

Centrifugal Force: Some Remarks on Vagrants in Three Texts by Lettie Viljoen/Ingrid Winterbach¹

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Summary

In her various novels, Afrikaans author Lettie Viljoen (pseudonym of Ingrid Winterbach) uses a large array of characters that could be described as marginal. These characters contrast strongly with the focaliser(s) in each text and in this way help to highlight the social differences caused by apartheid and the toll it took on both the haves and the have-nots. The struggle between the centre and those living at the margins – and particularly the manner in which the centre tries to co-opt or erase the margin – therefore becomes important. Viljoen/Winterbach also puts fewer and fewer words in the vagrant characters' mouths, paradoxically silencing them to prevent herself from becoming a spokesperson for the marginalised. All of the above will be demonstrated in an analysis of three texts by Viljoen/Winterbach: *Klaaglied vir Koos* ([1984]1987), *Erf* (1986) and *Buller se plan* (1999).

Opsomming

Die Afrikaanse skrywer Lettie Viljoen (skuilnaam van Ingrid Winterbach) gebruik in haar romans 'n groot verskeidenheid karakters wat as randfigure beskryf sou kon word. Hierdie karakters vorm 'n skerp kontras met die fokaliseerder(s) in elke teks en help só om lig te werp op die maatskaplike verskille wat deur apartheid meegebring is en die tol wat dit van bevoorregtes sowel as benadeeldes geëis het. Die stryd tussen die kern en diegene op die kantlyn – en veral die wyse waarop die kern poog om die randfigure te koöpteer of uit te wis – word dus belangrik. Viljoen/Winterbach laat die swerwendes al hoe minder en minder praat – sy maak hulle op 'n paradoksale wyse stil om te verhoed dat sy die randfigure se segsvrou word. 'n Ontleding van drie tekste deur Viljoen/Winterbach, naamlik *Klaaglied vir Koos* ([1984]1987), *Erf* (1986) en *Buller se plan* (1999), werp verder lig op die bogenoemde.

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1. This article is drawn from Chapter 3 of my MA thesis, “Marginale en liminale karakters in die werk van Lettie Viljoen/Ingrid Winterbach: Sosiale kommentaar en die ondermyning van grense”, completed as part of the requirements for the degree Magister in Arts and Humanities at the University of Stellenbosch. My thanks to Prof. Louise Viljoen, my supervisor, for all her valuable advice.

We can conceive of the margin/marginality in two ways: a) as subject position – the excluded other that must be coaxed into the centre through incorporation, inversion, hybridisation, revolution; or b) margin as irreducible other – the condition for the production of our discourse (and all positive knowledge) that must be acknowledged as incommensurable and irre-cuperable. The former speaks the positive dis-course of rights, while the latter speaks the negative discourse of limits.

(Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, “At the Margins of Post-colonial Studies” 1995: 59)

The way in which the Afrikaans author Lettie Viljoen (pseudonym of Ingrid Winterbach) portrays social outcasts – particularly homeless people and those who are deemed insane or intellectually deficient by society – can be read as an appeal for positive integration into the centre of any given society of that which is deemed to be marginal. In the three texts to be discussed – *Klaaglied vir Koos* ([1984]1987) [Lament for Koos], *Erf* (1986) [If deemed a noun: Residential Property, Yard or Inheritance; if deemed a verb: To Inherit] and *Buller se plan* (1999) [Buller’s Plan; a translation entitled *To Hell with Cronje* appeared in 2007]² – the world of the various vagrants and the focalisers could be considered as analogous to what occurred in apartheid society as a whole. The (white) focaliser has a house and enough to eat, while none of the (brown³ or black) vagrants have a house and possess very little of anything else. This article will focus on the way the focalisers try to negotiate their relations with the vagrant characters and on how Viljoen/Winterbach portrays these vagrant characters.

The differences in storyline between *Klaaglied vir Koos* and *Erf* on the one hand and *Buller se plan* on the other, are interesting. In *Klaaglied vir Koos* and *Erf*, the focaliser is alone on her property – her husband or lover has absconded. One or more vagrants periodically live on her property,

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2. All translations are my own.
 3. In South Africa there is a group of people who can, by and large, trace their ancestry to slaves – from South East Asia and elsewhere in Africa – and to the Khoi and San (names which are themselves not without controversy) as well as to European colonists and those representatives of the Bantu languages who are usually called black. Due to the complex and sensitive nature of identity politics in South Africa, it is impossible to attach a label to this group which will not offend some readers. At the behest of a referee the term “brown” has been used to denote this group in this article. But readers are welcome (and have a duty) to deconstruct any and all terms that are used to highlight cultural, ethnic and racial difference.

occasionally doing odd jobs around her house; sometimes they knock on her door in search of food, money or clothing. The focaliser generally experiences these vagrants as threatening or intimidating. In *Klaaglied vir Koos*, this makes up the bulk part of the storyline, told by a nameless first-person narrator. In *Erf* the encounters between Bets and the vagrants are only one of a number of narrative plots, recounted in the third person. In *Buller se plan* (a novel set in post-apartheid South Africa) the interaction is slightly different. Ester Zorgenfliess travels to the town of Steynshoop for a funeral and ends up staying a good deal longer than she intended. During this time she meets Mfazakhe Mhikize, a homeless man, in front of the town's historic church. He is not trespassing on her property and the neighbours are unlikely to complain – as is the case in the two novellas – but the relationship between them can hardly be described as equal.

The question of language will become increasingly important during the course of this article. Toward the end of the discussion, attention will be given to who has access to language and who uses language (and how this occurs). If it is accepted that those who are social outcasts are rarely – if ever – given the opportunity to speak out, then attention should be paid to the manner in which they are given or denied the opportunity to speak in a literary text. What gives Viljoen/Winterbach – a middle-class white woman – the right to speak for those who cannot? (Of course, the relationship between author, implied author, narrator and focaliser is at issue here. Viljoen/Winterbach uses narrators and focalisers who – in some cases – show similarities with her personal life. It is, however, dangerous to assume that narrators or focalisers give voice to the author's views and opinions. Authors might deliberately use narrators or focalisers that voice views contrary to their own in order to make a particular point about the world.)

