Story Skills and Hierarchies of Needs and Values: A Defence of the Humanities

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Summary

This article[1] is a defence of the humanities that emphasises the nature and value of humanistic knowledge. I firstly outline the present negative perceptions of the humanities and the factors that constrain their development in South Africa. Chief among them is the privileging of technical rational knowledge above *Bildung* and self-development. Against the background of views on social dedifferentiation and the end of the book I emphasise the career value of the humanities. I try to reverse the opposition between technical rationalist knowledge and *Bildung* by analysing Maslow's hierarchy of needs and confronting his theory with a number of findings of our recent research into identity and literary space. Two keywords that feature strongly are **centrality** and **narrativity.** The implications of this view are explored in a brief analysis of Eben Venter's novel *Foxtrot van die vleiseters* (1993) [*Foxtrot of the Meat-eaters*].

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel is 'n verdediging van die humaniora wat klem lê op die aard en waarde van kennis binne hierdie dissiplines. Ek skets eers die huidige negatiewe persepsies van die humaniora en die faktore wat hulle in Suid-Afrika beperk. Dit kom breedweg neer op 'n teenstelling tussen tegnies-rasionele kennis en selfverwesenliking. Teen die agtergond van sienings oor sosiale dedifferensiëring en die einde van die boek beklemtoon ek die loopbaanwaarde van die humaniora. Die teenstelling tussen tegniese rasionaliteit en *Bildung* word verder ondersoek deur Maslow se behoeftehiërargie krities te ontleed en sy teorie te konfronteer met 'n aantal bevindings uit ons navorsing oor identiteit en literêre ruimte. Sleutelwoorde in hierdie verband is **sentraliteit** en **narratiwiteit**. Die implikasies van hierdie siening word uitgespel in 'n kort analise van Eben Venter se roman *Foxtrot van die vleiseters* [*Foxtrot of the Meat-eaters*] (1993).

1. The article was developed as a thought paper in the NRF's project Shifting Boundaries of Knowledge – The Role of Social Sciences, Law and Humanities. A first version was presented at a regional workshop of the project at Tshwane University of Technology on 28 May 2004.

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What can the humanities offer humans in South Africa, caught up in the euphoria of 14 years of democracy and the successful 2010 soccer bid? What can they offer ordinary people in their struggle to keep body and soul together amongst the splendour of the rich and powerful, buffeted by the icy winds of globalisation, threatened by HIV/AIDS and TB, seduced hour by hour by the press, radio and TV messages to strive for a lifestyle they can never afford? How can the humanities help these poor, hopeful, exposed little beings?

By supplying what the people want, obviously. But what does a man or a woman want? A new cellphone, designer clothes, a ticket to the World Cup, regular sex, a job, a well-balanced diet and a TV? Breyten Breytenbach once described TV in a memorable phrase as "die boks wat van jou 'n doos maak". It is untranslatable, but a close equivalent could be: "the box that turns you into a mampara". So what can the humanities do in this scenario? Entertain, console and pacify the people?

Often they do quite the opposite. To adapt the words of the Dutch poet Lucebert, written shortly after World War II,

> in these times what people always called
> the humanities humanities have burnt their faces
> they no longer console the people
> they console the larvae the reptiles the rats
> but humans they terrify
> making them forcefully aware
> of being bread crumbs on the skirt of the universe
>
> (Lucebert 1974: 47)

It is true that the humanities can open up a terrible knowledge of our own insignificance in the ever-expanding universe, but what they can do and the perceptions of what they can do in our society depend on the dominant view of what it means to be human and to know in our society. To reduce the human to a set of skills for the job market, the capacity to vote, live in style and escape into entertainment would, for example, give carte blanche to the SABC to televise South Africans into blissful, consumerist ignorance.

Living life stylishly can contrast quite sharply with the ideals of human dignity, human rights, equality, liberty and democracy enshrined in the constitution of South Africa. What does it really mean to be human and to know? As South Africans we need to know more about what this means in our society before we can start assessing the role of the humanities.

Defining the Humanities

The humanities, as I use the term here, indicate the traditional human disciplines of literary study, linguistics, history, philosophy, music and art

history. They "concern secular history, the products of human labor, the human capacity for articulate expression" as Edward Said (2004: 15) recently defined them. His definition of humanism (p. 15) can serve as a point of departure for this meditation: "Humanism is the achievement of form by human will and agency; it is neither system nor impersonal force like the market or the unconscious, however much one may believe in the workings of both." Since I am a teacher and researcher of literary theory and of Afrikaans and South African literature, I am writing mainly from a literary point of view.

