibit elements of the *skaz* style of narration, *skaz* being a Russian term describing written narratives that make use of many of the devices of oral storytelling. Craig MacKenzie (1993) also wrote about Bosman's use of the *skaz* style, tracing its influence in the works of Bosman and fellow South African writers W. C. Scully, Percy FitzPatrick, and Perceval Gibbon. In a 1999 essay, MacKenzie explored Bosman's works in the context of the development of the "oral-style story" in modern South Africa. MacKenzie argued that Bosman's greatest accomplishment was his redeployment of "an old and ailing genre," which he then equipped with a new purpose, allowing it "to engage meaningfully with the growing complexities of

mid-twentieth-century South African life." MacKenzie's 2000 essay explores similar themes, suggesting that the poignancy of the Voorkamer stories derives from their success in capturing "the transition of South African society from coherent rural community to dislocated urban populace."

Bosman's treatment of racism has been a topic of ongoing interest among critics. David Medalie (1994) analyzed Bosman's use of humor in his stories, showing how it often functions as a tool for satirizing the racism of the Afrikaans farmers. Margaret Lenta (2003) acknowledged the "combination of camaraderie and genocidal racism" in the Oom Schalk stories but noted that the tales also comment often on the community's racism, hypocrisy, and parochialism.

Jelena Krstovic

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Blue Princess. As Herman Malan. Johannesburg: Central News Agency, 1931. (Poetry)

Mara. As Malan. Johannesburg: African, 1932. (Play and poetry)

Rust: A Poem. As Malan. Johannesburg: African, 1932. (Poetry)

Jesus: An Ode. As Malan. Johannesburg: African, 1933. (Poetry)

Jacaranda in the Night. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse, 1947. (Novel)

**Mafeking Road.* Johannesburg: Central News Agency, 1947. (Short stories)

Cold Stone Jug. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse, 1949. (Novel)

Veld-Trails and Pavements: An Anthology of South African Short Stories. Ed. Herman Charles Bosman and C. Bredell. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse, 1949. (Short stories)

A Cask of Jerepigo: Sketches and Essays. Ed. Lionel Abrahams. Johannesburg: Central News Agency, 1957. (Essays and sketches)

†*Unto Dust: Stories.* Ed. Abrahams. London: Blond, 1963. (Short stories)

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‖*The Complete Voorkamer Stories.* Ed. MacKenzie. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 2011. (Short stories)

*Includes "In the Withaak's Shade," "Makapan's Caves," "The Music-Maker," and "The Rooinek."

†Includes "Old Transvaal Story" and "Unto Dust."

‡Includes "A Bekkersdal Marathon," originally published in the *Forum* on 22 April 1950.

§Includes "Go-Slow Strike," originally published in the *Forum* on 29 December 1951.

‖Includes "Local Colour," originally published in the *Forum* on 20 May 1950.

CRITICISM

N. Meihuizen (essay date 1991)

SOURCE: Meihuizen, N. "Bosman and Self-Conscious Fiction." *Literator* 12.1 (1991): 35-42. Print.

[*In the following essay, Meihuizen uses Bosman's short stories "Unto Dust" and "Old Transvaal Story" to demonstrate how the author's " 'modernist' self-consciousness" is revealed in his work. In stories such as these, Meihuizen observes, Bosman "denies the validity of his materials, yet must make good use of those same materials," thus "undermining his position and affirming his faith in it at the same time."*]

Introduction

Bosman often comments upon his art in the course of his stories. These comments reinforce our awareness of the illusory nature of art, and yet Bosman is still able to hold us in his storyteller's grip. Why should this be so? The matter is related to his sheer craftsmanship, noted, for example by Hennie Aucamp (Aucamp, 1978:83, 90). But literary craftsmanship which distances itself from illusion must find another focus. I would suggest, as I hope this article makes clear, that through his comments and other devices, Bosman makes illusion subordinate to delusion, the latter as entertaining in its way as the former.

Stephen Gray elegantly elaborates on the aspect of commentary in Bosman's writings: "His on-going commentary on the practice of fiction intrudes quite frequently as you read along, as he explains himself, backtracks, apologizes, insists that it is only a trick after all. Often he actually explains the trick to you, only to pull another one later. He was as interested in his medium as he ever was in the Marico . . ." (Gray in Bosman, 1980:14). The emphasis on medium is also apparent in the typical features of a Bosman short story: exaggeration, bogus naivete, malapropisms, misquotations, incongruities and circumlocutions. Alfred Appel, in his foreword to *Lolita,* writes of "involuted" work, or work which "turns in upon itself, is self-referential, conscious of its status as fiction. . . ." Aspects of such work are detected by Appel in Nabokov, and might as easily be detected in Bosman: parody, patterning, the work-within-the-work and the authorial voice (Appel in Nabokov, 1970: xxii-xxxi).