Before launching into a discussion of the three texts, some brief points need to be made about marginality and the process involved in marginalising a person or a group. It must also be pointed out that this article is not an exhaustive discussion on vagrants in Viljoen/Winterbach's work. There is a character who is not included in this article: Marie Duvenhage in *Belemmering* (1990) [Obstruction]. She is a vagrant who lives in one or more hollow trees (Viljoen 1990: 178, 198 and 208). There is also a suggestion that she is white, as Duvenhage is usually considered a "white" surname, but there is never any explicit reference to skin colour. As with any article, spatial constraints mean that certain choices have to be made regarding the content. Marie Duvenhage is excluded from this discussion for two reasons. First and foremost, she addresses Hannah (one of several focalisers in *Belemmering*) but it would not seem that Hannah replies. This makes their interaction one-sided whereas the interaction discussed in this article sees participation from both sides. It also makes it difficult to place their interaction within a discourse of incorporation. Secondly, she seems to demand neither material support nor some type of intervention in her life

from Hannah, apparently using her as a silent listener to catalogue her woes. She is marginal, but asks for nothing more than that the centre recognise her pain (although it could be argued that that is asking for quite a bit).

1 Marginality

Marginality is controversial on at least two levels. Firstly, there are problems related to how and by whom marginality is determined (cf. Moi [1985]1998: 116). If a group sees itself as marginal, this identification usually occurs as a result of exclusion: the members of a specific group (irrespective of the homogeneity within that group) feel that they are excluded from one or more areas, thereby being shunted to the margin. If, however, this identification is done from the centre, it does not highlight exclusion but rather emphasises it. By describing someone as marginal, attention is focused on that person's marginality and differences between individuals or groups are emphasised, rather than similarities. As a result of this, the second contentious point is the manner in which marginality is dealt with. Are there attempts to integrate the margin into the centre, or is the margin retained as a way of maintaining the centre itself? The margin can contribute to the continued existence of the centre by acting as a source of new ideas (Seshadri-Crooks 1995: 59) and by acting as a depository for unwelcome ideas and persons – those who want to bring too many changes to the centre are relegated to the margin.

When a literary work focuses on marginal figures or if marginal characters are present in a literary work, it is necessary to determine whether the portrayal of those marginal figures emphasises their outsider-ship. It is also necessary to determine what attempts – if any – are made within the text to integrate these marginal characters into some political, social, economic or ideological centre. Integration is a problematic concept. It can occur when the characters conform to the ideals, goals and discursive framework of the centre (in which case the integration can be viewed as negative). Or the integration occurs in such a way that that which initially doomed the character to marginality is accepted by the centre (which is in turn enlarged by that integration). This can be termed positive integration. The manner in which characters are dealt with could be interpreted as an indication of how those characters (and the literary work in its entirety) could be read. If the marginal characters are there simply to emphasise the positive characteristics of the centre, the text can hardly be read as social commentary. There are two exceptions to this rule of thumb. The first is when a deconstructivist reading strategy is deliberately employed. The second is when that which is portrayed is represented as an alternative to the existing centre in a particular society. If the portrayal of those characters forces the reader to consider the reasons for marginalisation, the situation is

quite different and it could well be argued that a degree of social commentary or criticism is present.

This article does not purport to be an examination of marginal characters in Viljoen/Winterbach's work. It could be argued that all the characters that appear in her work are, in one way or another, marginal. In the discussion below, the portrayal of vagrant characters in Viljoen/Winterbach's work and the relationship these characters have with the various focalisers will be examined. In all three texts it could be argued that the focalisers are – to some extent – marginal: they are white women without husbands, living or travelling alone, apparently not (entirely) sharing or supporting apartheid's racist ideological framework. The key is, however, that they are white; they enjoy all the privileges that apartheid reserved for whites. The vagrant characters are homeless; they live in a country in which the state actively discriminates or discriminated against them and in which institutionalised violence is (or has been) aimed at them. Unfortunately this article will use the old apartheid terms of white, brown and black – however unpalatable they may be. It is a terrible irony that work which appears to criticise the apartheid system and analyses that discuss such texts should have to use the very categories that they struggle against or seek to eliminate.

2 The Unchanging Position of Vagrants

2.1 *Klaaglied vir Koos and Erf*

It is striking that Lettie Viljoen/Ingrid Winterbach's two novellas contain a number of homeless or mendicant figures (always brown) who lay claim to the (white, middle-class, female) focaliser's time and money. In fact, *Erf* does not begin with a mention of Bets's name, but with the name of the man who lives on her property: Loe-wie (1986: 1). This emphasis on those who do not have a house of their own, could be read as criticism of the infamous Group Areas Act (1950) that determined where every "population group" should live. The dislocation (both physical and psychological) of resettled communities is also symbolised by these homeless characters. However, the vagrant characters also undermine the Group Areas Act. Since brown and black people were quite literally removed from the centre and resettled on the edges of towns and cities – sometimes even in separate cities like Atlantis ("die gesonke stad A"⁴ (Viljoen [1984]1987: 19)) – the homeless character's behaviour is not only infiltration of the (white) centre but also a refusal to abide by the rules on which the centre insists. Furthermore the lack of a house or property can also be linked to the inability to vote and the concomitant inability to influence the society in which one lives.

4. "the drowned city"

Throughout the world the vote was – at least during the infancy of democracy – linked to property ownership. In the current era, possession of property provides status and in a system where some groups are silenced (although they may have the right to vote), the members of those groups who do not possess status symbols are the furthest removed from the centre and can thereby have the least impact on the centre.

The interaction between the homeless characters and the various focalisers can be read as interaction between the margin and the centre (although the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* and Bets in *Erf* are represented as characters who are relatively isolated from the other representatives of the centre). The impact the representatives of the margin have on the representatives of the centre is not always easily traceable, but it is there nonetheless. This interaction takes various forms. There is the relationship between beggar and benefactor (or patron), between employee and employer. The homeless character can also act as stimulus to the social conscience of the focaliser (and possibly also the reader) or he or she can be the threatening Other who disrupts the good order.