The Problem – Current Perceptions

Current perceptions of the humanities are rather negative. They are regarded as too expensive and a burden on the economy. Politically they are, on the one hand, too leftist and radical in their questioning of accepted views and politics, but on the other too conservative and Eurocentric in their approach, thereby degrading indigenous knowledge. Moreover, many humanists in South Africa were too strongly aligned to the past, too complicit in maintaining apartheid, too lukewarm in their opposition to the previous regime, and they remain perhaps too critical of the present one.

On the job market the humanities offer only limited (and not very lucrative) career opportunities. They have little glamour and are not attractive to students – partly because they are not visual or spectacular enough and do not make good film or TV material (with the exception of legal battles in court, of course).

Perhaps the most telling criticisms are that the humanities are not really scientific and do not produce useful knowledge. They are too soft to generate the hard knowledge that society needs to manage and solve social problems like poverty, HIV/AIDS, racism or social alienation and meaninglessness. The skills they foster are regarded as not really valuable on the marketplace and do not help us to maintain and manage the global economy.

The problem that besets the humanities might therefore be an undervaluation of the kind of knowledge they produce. Problems of dealing with the trauma of the past and issues of human dignity, equality and freedom are central to the enterprise of the humanities. Yet, mostly people want to manage such problems better – they want to deal with them in a technical rationalist way. Such technical-rationalist knowledge is therefore more valuable than knowledge that is related to *Bildung*, which can be defined as education in general, aimed at developing moral judgement, critical thinking, aesthetic sensibility and a sense of significance in life.[2] This

2. See Bleicher's definition of *Bildung*:

entails a lower career value and lower status for the humanities in general and means that public expenditure on the humanities (and on the arts, museums and libraries) can be reduced (since acquiring knowledge and skills to develop yourself is a personal and not a societal matter).

The idea of the human as defined in the South African constitution in terms of human dignity, human rights, equality, liberty and democracy is, of course, a legacy of the Enlightenment. This idea of the autonomous bounded and self-determining individual has, as is well known, been severely criticised in poststructuralist thought (see e.g. Foucault 1970). Stuart Hall (2000: 43-44) sums this critique up as a set of decentrings. Freud has decentred the autonomous "I" by showing the determining influence of the unconscious. Instead of self-determining, Marxists have seen the individual as blinded by false class-consciousness and manipulated by ideological state apparatuses. Saussure and Lévi-Strauss have shown that language and semiotic systems think through the individual. Postcolonial thought has destabilised the Western subject and feminist thought the male ego. However, for all its radical implications poststructuralist thought has had little resonance in the South African debates on education, which tend to be dominated by issues of skills training and vocationalism.

This emerges, inter alia, from a Delphi study we conducted in 1999 in order to determine the main factors constraining teaching and learning of the humanities at South African universities. We canvassed the opinions of 14 experts across a variety of humanities disciplines in the course of three iterations. The top 21 constraints identified in this way are shown in Table 1. (See Viljoen (2005) for details of the project and its results.)

> Transcending mere acquisition of knowledge, *Bildung* points to a way of integrating knowledge and expertise with moral and aesthetic concerns. On the basis of a successful integration of thinking, willing and feeling, it enables sound judgement, indicated by a developed awareness of what is appropriate, and is expressed in tact, good taste, and a sense of community. It entails openness to difference and a willingness to self-correct.
>
> (Bleicher 2006: 365)

Table 1: The 21 Most Important Constraints in the Teaching and Learning of the Humanities in South Africa

