

Appropriating Herman Charles Bosman: Same-Sex Desire and the Unmaking of Otherness

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Summary

This article focuses on two recent short stories that appropriate features of the literary works of Herman Charles Bosman, one of South Africa's most prolific short story writers. The two stories that I examine appear in different texts, neither of which has received sustained critical attention. Whereas Emil Rorke's "Poisoned Grief" was published in an anthology of short stories titled *Queer Africa* (2013), Richard de Nooy's untitled short story forms part of his second novel, *The Big Stick* (2011). The article focuses on how each story represents same-sex desire while offering different intertextual appropriations or reworkings of Bosman's style. Though this article engages with selected scholarship on Bosman's work, it is not a study of whether the two stories successfully mimic their literary antecedent. Rather, this article brings Rorke's and De Nooy's stories into dialogue, not only with one another but also with the characters, spaces, and style of Bosman's stories. I argue that though De Nooy's provocative and humorous story contrasts Rorke's subtle and poignant depiction of same-sex love and intimacy, both stories privilege desire over sexual identity, and offer us different ways of thinking about same-sex sexualities.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel fokus op twee onlangse kortverhale wat die kenmerke van die verhale van Herman Charles Bosman, een van Suid-Afrika se mees produktiewe kortverhaal-skrywers, aproprieer. Die twee kortverhale wat in hierdie artikel onder die loep geneem word, het in verskillende publikasies verskyn en is nog nie tot dusver indringend akademies bestudeer nie. Emil Rorke se verhaal, "Poisoned grief", is in die bloemlesing *Queer Africa* (2013), opgeneem, terwyl Richard de Nooy se ongetitelde kortverhaal deel is van sy tweede roman, *The Big Stick* (2011). Die artikel fokus op die wyses waarop hierdie twee verhale eengeslagbegeerte uitbeeld, en terselfdertyd verskillende intertekstuele appropriasies of herbewerkings van Bosman se styl betrek. Alhoewel daar op bestaande studies van Bosman se werk gesteun word, wil ek nie soseer die geslaagdheid van Rorke en De Nooy se verhale as "nabootsings" van Bosman se werk evalueer nie. My ondersoek betrek eerder Rorke en De Nooy se verhale by 'n kritiese gesprek – met mekaar, maar ook met die karakters, ruimtes en styl van Bosman se fiksie. De Nooy se snaakse, uitlokkende verhaal kontrasteer ooglopend met die subtiele en aangrypende uitbeelding van eengeslagverhoudings en -intimiteit in dié van Rorke, maar beide verhale stel die belang van begeerte bo seksuele identiteit en bied verskillende denkwyses oor eengeslagseksualiteit.

Writing in the first half of the twentieth century, Herman Charles Bosman is widely regarded as one of South Africa's most significant short story writers. He wrote and published stories for three decades until his untimely death in 1951, and his work has been studied in schools and universities for decades since. His stories are characterised, in part, by subtle and understated characterisation, richly textured community life, an imagined rural Afrikaner sociolect, and an ironic narrator. Bosman's writing reveals and ridicules the constructedness of the social mores of his time. In particular, Bosman's narrative style exposes and defamiliarises the racism and conservatism of the rural Transvaal and the binary logic on which such political sentiments depend. Patrick Mynhardt (2005: 3) explains that Bosman's overtly racist ironic first-person narrator, Oom Schalk Lourens, serves the function of exposing the "ignorance, self importance and unthinking cruelty of white men".¹ In this article, I show how Bosman's characters, spatial setting, narrative style and structure can be appropriated to challenge other forms of otherness. In addition to the famous Oom Schalk narrative persona, Bosman's writing is known for its "highly isolated, marginalized and backwater characters" (Gray 1989: 3); a "terseness of style, powers of suggestion and compression of detail" (Viljoen 1977: 29); and a narrative characterised by "subtle implication and inference" rather than "explanation and interpretation" (MacKenzie 2003: 5).

