

analysis. Spanning, chronologically, a twenty-year period, and formally, crime thrillers such as Deon Meyer's *Heart of the Hunter*, hybrid creative nonfiction such as Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, and the photojournalistic dispatches of Greg Marinovich that cover the massacre at Marikana and the Farlam Commission. This array of primary material, coupled with the books abiding concern with the tensions between "reality" or "truth" and fiction, resists reductive argumentation and counters the book's tendency to sometimes scabble towards a much desired but elusive, and perhaps, impossible in "real" terms, notion of virtue.

For scholars of South African literature, this is a compulsory read which charts a course from crime fiction and its treatment of cultural difference in Chapter One, through postapartheid "white" writing which persistently engages with spectres of the past in Chapter Two, then on to a postapartheid literature of disillusionment which describes how writers yearn for a deliverance from plot loss whilst simultaneously acknowledging that this hope is futile in Chapter Three, followed by a closer look at how fictional and nonfictional representations of crime perform social detection in Chapter Four, succeeded by an exploration of how new media render visible the "crime scene" or "wound culture" in Chapter Five, and which arrives finally at an assessment of fictional responses to the crimes of post-apartheid South Africa. De Kock ends this journey with a brief remark, which has been made emphatically and cogently enough throughout the book, that writers

have to tell the right story, to tell the story right, that is, they need to plot carefully the path to virtue.

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### **Learning Zulu: A secret history of language in South Africa.**

Mark Sanders.

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Taking a leaf from the book under review, I'll start by injecting an autobiographical element. Much of what Sanders examines here echoes my own experience, after Zimbabwe's independence, of heading to a remote mission school to teach for two years. Part of my purpose was to learn better Shona, the majority language from which I had been systematically discouraged by my colonial education. It was, in a way, a gesture of reparation, or addressing a nagging "white guilt", or at least of assuaging a sense of fruitless loss and exclusion. I was nowhere near as successful in attaining fluency as Sanders seems have been in learning Zulu; and now that I live in the Eastern Cape, my efforts to learn Xhosa have been similarly patchy and faltering. One thing is evident throughout Sanders's dense discussions: long-term, assiduous application and periods of total immersion are vital—and as he points out, few whites in South Africa

have carved out the time and energy to do so, while willy-nilly expecting the black majority to learn *their* language. (An endnote does aver that, according to census figures, a surprising 16,000-plus whites, and a similar number of Indians, in KwaZulu-Natal, list Zulu as their *first* language.)

Hence, as Sanders outlines it, a white person learning an African tongue in South Africa is inevitably shackled to the unequal past distribution of linguistic power; that learning has to be a gesture of reparation at a deeply psychological level, and failures or shortfalls can be generative of feelings as powerful as a “paranoia”. Those failures (mine included) are routinely explained away in what Sanders calls a “sanctioned ignorance” (18): the oft-professed wish to learn is “disavowed, a wall of ‘buts’ erected against it [so that] one begins to suspect the operation of a deeply rooted prohibition” (23), a “shabby concentrate of inhibition” that emerges not just from apartheid education but a longer-lasting “anal-sadistic arrogation of violent sovereign decision” (racism, in short, he doesn’t quite say) (30).

To the extent that various whites *have* learned or tried to learn Zulu, the results constitute, in Sanders’s subtitle, a “secret history” of language in South Africa—by which he really means that “it has not been recorded before, save in fragmentary form. Whereas the more- and less-alienating effects on Africans of colonial language teaching have been well attested, accounts of which are justly canonical, the meaning of learn-

ing an African language, for colonial of European descent [...] has scarcely been explored” (9).

Using as a narrative thread his own long-term experiences of learning Zulu both in South Africa and the United States (he is now a professor of comparative literature at New York University), Sanders explores in intricate and fascinating detail a number of case studies of whites learning Zulu. He shows convincingly how such efforts are laden with, and compromised by, complexly involuted and ironic psychopolitical dynamics inseparable from the wider politics of the times.