Description	Position
Students, especially those from previously disadvantaged communities, lack language and textual proficiency in the medium of instruction.	1
Students take too little responsibility for independent learning.	2
There is a perception that the humanities do not equip students with adequate professional skills.	3
There is a perception that humanities graduates struggle to find employment.	3
Many students and lecturers lack a culture of reading.	4
Society promotes its utilitarian ideal by emphasising applied or socially “relevant” science and technology, and vocational training at the expense of enquiry for the sake of extending human knowledge.	4
Students are not made academically literate (i.e. socialised into the unspoken ground rules, procedures and standards of a specific discipline).	4
Globally speaking, we are living in a utilitarian age with a strong emphasis on practical, vocational skills, and on profit.	5
A perception exists that humanities graduates have a lower social status and less earning power than graduates from science, technology and business.	6
Many students and academics lack the capacity to do research.	6
The humanities tend to be regarded as low-status knowledge in comparison with science and mathematics.	7
Society often fails to recognise the empowering effect of a humanist education.	7
Business, industry and government do not provide sufficient support for the humanities.	7
Students enter university with inadequate social and cognitive skills.	8
Financial constraints on universities often lead to utilitarian policies that run counter to academic ideals.	8
The potential of the humanities to develop life skills is not acknowledged as essential to all careers.	9
Universities are challenged by a utilitarian philosophy that places the highest value on profit and vocational skills.	9
University administrations do not understand and support the humanities well enough.	9
The general low level of education of South Africans inhibits teaching and learning in the humanities.	10
Students fail to manage their time effectively.	11
There is a cultural knowledge gap since both lecturers and students lack essential cultural, cross-cultural and multicultural knowledge.	12

Though more emphasis falls on students and their capacities, this list clearly supports the picture I sketched above. The conflict between human values on the one hand and instrumentalism, vocationalism and professionalism on the other is very clear. In general, the results emphasise the gap between the needs of the marketplace and the needs of *Bildung* and self-development.

Transformation, *Bildung* and Vocationalism

The transformation of South African higher education is intensifying the debate between *Bildung* and vocationalism, according to Wilhelm Jordaan (2003). He believes that a key aim of transformation is to provide vocational training to supply the needs of the market and guarantee jobs for thousands of young people. Merging the different cultures of universities and technikons is going to exacerbate the conflict between vocational training, with its emphasis on practical relevance and technical, rational problem-solving, and *Bildung*, which he defines as the ideal of a formative education that aims to educate people in independent critical rationality, open dialogue and the ability to find meaning in life. He sees a possible cultural disaster in our universities if the needs of the marketplace will start dominating and excluding the need for critical rationality and the ideal of *Bildung*.

Such a disaster is less imminent, as a number of spokespeople, including Prof. Njabulo Ndebele (2003) and Prof. Kader Asmal (2003), have come out strongly against such marketisation. In an article, "Human Values Cannot Be Traded in the Marketplace" (2003), Asmal argues strongly for dissolving the growing divide that globalisation causes between rich and poor by "ensuring a degree of symmetry in benefits" (p. 8). To this end he calls for three "constructive interventions" in globalisation, namely revitalising multilateralism, finding new ways to engage with linguistic, cultural and religious diversity, and resisting the commodification of education. In his opinion the South African Values in Education Initiative is based on the premise that "human values, such as equality, dignity, integrity, and social honour cannot be commodified in a market-based economy. These values cannot be bought; they are not for sale" (p. 8). Consequently, while participating in globalisation, he writes, "[W]e also need to maintain our human integrity by finding ways to articulate values that are not exclusively or even accurately determined by the market" (p. 8).

The needs of the market (both local and global) are extremely important today, but they have to be balanced by the needs of other public and civil places of interaction, like parliament, the courts, schools and universities, the churches and the sports fields and even the stage itself. In public as in private and family life South Africans cannot bow to the idols of the marketplace only.

Overemphasising the needs of the marketplace is, on the other hand, very dangerous, since this might mean that value and meaning will be determined solely by the rich and the powerful (Nethersole 1998).

How to articulate the values that are not solely determined by the market is precisely at issue. How can South Africans resist the commodification of education if the emphasis falls on measurable outcomes? The opposition between *Bildung* and vocational training needs to be explored further, and I propose to do so by an analysis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, confronting his theory with a number of findings of our recent research into identity and literary space. Two words will feature strongly in this analysis, namely **centrality** and **narrativity**.

Mapping the Terrain

In order to understand the challenges confronting the humanities properly, we first need to map the terrain, to determine what in the world is going on. Let me briefly discuss two grids that were developed for this purpose.