I focus on two recent short stories that rework elements of Bosman's writing and which destabilise the heteronormative impulse through which same-sex sexualities are typically marked as other. Firstly, I offer a close reading of "Poisoned Grief" (2013) by Emil Rorke and show how Bosman's first-person narrator, narrative structure and rural community are used to challenge heteronormativity and inscribe affective complexity onto forbidden desire. Secondly, I analyse a short story that appears in Richard de Nooy's novel, *The Big Sick* (2011). In this instance, authorship of the story is attributed to the protagonist of the novel. While I am interested in the intertextual resonances

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1. Though accusations of racism directed at Bosman have been hastily refuted over the years (MacKenzie 1998: 32; Viljoen 1977: iii), there is a need for more sustained research on the ethics and aesthetic of satirically prejudiced characters. David Lloyd (2003: 72), for example, observes that "the comedy in [Bosman's] short stories downplays the serious implications of Oom Schalk's bigotry and [...] he is let off rather lightly". In a similar vein, though Chapman (2004: 9) acknowledges that in many cases prejudice is clearly condemned, "[i]n the few stories of black-white confrontation [...] the irony is precarious" and "[o]ne is left unsure as to where Bosman stands in relation to the views of his character-narrator". Though there is a definite anti-racist agenda in Bosman's own short stories, which he enacts through a racist narrator whose hyperbole reveals the author's satirical intent, we cannot uncritically embrace an imputed humanism in his oeuvre, nor can we dismiss the complex positioning of his stories or the position of racial privilege from which he wrote.

between these two short stories and Bosman's writings, this is not an analysis of the extent to which each story successfully mimics Bosman's. In other words, Bosman's style is not a fixed literary form against which these two texts are assessed. Rather, this article offers a close reading of Rorke's and De Nooy's short stories and shows how each reworks elements of Bosman's writing to produce differently textured reflections on same-sex desire and heteronormativity.

Bosman's stories are often celebrated for their seamless blending of humour, irony and satire on the one hand, and pathos, sensitivity and serious social commentary on the other (MacKenzie 2003: 1; Devarenne 2009: 633; Kretschmann 2013: 55; Dickson 1975: 63). Michael Chapman (2004: 8) argues in this regard that "Bosman is able to translate jokiness into the bittersweet psychology of people's lives". However, neither of the two recent stories that I am analysing is characterised by this complex narrative layering. Rather, Rorke's "Poisoned Grief" is a devastating story of loss rendered in a sympathetic and moving way, and the untitled story in De Nooy's novel is ribaldly entertaining and satirical. Neither of these stories moves outside of its framing narrative mode of either pathos (in the case of "Poisoned Grief") or humour (in the case of De Nooy's story) – modes which Bosman was so adept at integrating into a single narrative. I argue that the affective depth of Rorke's story is contrasted by De Nooy's more provocative and humorous challenge to religious moralism and heteronormative concealment. What the stories have in common, however, is their textual engagement with the same author's work and their repositioning of same-sex sexualities outside the confines of both western sexual identity politics and constructions of difference.²

"Poisoned Grief"

Rorke situates his story firmly within Bosman's literary tradition in his preface in which he states: "With acknowledgements and gratitude to Herman Charles Bosman" (Rorke 2013: 27). The story is also set in the Marico district where most of Bosman's Oom Schalk and Voorkamer stories take place. The rural small town of Groot Marico was Bosman's favourite setting for his stories. He explains this preference in an earlier essay when he writes that it is "the deception of village life that calls for closer inspection: All that restfulness is only on the surface. Underneath, there is ferment" (Bosman in Snyman 2012: 62). It is the erasures and narrative contingencies through

2. Bosman's writing cannot be separated from a long history of short story writers, from South Africa and abroad, who preceded him and influenced the development of his narrative form and style (MacKenzie 1998; Marais 2005; Gray 1989).