In general, homeless characters in Viljoen/Winterbach's work appear in groups. There are Frans and Betty, groups of brown children, an anonymous brown man and woman, and Nevil and his nameless wife (all in *Klaaglied vir Koos*), Loe-wie and his harem as well as Sally Williams and Cyril the gardener (in *Erf*). Homeless characters who travel alone appear in *Klaaglied vir Koos* (Sylvia and Sam) and thereafter in *Buller se plan* (Mfazakhe Mhikize). There are many possible reasons why preference is apparently given to groups (or pairs) of homeless characters rather than solitary characters (this change of tack in Viljoen/Winterbach's oeuvre will be discussed later). Firstly, the margin and centre are juxtaposed. The marginal figures are not single entities who can be ignored, but groups who are (almost) mirror images of the groups in the centre (frequently the focaliser and her husband or lover). Secondly, the fact that marginal figures do not exist in isolation is emphasised: they have the same needs (physical and emotional) as those in the centre. Thus similarities between the centre and the margin are emphasised, rather than the differences. Thirdly, groups are more threatening than single figures and by portraying this threat as a racial conflict as well as conflict connected to centrality, Viljoen/Winterbach creates a situation analogous to the racial struggle within apartheid society. The interaction between different "race groups" during the apartheid period is reduced to the lowest common denominator possible: two (or three) representatives of the margin are arrayed against representatives of the centre. In this way attention can also be given to the interaction between so-called enlightened (or liberal) whites (the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* and Bets and Agnes in *Erf*) and the people about whose political integration into the (political) centre they are apparently concerned.

The basic tenet of apartheid ideology was the idea that everyone who was not classified as white, was at best an inferior person and at worst some sort of animal. This idea led to a range of policies and laws to segregate “race groups” in South Africa so that whites would not be “negatively” influenced due to contact with “lesser races” and so that browns and blacks could have the opportunity “to raise themselves up”. As already indicated, the contact with the white focalisers and the brown homeless characters is a breach of apartheid codes of conduct. The contact between the homeless and the focalisers also prevents the Other being seen in terms of abstractions (“the blacks”) and also emphasises interpersonal contact. The relationship between the homeless characters and the various focalisers is, however, reliant on the goodwill of the focalisers.

The notion that browns and blacks are “animals” (rather than people) or that homeless characters embody the stereotype of the noble savage living close to nature and using only those items needed, are both exploited and rejected in Viljoen/Winterbach’s work. She continually situates the homeless characters between the extremes these stereotypes represent so that they never quite fulfil either one.

It is particularly Loe-wie and his entourage who are described in these ways. Loe-wie’s sexual acts are compared to those of “animals at play” (Viljoen 1986: 53) and his wives are referred to as “wyfies” (female animals) (p. 22). Loe-wie has irises that have the exceptional amber glow of the smaller apes (p. 44) and he is compared to a trapped jackal (p. 23), beetles and an invisible worm that flies in the night (p. 53).⁵ He is also called a scavenger (p. 31). These descriptions of Loe-wie do not necessarily mean that Bets continually views him as an animal, but Viljoen/Winterbach plays with the reader’s ideas and with extant (literary) stereotypes in connection with black or brown men who are represented as animals (particularly in older Afrikaans literature).⁶ She uses images that should be familiar to the reader as well as others that are less familiar – or even outlandish (Loe-wie as the invisible worm that flies in the night falls outside the normal pattern of comparisons between people and animals). In this way she undermines the stereotype of associating a brown man with an animal. Paradoxically the references to the “animal” emphasises Loe-wie’s humanity. These references and images are repeatedly used during Loe-wie’s and Bets’s struggle for control of the property. The animal images contrast strongly with the cunning – if somewhat devious – plans which Loe-wie

5. The “onsigbare wurm wat vlie [*sic*] in die nag” is taken from William Blake’s “The Sick Rose” (published in 1794 in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*). “O Rose, thou art sick. / The Invisible worm / That flies in the night / In the howling storm // Has found out thy bed / Of crimson joy, / And his dark secret love / Does thy life destroy” (Blake 1993: 36).

6. Cf. Britz (1987: 9).

thinks up and executes in order to stay on the property and as a result his humanity is accentuated.

The romanticised aspects of Loe-wie's existence as noble savage are highlighted when Bets imagines how Loe-wie and his entourage roam along the river banks looking for adventure and she even compares him to the conquistador, Hernan Cortez (Viljoen 1986: 16). The manner in which Bets visualises the group's life in the seraglio (already a rather pretentious name for Loe-wie's shelter) (pp. 33-34), is also clearly an idealisation as well as ironisation of this way of life. This type of idealisation differs markedly with the reality of Loe-wie's life and can possibly lead the reader to realise how harrowing daily life is for vagrants. It can also help to counter the stereotype of the noble savage since the concept is ridiculed by the exaggerated descriptions. As a result the reader is forced to confront the homeless character (if not a homeless person) as a human being rather than falling back on stereotypes. Irony functions on two levels. Firstly, it functions as a distancing mechanism. Secondly, the humour created by the irony prevents the reader from being totally overwhelmed by the harrowing life of these homeless characters.

It is important to note that it is suggested that Loe-wie is of San descent; his body is described as yellow (Viljoen 1986: 24, 31 and 33) and it is also indicated that not one of his troop's height is higher than a white man's nipple (p. 16). By means of this suggestion, Viljoen/Winterbach activates a number of ideas. Firstly, the stereotype of the noble savage is activated once again. Secondly, the idea of a human being as an animal is applicable if one considers that the San were hunted by the southward-moving black tribes as well as the white colonialists.⁷ Thirdly, this reference indicates how colonialism and apartheid dispossessed the original inhabitants of South Africa. Fourthly (and more positively from a marginal perspective), this reference can also indicate that those groups or figures who are marginalised, are able to survive and that they are not destroyed by the centre – despite deliberate attempts to exterminate them.

As a counterpoint to the exaggerated idealisation (and ironisation) of the homeless existence and the association homeless person-animal, Loe-wie's and Sally Williams's stories (very briefly) contain moments where these two characters are given the opportunity to verbalise other thoughts than those relating to basic survival. In Sally Williams's case she and Cyril the gardener have conversations about life and death (Viljoen 1986: 47) and about the life of spirits (p. 48). Loe-wie (who receives a great deal more

7. The fact that a diorama of the San and other ethnic groups from Africa was on view in the South African *natural history* Museum in Cape Town from 1957 to the mid-1990s (while groups from South East Asia had their cultures represented in the Museum of *cultural history* – also in Cape Town) should surely be mentioned here. (For a discussion of the ethics of anthropological exhibits in museums, see Lidchi (1997).)

space in the narrative) ends one of his negotiation sessions with Bets – quite ironically – with a few choice comments about grace and mercy (p. 45). When Bets forces him off the property and destroys his shelter, he uses a line from Virgil's *Aeneid*: “Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta moveba”.⁸ The improbability of Loe-wie knowing Latin raises questions about the scope of his knowledge and guides the reader away from a simplistic, stereotypical image of a homeless character.