Late Modernity

In his article "The Triumph of Method" Anton van der Hoven (2003) uses the four phases of the social imaginary of modernity as such a grid. He describes the fourth phase, late modernity, in terms of a new complexity and increasing fragmentation of the social world, the demise of the ideal of the universal subject (the autonomous self) and the decline of experience. Social fragmentation leads to the collapse of key distinctions of modernity, like private vs public, work vs leisure, expert vs lay knowledge (*dedifferentiation*). To counter this fragmentation, people "immerse themselves in smaller, more homogenous belief communities" which function both as "havens for thought, desires, and emotions" and as projects that people can devote their lives and the resources of modernity to (*re-enchantment*) (van der Hoven 2003: 91). The decline of experience means that meta-knowledge, that is knowledge "generated less through experience and experiment than through appropriating, dismissing or otherwise acting on other pre-existing knowledge" (p. 92), has become a highly important feature of contemporary culture. Van der Hoven ascribes the growth of method courses, or how-to-courses, less to the effect of the increasing instrumentalisation of knowledge and more to "the students' serious attempt to empower themselves in the meta-knowledge culture of late modernity" (p. 93).

In van der Hoven's view, then, it is not narrow vocationalism that is driving the students; they are rather trying to empower themselves under the pressures of dedifferentiation and the decline of experience.

The End of the Book

A second grid of understanding is indicated by a remark by the then chairperson of the national curriculum development committee, Dr Cassius Lubisi. (He is at present the head of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.) Commenting on the process of reviewing the current curriculum for grades 10-12 Dr Lubisi said that many current subjects have reached their "sell-by date", and added: "One stumbled upon subjects such as book-binding, classical Greek, shorthand and watch-making, and asked ourselves what – in the globalised educational environment of the 21st century – one would seriously do with book-binding as subject at that level" (Baloyi 2002: 2).

The answer is obvious: bind books, repair and maintain the many millions of books stored in libraries nationally and the thousands of new books being produced annually. Or simply make beautiful bindings for special volumes. Would a person trained as a bookbinder not be able to find a job in the twenty-first century? Would s/he not be a useful citizen – even of the globalised world? It is not as if books are going to disappear from our lives in the near future.

Though it is true that the school curriculum and the developments in the economy and society as a whole are out of kilter, Lubisi's statement is not based on the demonstrable need for bookbinders nationally and internationally but rather on an ideological position celebrating the new technologies of the computer and information technology (the so-called *videosphere,* Debray 1996) and devaluing skills associated with the book – the sphere of writing, or the *graphosphere.* The skills and values of the videosphere are rapidly becoming dominant and acquiring a higher status than others. In so far as the humanities have since their emergence been disciplines of the book this trend is further undermining their status and perceived social value.

This is more than a passing fad. After centuries of written culture that follow upon ages of oral culture we are experiencing a profound change in the medium of text transmission. Texts written (or painted) in light are starting to dominate. The Dutch have coined a neologism for that – "lichteratuur": literature on the film, TV or computer screen. As the term indicates, such texts are strongly visual.

The videosphere has strong negative effects, like social isolation, loss of experience and dematerialisation, loss of a sense of belonging (Debray 1996). Forbiddingly, one is no longer a crumb on the skirt of the universe

but rather a node of the Worldwide Web. Still, the videosphere gives us new and exciting ways of retelling stories, of recuperating the past, of enhancing cultural memory. The problems of identity in cyberspace and of cyborgs and other creatures of our nightmares open new research territory. The new texts pose new problems of understanding and new challenges to interpretation.

Career Value of the Humanities

As teachers we should bridge the divide between the humanities and the workplace. Contrary to popular opinion the humanities do teach people a lot of vocational skills and we should overturn the perception that they do not. The challenge is to make people aware of the vital role that the humanities can and do play to foster a critical civil society.

The humanities do open up many (and varied) career opportunities like teaching, historical and archival work, publishing, all kinds of writing, entertainment, and communication in general. They are also of high career value for many different professionals who need to write, speak and communicate clearly and persuasively. We are, in effect, entering a new era where the "softer" skills of logical and persuasive communication are again in demand.

Gerda Dullaart (2002) did a PhD study of the construction of the human subject through the teaching of literature at South African universities since 1994. Part of the study focused on the value of the humanities for the job market in an effort to bridge the gap between *Bildung* and vocational training. She found that there is a demand for humanities-type skills in the open market particularly where a strong link between career and training does not exist (p. 180). Students are, however, seldom made aware of the vocational value of what they are taught and that very little effort goes into making students aware of the practical skills they have acquired. These include being able to see the broad picture, skills of analysis and interpretation and communication skills. Dullaart (pp. 177-183) discusses Dutch research that indicated that the creativity, flexibility and adaptability of people trained in humanities are in demand where employers need to employ people who can cope with change and uncertainty, e.g. in new ventures or on uncertain terrain, like information technology.