which this calm surface is maintained that Rorke explores in his story. “Poisoned Grief” recounts the loss experienced by a family in a rural farming district when their son is accidentally poisoned by the fumes produced when a storage barn catches fire in the middle of the night. However, only Andreas du Toit, the neighbour’s son who visited the farm on weekends, was supposed to be sleeping in the stone cottage adjacent to the barn that night. The narrator delivers the crucial information in the final paragraph with a sympathetic and gentle tone:

The stone shed had remained intact, and its door, miraculously, had been only half burned. With dread, Pieter pushed open the door and saw the body of the young man, Andreas du Toit, naked on his makeshift bed. And beside him, with their limbs intertwined and his head on the bosom of Andreas was the body of his son, Joey. Also naked.

(Rorke 2013: 34)

This final description is the only indication of same-sex desire and intimacy in the text. The story sidesteps gay identity politics and builds up to this heartrending scene of young lovers caught in death. This ending clarifies an earlier assertion made by the narrator that “[s]ometimes indiscriminately [...] young love may be claimed where it is found, and the warmth of a lover’s embrace may be just what is needed to assuage the anxieties of life” (Rorke 2013: 29). Vivienne Dickson’s (1975: 87) discussion of Bosman’s use of the “final paragraphs as a structural device” is particularly useful here: the final scene is not presented as “a sudden revelation for which there has been no preparation, or an unexpected turn in the plot”. Rather, it is only the “‘nub’ of the story [that] is [...] made completely clear in the final paragraph” (Dickson 1975: 87). While this structure produced a fusion of humour and pathos in Bosman’s oeuvre (MacKenzie 1993: 13), this tension is absent in Rorke’s story and it instead inscribes emotional depth and complexity into same-sex subjectivities, occluding binaries of normal/abnormal or moral/immoral. Furthermore, while the specific form of the disruption is only revealed at the very end, most of the narrative points to a disturbance in the normative arrangement of family and community life. Significantly, the story does not contain any explicit references to homophobia or discourses of sexual difference, and it is only the vulnerable intertwined bodies that connect and contextualise the otherwise unnamed suggestions of prejudice.

From the outset, “Poisoned Grief” is a sombre story of loss, even though readers are left unaware of the details of the loss until the story’s conclusion. The story begins by soberly contrasting the Cornelius family now to how they were in some previous, unspecified past. Mrs Johanna Cornelius is described as a “gaunt, taciturn woman” where previously she had been “vivacious, with sparkling blue eyes and a loud, happy laugh” (Rorke 2013: 27). Pieter Cornelius is referred to as “the husk of a husband [...] with his quivering mouth and dead eyes” who was once “a robust man, tall and proud, whose

popularity stretched across the Marico, and whose company and advice were widely sought” (Rorke 2013: 27). Whereas for Bosman the Marico is a parochial setting characterised by racism and ethnocentrism, Rorke’s Marico district is similarly marred but by the depredations of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) and its concomitant denials and silences. We are told that “the shadow of their tragedy would never leave the church or its people” and that the local religious minister had “shamefacedly” (Rorke 2013: 28) come to visit them once, even after he refused to officiate the funeral of their son. While we are unaware at this point of the reason for this refusal or the cause of death, the narrative tends to emphasise not only the duplicity of religion but also its complicity in moralist cultures of othering (a theme that recurs in many of Bosman’s stories).

A metafictional observation made by Rorke’s unnamed narrator seems to point to the importance of storytelling in challenging practices of erasure:

The art of telling my stories lies in saying the right thing the right ways, but sometimes, and sometimes more importantly, it lies in finding ways to say the things that are never said.

(Rorke 2013: 29)

However, the narrator continues and goes on to list those things that cannot be said:

Human lives and stories are like that. They consist as much in what can be told as in what cannot. [...] You can talk about some things that happen, such as Dominee³ Boonzaier refusing to perform the funeral ceremony for Joey, the son of Pieter and Johannes Cornelius, but you cannot say why. [...] You can say that people grieve, as Pieter and Johanna Cornelius did, but neither you nor they can talk about what other grief they have, beyond the grief of loss brought about by death.