As already indicated, even the margin can have a margin. Elaborating on the work of Julia Kristeva, Moi [1985] (1988: 167) claims that patriarchal cultures use women as a margin to protect male members of that culture from the “chaos” outside. Unfortunately the difference between margin and that against which it is supposed to form a bulwark is so small that the margin is also associated with that which is threatening – it shares in the “disconcerting properties of *all* frontiers” (p. 167). It seems that something similar occurs in the world of the homeless as portrayed by Viljoen/Winterbach. Women get the bad end of the stick, or at least the fist. In the case of Sally Williams, Cyril the gardener thrashes her so that she echoes like a wet paper bag (Viljoen 1986: 47) and she is cursed “tot in haar moer”⁹ (p. 48). More importantly she is denied a voice; Cyril taught her silence is golden (p. 48). She is one of the lowliest with regard to her position in the social hierarchy: marginal figures (who are denied a voice by the centre) encourage her to remain silent. In contrast with this, Loe-wie's wife¹⁰ is particularly vocal when he assaults her (cf. p. 54).

More attention is given to the physical violence directed against Loe-wie's wife (or wives) than that which Sally Williams must endure. What is interesting about the violence with which Loe-wie's wife must live, is Loe-wie's attitude toward women. Although he beats her himself (see, for instance, p. 54), he reacts in a tremendously condemning manner to the violence of the two young white men who attack them on a bridge (p. 41); he claims that if you so much as look at a woman, she cries (p. 44). A possible explanation for the contradictory attitudes is Loe-wie's claim that a woman is a *thing* you should love very much (p. 44; my italics). It can thus be deduced that Loe-wie views women as possessions: he can do as he pleases with his wife (or wives) but another person's possessions should be respected – young white men do not have the right to assault his wife; he

8. *The Aeneid*, Book 7, line 213. John Dryden translated it as follows: “If Jove and Heav'n my just Desires deny, / Hell shall the Pow'r of Heav'n and Jove supply” (Keener 1997: lines 412-413).

9. The Afrikaans is ambiguous. “Moer” can be a coarse reference to someone's mother or, as a verb, it means to hit someone.

10. Or wives – initially there is reference to more than one, but by the end of the text it would seem that Loe-wie has only one wife.

retains that right for himself. This association of wife with goods and chattels is not new – as Smith (1998: 5), following Davis ([1982]1986: 172), points out. She argues persuasively that “rape laws, as a rule, were framed originally for the protection of men of the upper classes whose daughters and wives might be assaulted” (Smith 1998: 5).

Within the framework of a margin-centre analysis of a (fictional) society, it can also be argued that the young white men disregarded the pecking order for the perpetration of violence. Since they are considerably closer to the centre than Loe-wie, they have – in a particularly twisted world view – the right to assault Loe-wie, but it is (in keeping with the same twisted logic) Loe-wie’s right to assault his wife. By beating and kicking both Loe-wie and his wife, the young men did not honour the hierarchical manner in which violence should be inflicted and that is why Loe-wie is upset about the assault on his wife.

This particularly twisted version of human interaction emphasises both Loe-wie’s humanity and his place in society. By drawing comparisons between the young white men (those who are at the centre of society and those who have power) and Loe-wie – all of whom beat Loe-wie’s wife – Loe-wie and the young white men become equals. Loe-wie and the other homeless characters are not reduced to animals or to idealised tropes (although these techniques or representations are used in the portrayal of these characters, they are used to undermine the stereotypes caused by these constructs). The humanity of the homeless and particularly the similarities they have with representatives of the centre, are highlighted. The entire ideological basis of apartheid is undermined by undoing the differences between the brown homeless characters and the white representatives of the centre.

2.2 The Relationship between Homeowners and Vagrants

The violence perpetrated against the homeless and other marginal figures is largely structural. This violence cannot be ascribed to a particular institution; there is nobody “committing direct violence” (Galtung 1969: 187). The first (and most obvious) way in which structural violence is present is the way in which the social system keeps marginal figures in a marginal position by denying them a voice. Secondly there is the homeless character’s dependence on Bets or the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* for food and shelter. Of course the situation is a good deal more complex than the preceding sentence suggests. It can be asked whether it is morally justifiable to deny someone food or shelter when they have already been denied so much by the system. It is also evident that the homeless characters are able to survive without the aid of Bets or the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos*, but that it is considerably easier to knock on the same door for support time and again. The stereotype of the completely

dependent vagrant is thus combated with equal vigour in Viljoen/Winterbach's work as the stereotype of the complete independent vagrant – the modern noble savage.

The house (or property) where the vagrants and the various focalisers engage is the point at which the vagrant tries to gain entry to the centre. It is noticeable that Bets and the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* continually attempt to stop this encroachment, even though there is the simultaneous realisation that the vagrant is marginalised and that the homeless characters do not lead comfortable lives. The focalisers and the vagrants seldom meet one another on equal footing or on the street (Viljoen 1986: 65). Interaction usually takes place with the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* or Bets enjoying the protection of the solid house (Viljoen [1984]1987: 65). The merciful house (p. 50) is not only a solid fortress (p. 57) into which Bets or the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* can withdraw and isolate herself when she feels threatened by the vagrants (it is noticeable that every round of negotiations is ended with the door being closed or locked). It is also an indicator of what separates the focaliser from the vagrant: a fixed address, a home linked to a place in the centre.

The difference in material comfort between the focaliser and the vagrants made apparent in various ways – particularly in *Klaaglied vir Koos*. The most blatant of these are the direct comparisons between the narrators and focalisers and the vagrants. The first-person narrator claims that Nevil's sleeping place between the asbestos sheet and the painting on masonite occupies one forty eighth of her property, if that much (Viljoen [1984]1987: 67). She, on the other hand, has the protection of her four walls (p. 52), which she significantly refers to as her haven (p. 52). Slightly less blatant, but still as startling, is the way the first-person narrator describes her house as obscene with abundance (p. 6). This indicates that the first-person narrator is not comfortable with a situation in which the poor and the worms feed on the guavas in her garden (p. 6).