Dullaart (pp. 198-200) concluded that the career value of the humanities should therefore be made an explicit part of teaching/learning objectives, that the curriculum should be open and flexible, that the fit between the curriculum and careers should be improved and that students should be exposed to the world of work (e.g. by means of internships).

Nowadays it is rather difficult to define the needs of the marketplace and the well-trained employee. Vocational training clearly involves much more than just training in basic and technical rational skills. It is also clear that we

need further research into the career value of the humanities and a redefinition of the humanities for changing times. As professors of the humanities we should professionalise our enterprise and find ways to ensure that society respects our knowledge, skills and the contribution we make to society.

Professionalism, some would doubtless argue, goes against the grain of the broad, generalist ideal of *Bildung* that the humanities espouse. But this position should also be critically examined. Moore & Young (2001: 447-449) calls it “neo-conservative traditionalism” and regards the current curriculum debate as a clash between this set of assumptions about knowledge and the curriculum and another, equally dominant, set they call “technical-instrumentalism” (a synonym for vocationalism). In their article they also examine the postmodern critique of both these positions, concluding that all three approaches preclude a debate on the nature of knowledge as such. They then propose an alternative they call a “social realist” approach to knowledge. This view, they claim, recognises the social, dialogic character of knowledge, avoids the ahistorical views of tradition without relying too much on notions like relevance or experience, maintains a certain autonomy from the instrumentalism of economics or politics, balances different social goals and reorientates debates about standards and testing (Moore & Young 2001: 456).

I do not want to go into more detail here, but their work indicates that research into the nature of knowledge and how our views about knowledge influence our teaching and research is vital.

Shifting the Boundaries of Need and Want

A Hierarchy of Needs and Values

All this is beside the point, isn’t it, since we know what South Africa needs, and that is relevant research. Relevance, in this context, tends to be defined narrowly as research that can lead to technical rationalist solutions to poverty, crime and the problems of HIV/AIDS and to economic growth. It does not make much sense to talk to people about poetry and beauty, rights and dignity when they are hungry, jobless or dying from HIV/AIDS. It is quite obvious that a government first needs to supply the basic needs of its citizens before spending too much time on their rights and dignity or aesthetic experience. It needs to deliver jobs, houses, health care and safety. In reality, the ANC government has thus far in many areas been stronger in philosophy and policy than in delivery.

At issue here is again what it means to be human and which needs and wants humans have. It is common sense that certain needs (and values) are more basic than others and that the need for food or shelter is more basic

than the need for a sense of self and for self-development. In other words, we know quite well what humankind wants: they want to satisfy their basic needs and then, maybe, grow into self-actualisation. This view is based, unconsciously, on Abraham Maslow's (1954) theory of human motivation.

Maslow distinguishes five sets of needs. In hierarchical order they are firstly, basic, physiological needs; secondly, needs for safety and security; thirdly, belongingness and love needs; fourthly, the esteem needs, and finally the highest need – the need for self-actualisation.

Though Maslow argues for a holistic view of human personality, his views seem to vacillate between the dominance of the basic needs, which are more animal and instinctive in nature, and the pull of the higher institution of the psychologically healthy self. He strongly argues that the higher needs can only develop once the lower needs have been satisfied. Living continually on a hungry stomach will cause our needs for esteem and self-actualisation to die off, he thinks. On the other hand he tries to overcome the split between body and soul (or nature and culture) inherent in his scheme by saying inter alia that "the higher develops only on the basis of the lower, but eventually, when well established, may become relatively independent of the lower" (Maslow 1954: 154).

The contradiction between the push of the body and the pull of the self is clear in Maslow's arguments for distinguishing between the higher and the lower needs. He bases his hierarchy on relative potency (p. 146), since the lower needs are stronger and more urgent than the higher ones, but he also develops a set of 16 arguments for distinguishing between higher and lower needs. This includes that the higher develops later evolutionary and ontogenetically, that the higher depends on more preconditions and that the higher is valued more, since it means greater biological efficiency and psychological health. Gratifying the higher needs means "a greater degree of love identification", has "desirable civic and social consequences", but also comes closer to self-actualisation and "leads to a greater, stronger, and truer individualism" (p. 149). This illustrates the pull of self-actualisation, which has some very interesting implications for society and for education in particular. Once we have achieved the awareness "that we really want and need love, respect, knowledge, a philosophy, self-actualization, etc." (p. 153), we realise that the basic needs are not primitive forces that need to be disciplined and controlled but rather weak forces which should be accepted and encouraged to emerge spontaneously, naturally, permissively.