(Rorke 2013: 29)

This metafictional commentary by the first-person narrator can also be read as an intertextual reference to Bosman’s own musings on the nature of storytelling. In “Mafeking Road” – the title story of Bosman’s debut anthology – Oom Schalk says:

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

(Bosman 2006: 119)

3. The Afrikaans word “dominee” refers to a religious minister, often in the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.

This intertextual reference to one of Bosman's most famous stories is more than a foreshadowing of the use of the author's short story structure. It also situates the unnamed first-person narrator in the tradition of Bosman's own Oom Schalk and the fireside tale, replete with a "storyteller figure" who is internal to the narrative (MacKenzie 1998: 23), and an implied audience (Dickson 1975: 27) produced by the recurring use of the second-person pronoun "you". Unlike Bosman's conservative Oom Schalk narrator, whose extreme racist views are underscored and undermined by the author's satirical intent, the narrator in Rorke's narrative is sympathetic to the young male lovers and melancholic about the multiple losses enacted by (hetero)normative practices of othering. The narrator's assertion that "[t]hese are my people and I tell their stories" (Rorke 2013: 28-29) reinforces his insiderness within the community and his contradictory role as amanuensis of a community's heteronormative erasure and a family's overwhelming shame. The observations made by Oom Schalk about storytelling in "Mafeking Road" are reworked by Rorke to foreground the devastating impact of heteronormativity. Whereas Oom Schalk was interested in the practices and narrative structure of good storytelling, the unnamed narrator in Rorke's story is concerned with the ethics of and mechanisms through which Bosman's (in Snyman 2012: 62) idea of a small town's "ferment" is concealed beneath a deceptive "restfulness".

Heteronormativity and the production of sexual otherness are bound up in this story with themes of shame and grief. The death of Joey Cornelius was an obvious cause of despair. However, as the title reminds us, there was more to it; theirs was a *poisoned* grief. The adjective is doubly loaded here as it points both to the poisonous chemicals that caused the death, and it uncovers the nature of the grief. Their experiences of sorrow, in other words, are loaded with another layer that makes it doubly corrosive. The narrator says that "[i]t is the unspoken, undisclosed grief that is the worst to see" (Rorke 2013: 29). This unsaid anguish is rooted in feelings of shame. It is a shame generated by their son's hidden same-sex sexual relationship that was introduced into the community's consciousness and resulted in censure by the local church. The narrator sympathetically sketches the origins of these feelings of shame when he says:

Mothers' hearts are soft towards their sons, and there are fathers whose hearts are also soft towards their sons. Soft in pride and in love, and with the hope that, one day, their sons may be as *they* are.

(Rorke 2013: 29, my emphasis)

That fathers have hope that "their sons may be as they are" points to a seemingly universal model for the reproduction of certain forms of masculinity that, in the context of this story, are entangled with hetero-normativity. What is suggested here is that while pride is possible when sons reproduce idealised masculine forms to "be as [their fathers] are", shame occupies this

space when such intergenerational reproduction of hetero-normativity has failed. In other words, the family is not only devastated by the loss of Joey but also by his failure to conform to the rural Marico's gender norms.