The extent to which the vagrants disturb the first-person narrator is evident in the fact that she does not like to appear in front of her house's windows because she is afraid of being seen, of being addressed by the poor, the hungry children, Frans and Betty, Sylvia (p. 39). This fear partly relates to her need for isolation (p. 22) and partly arises from the fact that it was never her intention to give up her lifestyle (p. 14) – despite her (sporadic) involvement in political activities. The first-person narrator thus finds herself in the stereotypical position of the (white) South African liberal:¹¹ a need for political change but unwillingness to undergo a change of lifestyle at the same time.¹²

11. "Liberal" is a term with different associations for different people. In this instance it refers to those who are afraid of the "heavy hand of government

Despite the fact that she finds the vagrants disturbing and disquieting and that she would actually like to be rid of them, the first-person narrator – just like Bets in *Erf* – continues to dole out money and food. Normally, handing out alms and gifts not only causes a patron-dependant relationship, but it also reinforces a power relationship in that the giver places the receiver under a moral (if not actual) obligation. The relationship between the focalisers and the various vagrants is not that simple, however. The men (Loe-wie, Nevil, Frans and Sam) all perform odd jobs in the garden from time to time. For work, such as moving the compost heap or mowing the lawn, they receive payment – in which case they are not begging, but selling their labour (Viljoen [1984]1987: 45 & 1986: 19). Loe-wie, however, performs various tasks for which he receives no payment. For instance, he helps Bets to clean a blocked drain (Viljoen 1986: 64) and puts out the trash every week before Bets gets an opportunity to do so (p. 64). This unpaid labour could be seen as a way to pay the rent (it is noticeable that Nevil and Loe-wie, who do the most gardening among the vagrant characters, both live on the focalisers' property), but it could also give them some claim to the land as they are the ones tending it. The relationship between focaliser and vagrant (or centre and margin) is therefore not exclusively one in which the homeless character goes from day to day, staggering and detachedly living off crumbs and mercy and by grace ([1984]1987: 34).

It may seem as if the vagrants are continually portrayed as voiceless victims, lashed hither and thither by the (white dominated) system. Viljoen/Winterbach's portrayal is much more nuanced than this. It becomes clear that – however difficult the existence of vagrants may be – they also know how to exploit the system and to use the (white) focaliser's feelings of guilt for their own gain. After Sylvia's appearance the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* wonders whether everyone on the fringes, everyone drinking methylated spirits and all the vagrants know that she is a woman alone in a house and that she can be manipulated ([1984]1987: 33). Both the first-person narrator and Bets are manipulated by the vagrants. When Frans and Betty appear at the first-person narrator's house, Frans has his story ready, while Betty plays a perfectly rehearsed supporting role (p. 24). The

and seek to liberate the individual from state oppression" (Balaam & Veseth, 1996: 39). Heywood (1997: 41-42) points out that the emphasis on individualism, the need for (individual) freedom and (human) rights, as well as a demand for equality and tolerance are all of cardinal importance to liberals.

12. The problems around the priorities of the white liberal come to the fore in the first-person narrator's hesitancy to become a white woman swinging her arms about plover eggs (threatened by the actions of municipal workers) (Viljoen [1984]1987: 26). This incident has similarities with an incident in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* (1979) (cf. Coetzee's commentary on this ([1986]1992: 366-367)).

impression is created that both of them act in order to get food – in this specific instance they pretend that they want work. In this way the usual connotations of benefactor and beggar are overturned since the benefactor is conned or emotionally blackmailed into giving something and as a result the receiver is not placed under the same type of moral obligation. Bets's struggle to get Loe-wie off her property also revolves around acting: Bets pretends that she is oblivious to Loe-wie after she has chased him and his companions off the property and they return "unseen". It is only when she has refused him food (1986: 78) that she confronts him outside the house for a second time. Loe-wie pretends to accede to Bets's request but apparently believes that she is too soft (p. 54) to ask him to leave the property again and thus he plays on Bets's feelings of guilt.

The contact between focaliser and the homeless characters results not only in the inability to view the vagrants as abstractions, but ensures that the margin has a recognisable face. Instead of references to vagrants, there are identifiable characters with whom Bets and the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* have a variety of relationships. It could be argued that ideologies (or comparable analytical frameworks) tend to generalise and to treat all groups in a similar fashion, without taking into account what differences there may be in particular groups¹³ (homogeneity is, of course, easier to deal with than heterogeneity). The disguising power of ideologies is indicated by the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* when she claims that Frans and Betty's history contains the sort of facts that make ideologies necessary ([1984]1987: 21). This statement is both ambivalent and ironic. The irony is that the better part of their suffering is the result of apartheid ideology and their history could be used against such an ideology. The ambivalence relates to the way in which ideology is created – observations or interpretations of history (apartheid ideology relied on specific interpretations of history and facts related to biology and physiology) which soon obliterate that history. Ideologies such as Marxism or socialism are an intellectualisation of people's social conditions and the reality of homelessness or exploitation can easily be forgotten during intellectual debates.

The impact of vagrants (particularly Frans and Betty) on her existence is described as follows by the first-person narrator:

Ek weet nie wat alles agter die skerms aangaan nie, ek vermoed daar is nie 'n gebrek aan teorie of analise nie, ek vermoed 'n verskeidenheid van private oplossings vir private hang-ups, vir diegene wat nie meer gemeensaamheid met die gemeenskap ervaar nie

13. Cf. Spivak's critique of (among others) Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze (Spivak 1988: 272 and further).

Maar ek verloor perspektief, ek sien te veel van diegene wat op die grense van my eiendom beweeg. Silwer (befokte) Sylvie, spaced-out Frans en Betty, die honger kinders, die ouer armes.

[I don't know what is happening behind the screens, I suspect there is no shortage of *theory* or *analysis*, I suspect a variety of private solutions for private hang-ups, for those who no longer experience familiarity within the community ...

But I'm *losing perspective*, I see too much of those who move on the *borders* of my property. Silver (fucked) Sylvie, spaced-out Frans and Betty, the hungry children, the older poor.]