In this regard Maslow writes: "If our intrinsic impulses are understood to be not lions but lambs, loving rather than predatory, admirable rather than detestable, we shall certainly wish to free them for their fullest expression rather than to bind them into straitjackets" (Maslow 1954: 153).

How to be good, happy and fruitful, can be deduced from human nature itself, since "the organism tells us what it needs (and therefore what it values) by sickening when deprived of these values" (pp. 152-153). The lion of the Id, turned into a lamb, has to be nurtured carefully.

John M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) strongly contradicts Maslow on this point. David Lurie justifies his near rape of a student with an appeal to the rights of desire but is confronted with the unwanted results of giving free reign to the rights of desire when his own daughter is raped. His bleak vision of South Africa as one immense machine for the forced exchange of goods – and maybe of women, too – is contradicted later on in the book by his simple life and simple affection for a stray dog. In the end he gives up the dog he loves – not as a sacrifice, but in a gesture of self-denial. In other words, he renounces the rights of desire. But this is only one of the possible interpretations of the ending of that uncompromising text that forces us to ponder values like compassion, guilt and restitution.

It is therefore a simplistic reading of Maslow's theory to say that policy and research should focus on basic needs, since people's very survival depends on them. He rather makes a strong argument for teaching and researching precisely those skills that are not immediately socially relevant but on the long run leads to self-actualised, happy citizens in harmony with their fellow citizens and their environment, less prone to act out of instinctive and physiological need. Rather than putting less emphasis on teaching self-knowledge and formative knowledge, Maslow's ideas in other words imply that universities should teach students much more about self-actualisation.

From Belonging to Centrality

Maslow seems to think that one's needs to belong should first be satisfied before self-actualisation becomes possible. Our research into space and identity in literature, published under the title *Storyscapes; South African Perspectives on Literature, Space and Identity* (see Viljoen & van der Merwe 2004), points rather to an intimate interaction between belonging and security (and even insecurity) and the idea of a self. We agree that people need to belong, to have a sense of being at home in the world, even if such belonging is temporary and precarious. A house can be regarded the essence of inhabited space – the place we call home shelters us and forms a kind of shell for our solitude and our daydreams. Finding shelter in the world into which we are cast is for the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard the essence of "the primary function of inhabiting" (1969: 4). That is why the shell of a mollusc is the root metaphor of his phenomenology of inhabiting. The shell gives shelter to individual solitude, just like the human equivalent, the hermit's hut, does. Its essence (which is "the essence of the verb "to inhabit") is that it is "centralized solitude" (p. 32). The places we call home are shell-like in the way that they protect our solitude and our "spaces of intimacy" (p. 8). The house itself is a primary space of intimacy, mainly because it shelters our solitude and gives us space

to daydream, for it is in daydreams that for Bachelard thoughts, memories and dreams are integrated (p. 6). The quintessential house, therefore, is an oneiric house – a space that shelters wishes and daydreams.

Bachelard further claims "a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (p. 17), since it appeals to our consciousness of verticality and of centrality. The vertical dimension is the way in which the daydreamer constructs the upper stories and the attic – and the attic is specifically shell-like in that it is a space of cosmic dreams. At the same time the dreamer is also digging the cellar. In other words, the meaning of a house lies in the dialectic between cellar and attic – psycho-analytically spoken, between the unconscious and the conscious, between the rational and the dark mysterious depths below. Even in an electrically lit house the cellar retains this unconscious mystery. Houses with strong sub-terranean elements are for Bachelard houses with cosmic roots. They are like stone plants "growing out of the rock up to the blue sky of a tower" (p. 22).

The dimension of centrality returns us to "a house's situation in the world" (p. 27), to the essence of inhabiting – to the hermit's hut, in other words. The hermit is alone before God and the hut is an image of the "center of concentrated solitude" around which radiates as it were "a universe of meditation and prayer, a universe outside the universe" (p. 32).

Bachelard writes from a European situation of multi-storeyed city houses. It is not self-evident that the same values would apply to houses in South Africa. André Brink attempted to create such a house in *Donkermaan* (2000, translated as *Rights of Desire*) where the dark secret of the cellar is the skeleton of the maltreated slave Antje of Bengal, but Brink's attempt is too contrived to be convincing.