The moral emptiness of this heteronormative impulse is given further credence through Rorke's strategy of doubling. Pieter and Johanna Cornelius have two children, Joey and Hettie. The fact that these two young adults are twins exposes the heteronormative logic on which the Cornelius family's shame depends. Pieter and Johanna were delighted by the amount of time the neighbour's son, Andreas, was spending at their farm. The narrator notes that, after the young man's first visit to the farm, "[a] lump came to Pieter's throat as he watched [the three young adults], and he thought how fine Hettie and Andreas looked together, she with her blond hair and blue eyes, he with his dark hair and eyes [...]" (Rorke 2013: 32). The narrator elaborates and says that "Hettie's parents felt hope for their daughter's heart" (Rorke 2013: 32). So whereas the parents are pleased by what they imagine is a growing attraction between Andreas and their daughter, they are devastated to learn that the real intimacy is between Andreas and their son. The only significant thing that distinguishes Hettie and Joey in the context of the story is their gender – presumably they even share the blond hair and blue eyes that their parents find so compatible with Andreas's dark looks. It is thus an oppressive heteronormativity that drives their poisoned grief. In her introduction to the anthology in which Rorke's story appears, Pumla Gqola (2013: 4) writes that the narrative "captures enmeshed danger and discovery in a hostile world that will not see two men's desire for each other". This certainly explains the Cornelius family's blindness to Joey's and Andreas's ongoing intimacy before their sudden death, but the story goes further than this. In many ways, the story is about the mechanisms of shame and silencing that are brought to bear once same-sex desire has been exposed, rendered corporeal in the discovery of intimate bodies, and made permanent through the official "inquest" (Rorke 2013: 33) and other institutions of state.

Rendered in a poignant hue, the same-sex intimacy at the end of the short story recognises the emotional complexity of forbidden desires. The story's disarticulation of heteronormativity does not rely on a radically queer declaration of difference but rather on exposing the constructedness of the very idea of alterity. The structure of the story is also significant in that although the effects of prejudice as a generic form are evidenced throughout the narrative, it only takes on a specificity at the very end, and it is – with retrospection – the mourning family and ruptured community that appear incomprehensible and strange rather than the two young men found in a loving embrace.

The Big Stick

Whereas Rorke's story is characterised by pathos and sensitivity, De Nooy's story is a more humorous, confrontational and provocative encounter with heteronormativity. The untitled story, we are told, is a submission that the novel's protagonist made to the "Herman Charles Bosman Essay Contest" (De Nooy 2011: 16) many years previously when he was in school. The plot of the short story is simple: As Oom Schalk Lourens is trying to determine which one of his two male donkeys he should give to the dominee as a gift, he notices that they start to fornicate. His alarm at the prospect of the dominee seeing two aroused donkeys leads him to masturbate them hoping to reduce their arousal before the dominee and the church elder arrive. However, the dominee then discovers Oom Schalk masturbating these donkeys and the protagonist tries to explain himself. While Oom Schalk is an ironic first-person character-narrator in Bosman's own stories, in De Nooy's narrative he is instead a character being reported on by a third-person narrator who is external to the events of the story.

Unlike "Poisoned Grief", the narrative focalisation is not sympathetic towards same-sex sexualities and instead documents the protagonist's attitude of conservative disgust. When Oom Schalk sees the male donkeys fornicating, they are described as engaging in a "horrifying act. An inhuman act, even by donkey standards", and an "infernal spectacle" (De Nooy 2011: 18). He observes even that the one donkey, Trekmaar, "took it like a man, which was as logical as it was horrifying" (De Nooy 2011: 18). The idea that same-sex sexuality can be described as "taking it like a man" marks a fascinating refashioning of conservative discourses in which masculinity is implicitly heterosexual. In this moment, it is the very act of same-sex penetrative intercourse that suggests, idiomatically at least, a particular kind of manhood. More provocatively, and pushing the boundaries of even Bosman's considerable criticism of "sanctimony and [his] mockery [at] religion" (Viljoen 1977: 35), the narrative voice overlays biblical references with sexual imagery. The narrator says:

[A]ction had to be taken, and it had to be taken soon. The dominee could arrive at any moment, and Oom Schalk Lourens had a sneaking suspicion that he would not rejoice to see God's creatures fornicating in the sun, even if they had carried His only Son upon their back.

Warrie's forelegs were now exactly where the good Lord had been seated and it looked very much as if he had every intention of ramming Trekmaar to Kingdom come.