(Viljoen [1984]1987: 35, my translation and italics)

The margin does not only play a consciousness-raising role in prose texts (cf. le Roux 1985: 9). In *Klaaglied vir Koos* and *Erf* the eventual interaction between the margin and the centre is one of two broad strategies for the incorporation of the margin into the centre.

2.3 Negative and Positive Incorporation

It has already been indicated that the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* sometimes feels threatened by the vagrants who knock on her door for money and food. In *Erf* Bets also feels threatened, as is clearly indicated by a fever dream she has and the fact that she first ensures that Loe-wie is not in the garden before she rushes out to put the garbage in the garbage can or to take laundry off the washing line (Viljoen 1986: 77). This fear of the Other leads to two strategies to regulate the interaction between the margin and centre.

The strategy Bets employs in order to get Loe-wie out of her life could be described as negative incorporation. First she tries to relegate the margin to a position in which it cannot trouble her: she throws Loe-wie off the property. When Loe-wie and his companions return, it is evident to the reader that this is not an effective way to interact with the margin since the group move closer to the house every time Bets confronts them or destroys their shelter (p. 44); eventually they penetrate the most sensitive part of the backyard (p. 74). Bets eventually manages to get rid of Loe-wie (although he still appears in her dreams) after she breaks his shelter down numerous times and refuses to give him food. Interestingly, the last time Bets breaks down Loe-wie's shelter, she is assisted by her friend, Harie. Although Harie hardly fits the stereotype of the patriarchal, white, Afrikaner man, he is (as white, Afrikaans man) a representative of the inner circle of the centre. The final removal of the margin can thus only be achieved when various representatives of the centre combine forces.

When he is off the property it seems as if Bets regrets her actions (or becomes nostalgic, at the very least) and the destroyed seraglio¹⁴ is rebuilt. This is the second part of her negative incorporation of the margin. The new summer palace is not the same as the original: the floor is laid out with square cement slabs (p. 99). The reconstruction of the summer palace is important for two reasons. Firstly it indicates that the same rules do not apply to the margin and the centre. Bets may chop down forty-eight reeds and peel the bark off the banana trees so that she can use the dried pulp for mats for the seraglio (p. 99). This contrasts greatly with Bets's reaction when Loe-wie chopped down the reeds to make a shelter. Secondly Bets's reconstruction of the seraglio is an appropriation of elements from the margin that she finds acceptable, without integrating the margin itself into the centre. Loe-wie must be removed because Bets is disturbed and threatened by his behaviour, but Bets retains the right to recreate the idyllic days of the seraglio (p. 54). She gains from the idealised image of the margin without having the margin there to destroy her illusions or to confront her with reality.

Juxtaposed with this negative integration is the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* and her positive integration. Although the process of integration is not completed in *Klaaglied vir Koos*, there is a strong indication that the narrator's attitude to the margin has changed and that she strives for integration without the appropriation present in Bets's integration. She overcomes her fear of the margin and decides that she will no longer negotiate from within the house, but will deal with those who are fucked up ("befoktes"), homeless, without possessions, those who surround her house in the evening, in honest sympathy (1984]1987: 66). This decision is taken after she and Nevil plan what changes have to be made to the garden and after she notices various similarities between them. Both are compared to animals and both have difficulty in organising their lives (p. 66). Central to the first-person narrator's changed approach to the margin is an intense desire to live alongside the social outcasts (p. 66). The ambiguity of the Afrikaans "mee leef" is, firstly, a matter of sympathy (*meelewing*) and, secondly, the need to live alongside the margin under one (metaphorical) roof – if the first-person narrator takes this idea of neighbourliness to the extreme, she should take Nevil into her house (cf. p. 69). The first-person narrator's need for integration can be ascribed to a realisation that she cannot lead an isolated life (possibly a message to the white enclave of

14. The use of the words "seraglio" and "summer palace" to describe Loe-wie's shelter indicates not only irony, but also the way Bets tries to distance herself from Loe-wie's impoverished existence by describing that existence in exaggerated, romanticised terms. These descriptions of Loe-wie's home can be contextualised within the colonial discourse in which the Other must continually be kept at a distance, must continually be represented as different (cf. Said [1987]2003: 207).

apartheid South Africa). It is also a technique by which Viljoen/Winterbach contrasts the actions of the first-person narrator and her husband. The first-person narrator remains (and becomes increasingly) involved with outcasts, while her husband (who leaves the country to fight for the outcasts) has no contact with them. The first-person narrator feels alone (even abandoned) (p. 64) during political meetings, but it seems that she feels less disconnection in the presence of the vagrants – an indication that involvement with political activities will not in and of itself lead to changes in the relations between people.

The changes in the relationship between Nevil and the first-person narrator are worth mentioning. The relationship changes to such an extent that when Nevil knocks on the door one evening, extremely drunk, he hands the first-person narrator a chocolate for her child (p. 67). It is the marginal character who, in the changed interaction between the margin and the centre, can act as benefactor.¹⁵ There is a suggestion, however, that the changed relations between the first-person narrator and Nevil, on the one hand, and the first-person narrator and Sylvia, on the other, will be short-lived. Sylvia leaves the first-person narrator with a feeling of loss when she knocks on the door at the end of the novella, once again in search of clothes for her daughter (p. 69), but the emphasis on the definite article emphasises how short-lived this feeling could be. Another time the first-person narrator might rather hope not to see her again (p. 34). The first-person narrator also anticipates that the neighbours will drive Nevil away and will not hesitate to call the police if he and the woman with him raise their voices (again) (p. 69). Nevil thus remains a victim of the centre's attempts to remove the margin or render it invisible and it does not seem as if the first-person narrator intends to protect him – despite her attempts to interact with him on an equal footing.

In the descriptions of these two focalisers' relationships with the vagrants, Viljoen/Winterbach retains an extremely ironic tone. Irony has long been an aid in voicing social criticism (see, for instance, [1994]1995: 30), but it is also a distancing mechanism (p. 49 and further). As a result it could be argued that Viljoen/Winterbach already gives her reader an indication of the likelihood of integration by means of the tone of the narrative. The question is not only whether negative or positive integration will occur, but whether integration is at all possible (and desirable) or durable. The ironic tone might suggest that even in cases where there are attempts at positive integration, that integration cannot really occur.