The individual shell (or cell) that enables solitude – the "room of one's own" so essential for reading and writing, the place needed to mould, to become a self, to create an identity, especially that of a writer – does not seem to be a central principle of inhabiting in many Afrikaans novels. "To inhabit" rather seems to mean to be sheltered from the heat and from the vast, open veld – a garden or a farm, in other words. Horizontality seems to be more important than verticality, so that the cellar and the attic are trans-lated into their horizontal equivalents: the mysterious, *unheimisch* veld and the safely enclosed garden (in itself a potent symbol of the self) where the ear can be lulled by the sound of water.

It is in the in-between spaces, beyond the limits, we found in our research, that transformation and rebirth can take place and new possibilities can form. Nevertheless, the texts we studied in *Storyscapes* point in many ways to a human need for coherence and significance. Significant places acquire mythic proportions – in Bachelard's terms a centrality. A sense of meaning-ful relatedness, of being meaningfully cast in the world, is essential.

Bachelard's phenomenology of space thus seems to break down in the South African imaginary since the modalities of habitation are different.

The "I" in Bachelard's system seems to be born fully fledged in its house, in its shell where solitude is possible. It is a bourgeois "I". The cogito that contemplates the essence of inhabiting has already been formed, just like Maslow's self.

Narrativity and Narrative Knowledge

Some elements of Bachelard's view point in another direction, however. He emphasises memories and "the complexity of mixed reverie and memory" that we find in daydreams (1969: 26). "To inhabit" is after all also an active verb, and the history of the "I" is (among other things) the memory of the series of places of its intimacy. Knowing ourselves means knowing "a sequence of fixations in the being's stability" (p. 8). "In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time. That is what space is for," Bachelard writes (p. 8). The mixture of reverie and memory points in the direction of stories. The series of intimacies the "I" remembers might well be a series of stories. The cogito in its solitude in other words presupposes a narrative process of formation – it is a narrative identity, since for Paul Ricoeur, it is narrative that connects the discontinuity of the "I" to its continuity. In other words, identity is a narrative process that ties together memories, fleeting images and reveries in language – the centrally important medium of representation.

Ricoeur (1991) points out that identity means both "sameness" (Lat. *idem*) and "self" (Lat. *ipse*). To him selfhood means continuity over time, since he connects it to human *Dasein* – the state of being cast in the world. It indicates the ontological state of being able to interrogate one's self and to enter into a relationship with being qua being. Selfhood is an authentic state of living and experiencing in time. By connecting sameness (continuity) and selfhood (discontinuity over time) narratives therefore reconfigure different states of selfhood, of sameness and of the world, and this can lead to a reconfigured view of the self and of the world. The power of narratives lies in the fact that they not only reflect ways of understanding the self and the world, but that they also stage and experiment with these different ways.

Narrative emplotment paves the way for new ways of emplotting individual, place and society in order to overcome the uncertainty and insecurity of our globalised postcolonial condition. Further research into this constructive power of stories is necessary, since there are millions of stories in the world, and telling stories fulfil many different functions in society. In a sense even memory is a story since it is rather a re-creation or re-imagining and not just a reflection of the past.

The disdain of humanistic knowledge obscures vital functions of literature. In literature knowledge is mostly organised not in theories and models but in stories. Political and social stories (narratives) are powerful vehicles

for self-understanding but also for the social construction of knowledge and for social mobilisation. In short, the ability to understand and deal with narratives is a very important literary, social, epistemological and political skill.

Emplotment, the Self and Its Needs in *Foxtrot van die vleiseters [Foxtrot of the Meat-Eaters]*

In conclusion I want to give a brief practical illustration of the interplay of emplotment, needs and the self in the case of Eben Venter's 1993 novel, *Foxtrot van die vleiseters* [*Foxtrot of the Meat-eaters*].

The novel is set in the interregnum between the old South Africa and the new. The old order of the farmer and his patriarchal control over his land, his children and his workers is dying, but the new cannot be born yet. The book (re)creates for us a few months in the history of Hendrik Douw Steenekamp and his family, and their reaction to the state of emergency in the eighties. The book is full of fear and other morbid symptoms of the "Groot Versteuring" [the Big Disturbance, pp. 159-60] but also full of zest and vitality. It is a cornucopia, overflowing with the richness of farm life, all the more abundant because the lifestyle of the whites stands in stark contrast to the poverty of the labourers that make it possible. It is a rich and thick description of a way of life that is passing away.