Theoretical Background

Relatively early in the Anglo-Saxon world Appel was expressing a theoretical interest in self-conscious literature, an interest since more thoroughly formulated in works such as Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1984) and Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984). Howard Felperin, in *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory* (1986), suggests that such theoretical works are part of a present historical moment in a long tradition:

> The recent paradigm-shift toward theory, which has enabled such [self-conscious] texts to be read as never before, and writerly modernity to be radically backdated, may itself be only the latest phase of that larger change in the status of writing which enabled such self-critical and self-destabilizing texts to be produced in the first place, the academic institutionalization of a textual self-consciousness long since in train.
>
> (Felperin, 1986:200)

Felperin (1986:200) "backdate[s]" "modernity" in order to include such works as *Don Quixote, The Tempest,* and *Tristram Shandy,* the potential of the last-named work for "laying bare" its own devices long since recognized by Viktor Shklovsky (Selden, 1986: 11). But as Waugh hints, the practice of self-consciousness might be older than the novel itself (1984: 5). Indeed, Roland Barthes, in his famous essay of 1968, "The Death of the Author," implies that since its emergence, writing has underlined the textuality of the text:

> As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively, that is to say,

> finally outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself, this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.
>
> (Barthes in Lodge, 1988:168)

But if all fiction is inherently self-conscious, it is yet possible and necessary to categorize different types of self-consciousness in order to draw very obvious distinctions. For example, while "[o]ver the past twenty years, novelists have tended to become much more aware of the theoretical issues involved in constructing fictions" (Waugh, 1984: 2), this is certainly not true of Bosman. He is not concerned with "explor[ing] a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction" (ibid.). One feels, as remarked earlier, that his principal concern is to entertain. Peter Hutchinson, in *Games Author's Play* (1983), indicates that entertainment is one of the basic attributes of literary play (Hutchinson, 1983:13). This is not to say that Bosman doesn't share certain other attributes with contemporary writers of metafiction ("... fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, 1984:2). We can extrapolate from Waugh's list of the fundamental attributes of metafiction attributes which clearly apply to Bosman, as a glance back at Appel's list will help corroborate:

> [A] celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with an uncertainty about the validity of its representations; an extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing fictions; a pervasive insecurity about the relationship of fiction to reality; a parodic, playful, excessive or deceptively naive style of writing.
>
> (ibid.)

But *uncertainty* and *insecurity* are not characteristic Bosman traits. I am implying that Waugh's list indicates a distinction in the production of self-conscious literature, reflecting to an extent Roger Fowler's distinction between the intense self-consciousness of post-World War-II literature (aided by the writers' growing awareness of theoretical issues) and "modernist self-consciousness" (Fowler, 1987:96), which would include Bosman's work.

Self-Consciousness in South African Fiction

Self-consciousness is not new in the eighties in South Africa, where young Afrikaans writers (such as Koos Prinsloo, in *Jonkmanskas* and *Die hemel help ons*) exploit to the full techniques which underline the nature of the medium (Prinsloo, 1982, 1988). And, to remain with Prinsloo, the commendable dissertation on *Jonkmanskas* by A. W. Botha (1987) is representative evidence that South Africa is not lagging behind in its appreciation and understanding of self-conscious techniques in literature. Present local involvement with such techniques however focuses on the *intense* variety of self-consciousness; the *modernist self-consciousness* of Bosman still deserves attention, as, apart from its own intrinsic value, it helps demonstrate a continuity in the development of literary self-consciousness in South Africa.

Bosman and Self-Conscious Fiction: A General Overview

What is intriguing about Bosman is the garb in which he clothes his materials. Marico farmers are, at first sight, even less likely characters in contemporary fiction than Umberto Eco's medieval monks. The South African bushveld was indeed virgin territory for one establishing twentieth century literary techniques. But although Bosman inaugurates, as it were, this century in the bushveld, he never swerves from being true to the ingrained nature of the bushveld. Indeed, aspects of his self-conscious art (for example, the disclosure of illusion, or the explanation of the "trick," as Gray puts it) chime perfectly with the cunning playfulness of the traditional "fireside" storyteller.

Gray gives a useful concise breakdown of the pattern of a Bosman short story, which we might apply to actual examples in attempting to highlight Bosman the self-conscious artificer. He writes that, "[t]he pattern in each of Bosman's stories is one of a theme with variations, around which all the material is shaped." "With the resolution," notes Gray, "all those different views [presented by the variations] are brought into focus on the original theme, so that it leaps into clarity." He further notes that "a small and unexpected detail, mentioned casually in the introductory section," often turns out to be of prime importance in illuminating the whole," and he refers to "the recurring yellow dog in **'Unto Dust'** as a 'neat example'" (Gray in Bosman, 1980:15-16).

"Unto Dust"

"Unto Dust" warrants closer observation. The general theme of the story is death, or to be more particular, the prejudices we have regarding the dead. This is apparent in the opening sentence, which indicates the differing attitudes people have towards those who die young and those who die old: "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, 1983:13). The bare fact of death is also reflected on in this paragraph, although in a humorous way, through "the crude questions that a couple of men in plain clothes from the land-drost's office are asking about cattle-dip." The crude questions take the edge off what may be romantic about a young girl's death, and expose a more stark conception of death as the leveller, the second important theme in the story. The second and third paragraphs offer a corrective to the conventional attitudes towards death displayed in the first paragraph. As romantic as the young girl's death seems,