15. Dagut (1997: 4) claims, however, that in cases where the employee (or individual lower down the social ladder) gives the employer (or individual higher up the social ladder) a gift, he or she tries to elicit a paternalistic reaction from the employer (or individual with greater status) – the person with less status purposefully tries to create a patron-dependant relationship.

The degree to which equal interaction between the centre and the margin – not to mention positive integration of the margin – can occur in a society in which there is not even the pretence of equality (political, judicial, social and so forth) between the centre and the margin, is debatable. Possibly it is for this reason that the first-person narrator in *Klaaglied vir Koos* and Bets in *Erf* does not succeed in having a sustained, positive relationship with the vagrants. The question is whether any such attempts at positive integration are possible in a post-apartheid society in which all are supposed to be equal.

2.4 Mfazakhe Mhikize

Mfazakhe Mhikize in *Buller se plan* (1999) is an important character when vagrants in Viljoen/Winterbach's oeuvre are discussed. He is the first vagrant to have significant contact with a focaliser since *Klaaglied vir Koos* and he is also the first vagrant to appear in a post-apartheid novel by Viljoen/Winterbach. Furthermore it would seem that he is the first black vagrant in Viljoen/Winterbach's work. Besides all these points, it seems that he is not only a vagrant but that he also suffers from some psychological problems¹⁶ and he can therefore be seen as a cross-over figure between the vagrants and those characters in Viljoen/Winterbach's work who are psychologically unstable.

Viljoen/Winterbach's portrayal of Mfazakhe Mhikize as vagrant differs from her portrayal of the homeless in her two novellas. Firstly, unlike the vagrants in *Klaaglied vir Koos* and *Erf*, he is called by his name and surname, while Loe-wie, Nevil and similar characters are only called by their first names. This emphasises his ethnicity and indicates how much South African society has changed. Mfazakhe Mhikize does not have a "white" name (Viljoen 1986: 9) and the combination of name and surname circumvents the feeling of familiarity or unequal power relations that is created by the use of a first name only. Secondly, the negative impact of his way of life is continually emphasised. From her initial meeting with him, the focaliser, Ester Zorgenfliess, notes that he struggles to speak, that his clothes do not fit his body, that he is ill. The ironic tone, the haze of bitter humour (Ester 1985: 74), that is present in the descriptions of Loe-wie, Nevil et al., is absent in descriptions of Mfazakhe Mhikize and the result is that the life of a vagrant is stripped of the romantic elements (though

16. Although Sylvia is described as "onsamehangend, kleiner, dronker of haar kop net helemáál geblaas" (Viljoen 1986: 68) [incoherent, smaller, drunker or just *totally* out of her mind] at the end of *Erf*, she is not portrayed in this way for the better part of the novella and the explanation of drunkenness which the narrator provides is thus a plausible alternative. Alcohol is never mentioned in any description of Mfazakhe Mhikize and as a result some psychological instability therefore seems more plausible.

tempered by an ironic tone) that are occasionally present in Viljoen/Winterbach's two novellas. Thirdly, Mfazakhe Mhikize pertinently comments on his own situation – something none of the other vagrants in Viljoen/Winterbach's work do.

Hy verstaan dit nie, sê hy – dink Ester hy sê – waarom sy lewe is soos dit is nie Elke dag weet hy dit weer nie, sê hy

[He doesn't understand it, he says – Ester thinks he says – why his life is the way it is Every day he doesn't know it once again, he says ...]

(Winterbach 1999: 69-70)

Hy roep, sê hy, hy skree, en niemand help hom nie. Niemand om hom te red nie.

[He cries out, he says, he screams, and no-one helps him. No-one to save him.]

(Winterbach 1999: 120)

Daar is nie werk nie, sê hy. Hy is nie siek nie, sê hy, hy is net arm. (Het 'n arme dit al ooit op dié manier vir haar gesê? Sy dink nie so nie – dit bly altyd op die een of ander manier versweë. Net arm. Hierdie man sê dit asof hy goed besef dat hy deur sy armoede van 'n ander soort lewe weerhou word.)

[There is no work, he says. He isn't ill, he says, just poor. (Has any poor person ever said it in this way to her? She doesn't think so – in some way or other it always remains unsaid. Just poor. This man says it as if he realises all too well that his poverty bars him from another type of life.)]

(Winterbach 1999: 81)

The last extract from *Buller se plan* is followed by Mfazakhe Mhikize's explanation of how he searches for food. The combination of this self-reflexivity and the sober descriptions of his lifestyle makes Mfazakhe Mhikize a different type of homeless character. There is nothing reminiscent of the so-called "jolly Hotnot" in his character. He exhibits neither rowdy cheerfulness nor superficial experiences of sorrow (see Gerwel 1979: 11). Nevil and Loe-wie conform to this stereotype inasmuch as they are both cheerful and noisy when they get drunk. Other than that similarity, the stereotype of the "jolly Hotnot" is not applicable to Nevil, Loe-wie or any of the other vagrants in Viljoen/Winterbach's oeuvre. Instead, there is a positive outlook (as intimated by Betty's optimistic little prune face (Viljoen [1984]1987: 49)); it is entirely lacking in Mfazakhe Mhikize, however. It would also seem that Mfazakhe Mhikize does not have as many options as Nevil does (p. 66).

Mfazakhe Mhikize and Ester Zorgenfliess meet one another in front of the historic church in the small town of Steynshoop – a place where she also meets the strange, misshapen child and thus a liminal zone where interaction between the centre and margin might occur. On the benches under the plane

trees, Ester and Mfazakhe Mhikize are two equal souls (Winterbach 1999: 99). This equality of souls does not, however, mean that Ester and Mfazakhe Mhikize are truly equal. Ester remains the benefactor who supports Mfazakhe Mhikize – although he breaks with the traditional pattern by continually asking her for a specific amount over and above the amount she has already given to him.