Food is one of the main indices of the lack of understanding and indifference of the whites and of the vast gap between rich and poor. The landowners eat meat in abundance, reaching a climax in the chapter "Vleis" [Meat] where the narrator revels in the description of the two grotesque brothers Bekker with their gargantuan appetites for meat. The labourers get very little meat and even the milk dries up. Buziwe, the only black girl on the farm who takes her education seriously and resists the hegemony of the whites, longs for a single orange, while the Steenekamps can each devour five oranges in one evening. A strong sense of horrified fascination with human excess runs through the book, for it is written under the sign of the grotesque, right from the horrifying blood-curdling scream the Steenekamp family hears at the beginning.

The abundance is closely linked to ominous signs of change and to death. The patriarchal conventions of the traditional farm novel are reconfigured. Hendrik Douw mourns the passing away of the old order. Their years of grace ("genadejare") have ended; they have used up all the grace they had, he says (p. 192). The first ending of the book, in the detail it gives of the leftovers and dirty plates of Mirtle's wedding reception, is an eloquent picture of vanitas, right down to the image of a moth crawling on a leftover sosatie. In the end the patriarch, Hendrik Douw, has come full circle. While his barn is burning down, he remains in the semi-holy Wild Horse Glen

(Wildeperdehoek) where he is shown praying in the beginning and where his daughter's wedding reception takes place. He has become vulnerable, since he has lost control of nature and of the events. Here one might be tempted to find a centrality.

However, the second ending, which consists of a set of interviews between the narrator and the characters, shows that the first one is fictional. After the deliberate act of closing life goes on, in other words. The sabotage of the barn is a fiction.

Instead of leading to self-actualisation, the abundance seems to stunt the spiritual growth of the Steenekamps. Their hidden darknesses and sense of guilt are uncovered. Petrus allows the workers to voice their sense of injustice, giving them dignity and moral force. Chapter 4 already ends with a strong emblem of this dignity in the very midst of the morbid symptoms of the state of emergency. This chapter is set on the farm of Grandfather Lampinon, the old patriarch. Two white women, Ouma Lalie and Tjieries, enter the house of one of the labourers whose father has died to sympathise with the family, but they are completely unable to comprehend the meagreness of the human space inside the house. Their alienation seems to compel Ouma Lalie, in an act of atonement, to place the bouquet of flowers she was going to deliver in town at the foot of the deathbed. This is the first thing, the first gesture that Tjieries finds comprehensible in the whole situation (p. 62). It is an extravagant way to try and honour the dead person.

Despite the feudal differences between white and black there is a strong sense in the book that they are also intimately related. The signs of the Big Disturbance are also signs that the old relations are changing, especially in the case of the young people. They, each in their own way, are trying to forge new sets of relations and a new identity. Johannes becomes John-John and seems to lose his identity in the city. Buziwe finishes her schooling and joins a liberation movement. Petrus, the narrator and would-be social conscience in the book, makes notes, questions, writes a book. He takes Buziwe swimming at the hot springs and tries to change the master servant relationship into which they are cemented (p. 204).

The book evokes the spirit and substance of a way of life like no academic description can, and part of its thickness and reality is its strong sense of the relatedness of people. They are part of a social fabric, part of a bigger whole of shared experience, of living together. The signs of the new are small but unmistakeable: the rains come, Mirtle gets married, Hendrik Douw is glad that he did not shoot the black boy who ripped his wife's pearl necklace off her neck that day when young blacks overran the agricultural show. The book is a foxtrot between two kinds of meat eaters – those who have and those who don't – a kind of contest, a Jackal-and-Wolf game in which people try to trick and outwit each other. Every story has its alternative in the quick dance of living, surviving and maybe growing into something more.

Conclusion

As my example indicates, literature does not only preserve culture and cultural memory but also helps us to create new ways of exploring and understanding the world. This seems to be true of the humanities in general. Humanistic knowledge is not knowledge for the sake of knowledge, but humanities disciplines and institutions play vital (if less understood) roles in society. Behind the perception that the humanities are socially less useful and should therefore receive less money and less recognition than technical-rationalist knowledge lies a hierarchy of knowledge based on the degree to which the humanities are perceived as of practical utility and as scientific or methodologically rigorous. This hierarchy is based on simplistic views of what it means to be human and of knowledge and should be abolished.

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