(De Nooy 2011: 18-19)

This extract's description of fornication between these two male donkeys appropriates one of the central images of Christian theology. The figure of Christ travelling on a donkey is the backdrop on which a provocative

depiction of same-sex animalistic lust is projected. Unlike in Rorke's story in which difference is downplayed, here same-sex desire is explicit and disruptive. The metonymic defamiliarisation of the donkey figure also interrogates the heteronormativity that shapes historical and biblical narratives.

Oom Schalk's attempts to prevent the fornication takes a decidedly violent turn as he "thrashed both donkeys soundly with his sjambok,⁴ mumbling the Lord's Prayer under his breath for good measure" (De Nooy 2011: 19). He is then again described as "whipping their grey hides" (De Nooy 2011: 20) once the donkeys have been separated. During the assaults and masturbation, Oom Schalk keeps returning inside to drink from "a large earthenware jug filled with Gideon van Rensburg's finest witblits" (De Nooy 2011: 19). The narrator observes that he "stopp[ed] only to refresh and re-fortify himself with two hearty swigs from the jug" (De Nooy 2011: 20) and later "prepared himself for the task at hand, which was easier now that the jug was half empty" (De Nooy 2011: 20). The excessive consumption of alcohol is a recurring theme in Bosman's oeuvre, and the cadence of De Nooy's descriptions is a noteworthy intertextual reference to Bosman's famous "A Bekkersdal Marathon". Significantly, the violence that underpins Oom Schalk's attempt to prevent their coupling is suggestive of the senseless violence that characterises the broader heteronormative project, in which certain forms of sexual bodies are assaulted, shamed, excluded or killed. The use of fornicating donkeys here also confronts a certain desexualising representational strategy through which the image of the respectable and emotionally-invested same-sex couple is often predicated on the erasure of sex itself (Warner 2000).

Feeling revulsion at the sign of two erect penises, but driven by a desire to avoid being humiliated in front of the dominee, Oom Schalk, we are told:

spat on his palms, grasped the two pink swords in his hands, closed his eyes, and began to milk the donkeys, who seemed wholly unperturbed by this abominable act. In fact, they seemed quite comfortable with the arrangement and, judging by their movements, were on the verge of rewarding Oom Schalk for his efforts when a gentle voice spoke [to him]

(De Nooy 2011: 20)

The third-person focalisation of Oom Schalk reveals how he is experiencing "this abdominal act", though the narrator himself conveys no moral indictment. Much like Bosman's own stories, this extract reveals two competing narrative impulses which operate simultaneously: quiet understatement and absurd hyperbole. Pushing this unimaginable scene a little further and in a humorous turn of events, it is in fact Dominee Siebolt and Ouderling⁵ Pretorius who have found Oom Schalk masturbating the donkeys.

4. The Afrikaans word "sjambok" refers to a leather whip.

5. The Afrikaans word "ouderling" refers to an elder in the church.

Despite the protagonist's failing attempts to explain his actions, the dominee steps in with an ambiguous observation:

Dominee Siebolt, who was a well-travelled man, calmly remarked that a sword swallower he had met in Zeerust claimed he had practised on many a donkey prong before graduating to sharper metallic objects. At which point, Ouderling Pretorius asked, in a very thin voice, whether Oom Schalk might make them a cup of tea, as the long trek had left his throat rather dry. 'Like that of a sword swallower', smiled Dominee Siebolt, as he turned and made his way to the house.