Mfazakhe Mhikize purposefully tries to place himself in the centre. This occurs on two levels. Firstly he seeks Ester's company when she sits at this historical church, although he generally respects Ester's position in the social hierarchy when it comes to conversations. Secondly, when Ester asks him to write his name for her, he writes it between the printed lines in a newspaper advertisement, instead of using the broad, white margin (p. 81-82). She interprets this as a sign of agoraphobia (p. 82), but by writing his name between the small, printed black words (p. 82) Mfazakhe Mhikize places himself in the central text and refuses to be relegated to the margin – however broad that margin might be. This action makes Mfazakhe Mhikize a rather exceptional vagrant. Although the others try to move closer to the centre by undermining or manipulative actions, they do not succeed and the margin must still be appropriated (whether negatively or positively) by the representatives of the centre in order to become part of that centre.

Mfazakhe Mhikize's involvement with the theft of Mevrouw Kriek's property after her death also differs from the behaviour of the other vagrants. This is not Loe-wie who – in Bets's imagination – vengefully abducts her neighbours' cat in order to bake it (Viljoen 1986: 42), that is humorous, despite (or perhaps because) of the horror inherent in that image. Mfazakhe Mhikize's possible involvement in the murder of Mevrouw Kriek points to a side of the homeless which is much harder to romanticise: they become involved in crime due to their circumstances. In this case the homeless are no longer products of a system that actively promotes (social) inequality (and where the interaction between vagrant and focaliser illustrates the imbalance between the margin and the centre). Rather, it is an indication of social ills (crime, in this instance) that are exacerbated (or possibly caused) by social inequality – irrespective of the political regime's involvement in promoting or combating that inequality.

By portraying Mfazakhe Mhikize on his own, the difficult lifestyle of all vagrants in the new dispensation – in which a positive enlargement of the centre is supposed to occur – is indicated. He is the case study that is investigated and of whom the reader is continually reminded by the various (faceless) men who, during the course of the novel, push supermarket trolleys full of strange objects – rolled-up wire (pp. 17, 60), something resembling a rolled-up canvas (p. 17), a crossed stick (p. 59), books (p. 63), or empty cement bags (p. 119) – up and down the streets of Steynshoop.

3 Voiced and Voiceless

One of the purposes of this article is to provide possible reasons why Viljoen/Winterbach (as a white, middle-class woman) speaks for those who cannot. The supposition that Viljoen/Winterbach acts as spokesperson for those who are voiceless, is not unproblematic. Elaine Showalter (1988: 346) argues (taking her cue from Shirley and Edwin Ardener) that “all language is the language of the dominant order, and women, if they speak at all, must speak through it”. Within the South African context, where the political centre has shifted since Lettie Viljoen/Ingrid Winterbach published her first novella, her position within the social hierarchy is problematic. Does she speak the language of white men or black men? Or is there a shift: does she, in her two novellas and first two novels, speak the language of white men and that of black men in her four most recent novels? Or do the complex and changing power relations in South Africa ensure that she speaks a creole?

To address this problem at a very basic level, it has to be highlighted that Viljoen/Winterbach writes in Afrikaans – previously the language of the oppressor, but now a language that no longer occupies a privileged position, one that is (according to some) becoming increasingly threatened. It does, however, remain a language of people with power and influence in South Africa. But at the same time (as was also the case during apartheid) it is the mother tongue of (some of) those who were oppressed and disadvantaged during apartheid. The language in which Viljoen/Winterbach chooses to write is therefore ambivalent. But this conclusion is not a solution for the problem of whose voice Viljoen/Winterbach uses when writing and putting words into the mouths of (marginal) characters.

When there are attempts to give a voice to those who cannot raise theirs, there is always the danger that those people who want to give the voiceless a voice will give voice to their own ideas. Spivak (1988: 295) addresses this problem and comes to the conclusion that it is impossible for an anthropologist, political scientist, historian and sociologist (and one would like to add: novelist) to get information from the “silenced areas” of the voiceless without that work coinciding with “the work of the imperials subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization”. As a result, the voiceless remain “as mute as ever” (Spivak 1988: 295). Such a generalisation is dangerous, however, since the logical conclusion of this is that only wheelchair-bound black lesbian women can speak for other wheelchair-bound black lesbian women; ultimately everyone can only speak for themselves and any struggle against social inequality becomes pointless and impossible. Nonetheless it is a good rule of thumb to listen critically where there is a possibility that someone is talking “for” someone else. Apparently Viljoen/Winterbach consciously tries

to avoid this pitfall by focusing on a portrayal of certain characters rather than their dialogue.

In this article it has been indicated that Viljoen/Winterbach uses a variety of characters moving on the edge of society, whose voices are seldom or never heard. These characters seem to become more and more silent in recent prose works. In *Klaaglied vir Koos* and *Erf* vagrants are quite capable of speaking their mind. However, Mfazakhe Mhikize stutters and stammers and is sometimes unintelligible. Thus the tendency is that marginal characters progressively lose their voices – ironic if one takes into account that those previously disadvantaged (for whatever reason) were supposed to be able to raise their voices since 1994 (particularly since the inception in 1996 of a constitution guaranteeing freedom of speech). In a shift from her early work to *Buller se plan*, Viljoen/Winterbach does not allow vagrant characters to raise their voices in an intelligible manner, but at the same time she does not put words into their mouths. She tries to have no part in the “continuing construction of the subaltern” (Spivak 1988: 294).

In her most recent novels Viljoen/Winterbach does not appropriate the voice of the voiceless and paradoxically thereby prevents herself from silencing it. This is the case not only with regard to homeless characters but also with those who could be deemed psychologically troubled (see Foster 2004). Viljoen/Winterbach creates characters whose silence or inability to speak (or who receive no opportunity to speak) is noticeable. Thus it is very clear that the particular character is only accessible to the reader through the intervention of the focaliser. In this way, Viljoen/Winterbach foregrounds the focaliser rather than pretending to be the literary equivalent of a nineteenth-century positivistic scientist. The focaliser, through whom the reader experiences the marginal character(s), is very clearly not an impartial observer who simply wants to convey information to the reader (cf. Spivak 1988). By making the marginal character virtually inaccessible, Viljoen/Winterbach emphasises the relationship between the focaliser, the marginal character and the other characters (and thereby prevents one character from speaking “on behalf” of another character). By apparently emphasising the difference of marginal characters, the reader is given the opportunity to re-evaluate that which separates the marginal character from “the norm” and to consider whether incorporation into the centre would not be a better option – both for the sake of the (fictional) marginal figures as the (fictional) representatives of the centre.

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