(De Nooy 2011: 21)

MacKenzie (1998: 27) has observed that a "sudden twist at the end [that is] casual[ly] [...] conveyed" is one of the defining features of Bosman's Oom Schalk stories. Unlike the ending of Rorke's story which sympathetically confirms that which has already been intimated, this concluding paragraph is characterised by a "sudden twist" in which the very person to whom Oom Schalk had to prove his moral standing suddenly makes an unexpected and somewhat inexplicable declaration. While Ouderling Pretorius appears to be unsettled by the flagrant references to oral sex – whether it involves donkeys or humans – the dominee seems to be making a very specific insinuation. It remains unclear to the reader whether the dominee is suggesting that Ouderling Pretorius himself might engage in oral sex with other men, referred to here as being "a sword swallower", or if it is both the dominee and Ouderling Pretorius who engage in oral sex. This ambiguity scratches at the heteronormative surface to reveal a range of non-normative desires or experiences that are neither disclosed nor confirmed but nevertheless inscribed into an ostensibly conservative rural landscape. Significantly, much like Rorke's story, this extract anticipates same-sex sexualities that operate outside the ambit of gay identity politics and simplistic binaries of sameness and otherness. Different degrees of same-sex desire pervade the human and animal characters in the story, and the lack of specificity only makes this point more pronounced.

We see in this story resonances of Bosman's own writing, though offering a critical commentary on heteronormativity rather than racism. Chapman's (2004: 9) discussion of racism in Bosman's short fiction is incisive here when he argues that where "prejudice is clearly condemned [t]he method is usually that of *reductio ad absurdum*". In the case of De Nooy's short story, it is heteronormativity that is reduced to the point of absurdity. Leon De Kock's (2001: 196) reflections on a selection of Bosman's Afrikaans stories are similarly relevant to Oom Schalk and the dominee in De Nooy's story: he highlights "the sheer slyness of Bosman's characters, their penchant for comical self-delusion and, inevitably, their utterly ingrained racism". Whereas Oom Schalk is Bosman's ironic first-person narrator who functions as a mouthpiece for conservative racism, De Nooy's Oom Schalk is the

defender of conservative heteronormativity – a normative impulse that the very custodian of religious virtue throws into doubt.

Conclusion

Though Bosman is one of South Africa's most prolific early twentieth century short story writers, his work nevertheless was produced in the context of increasing state-sanctioned racism that characterised the late British imperial project and the rise of apartheid. As his stories slowly fall away from university and school curricula (Butler 2006: 245; Miller 2006), and following the death of Patrick Mynhardt (who popularised the stories for decades on stages across the country), we are asked what to make of Bosman as a writer, whose coarse satirical racism leaves us feeling unsettled, despite the technical sophistication of his art. Rorke's and De Nooy's short stories point tentatively towards a malleability in Bosman's literary legacy as their stories bring his work into dialogue with a different type of progressive politics.

This article has argued that Rorke and De Nooy have appropriated elements of Bosman's writing to defamiliarise same-sex desire. While both make intertextual references to the author's work, their stories are not aimed at mimicry and each produces a well-crafted narrative that lets us think differently about same-sex sexuality. Rorke's "Poisoned Grief" has a first-person narrator who is internal to the narrative and is a resident of the Marico district. Same-sex desire is read in sympathetic terms, and any imagined difference between same-sex and heterosexual attraction is dismissed as a normative social construct that carries a heavy price for all. The young lovers found in the stone cabin are neither connected to identity politics nor framed in terms of difference. It is the subsequent shame and social exclusion that evidences the poisonous nature of heteronormativity and its religious sureties. In contrast, the unapologetic depiction of sex between two male donkeys challenges conditional acceptance of same-sex sexualities. Furthermore, the dominee's ambiguous declaration about oral sex suggests a hidden network of non-heteronormative desires and undisclosed sexual transgressions. The religious heteronormativity that is evidenced in the beginning of both stories is undermined by the inscriptions of same-sex desire in the final paragraph of each: whereas in "Poisoned Grief" these inscriptions are sensitive and subtle, in De Nooy's story they are provocative and bawdy. What is also significant is how the structure of both stories use Bosman's revelatory ending in different ways, either to generate a contemplative empathy in the case of Rorke's story, or a surprising ambiguity in the case of De Nooy's. Finally, though De Nooy's humorous story contrasts with Rorke's tragic depiction of love and intimacy, both stories foreground sexual desire over sexual identity, and reject simplistic constructions of the normative.

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