The cases range widely, each supported by impressively compact historical and political background: the role of Bishop Colenso and the first standardised dictionaries; the formation and history of “Fanakolo” (my childhood’s Chilapalapa); “the awful but popular bowdlerisations of Zulu represented by the stage-show *Ipi Tombi* (in a school production of which Sanders once acted the “100% Zulu boy”); the career of Johnny Clegg, the honorary “White Zulu”; the role of Zulu normativity in 2008’s xenophobic outrages; through to the case of another “100% Zulu Boy”, Jacob Zuma, with particular reference to the avowedly “Zulu” masculinity that underpinned the then presidential candidate’s rape charge and acquittal.

In an especially subtle exploration, Sanders unpacks implications and aporias in Sibusiso Nyembezi’s Zulu primers, *Learn Zulu* and *Learn More Zulu*, key learning texts in Sanders’s trajectory:

an understated—significant *because* so understated—critique of apartheid showing through its apparently inoffensive surface. Nyembezi (d.2000) was also a substantial novelist in Zulu; but apart from discussion of those novels, Sanders offers an exegesis of Nyembezi's translation into Zulu of Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* (*Lafa elihle kakhulu*). The handling and presentation of the Zulu language in the English original is problematic enough; but what happens when Nyembezi is faced with the problem of (re)translating the Reverend Kumalo's gentle "correction" to the white Jarvis boy's "mistake" in Zulu, when the correction itself is erroneous according to the standard or "correct" Zulu in which Nyembezi is writing, and which he advocates in his primers? A fascinating problem, indeed.

The emergence of a standard or "high" Zulu, often attached to the norms of the royal family, lies behind this example. Sanders, drawing on a swathe of recent scholarship on the emergence of the Zulu state and on what might constitute "Zulu identity", shows that that identity was always fraught, malleable, periodically fragmented to the point of civil war, and is still under contestation. (Two years ago I was privileged to attend a mass meeting, called by King Zwelithini at one of his rural palaces, engineered to reconcile "core Zulu" and "Mkhize" segments of what has sometimes, and sometimes not, functioned as a unitary Zulu identity.) In the 2008 xenophobia, knowledge of abstruse, even archaic Zulu concepts, also sometimes associated with

the royal core, would be used as a test for foreigners; failure could provoke violent expulsion.

As with "standard Shona" in Zimbabwe, which only emerged, through the efforts of missionary lexicographers comingling and choosing between the various related-but-different dialects, in around 1910, the status and solidification of a standard or "pure" Zulu, evolving through the efforts of Colenso, Grout, Bleek and other literate dictionary-makers, was a fraught and politically contingent business. So too then is the business of translation, not centrally theorised but a necessarily constant presence in this study.

Sanders makes mileage of two particular Zulu phrases. The first is the sentence *ngicele uxolo* (I beg forgiveness), which becomes a sign of Sanders's "making good", a reparation. The shadow of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is unavoidable here, and the author's grappling with this impulse governs the study.

The second phrase is *ulimi lwebele*, language-of-the-breast, Zulu as the "mother-tongue", literally that which one imbibes with one's mother's milk. Sanders meshes this with an underpinning of psychoanalytic theory, invoking Freud and Melanie Klein. I'm personally not convinced by it all, perhaps because it is rather patchily explicated: "To continue the endeavour to make good would be to summon the courage to bring the *words* of the language themselves into one's mouth [...] and so to master the phallic meaning of the *name* of the language, in

other words the threat of castration that led to the name being used as a fetish.” (98)

Really? Sanders anticipates precisely such a bemused reaction early on, asserting that if his “use of psychoanalysis might from time to time sound hyperbolic, that is deliberate”. He is using it, he says, as a “brake” on his own confessional mode; even as he searches for a generalizing theory, he evidently worries about a propensity to feel a troubling “superiority” (63) to other whites who haven’t studied Zulu as he has. While this may be true enough, there recur traces of something slightly defensive, as if allaying persistent anxieties—and incidentally drawing us (other South African whites, that is) into them.

The case of Zuma’s rape case seems tailor-made for Freudian-Kleinian phallic theories. Sanders’s discussion hinges on subtle yet crucial (mis)translations of a key line Zuma uttered in his defence, to the effect that “in Zulu culture” a woman’s arousal needed to be satisfied or the man risked being accused of rape. Again somewhat melodramatically, Sanders now—because he has been trying so hard to suckle at the breast of Zulu—feels himself obscurely implicated in a distasteful quasi-nationalist form of masculinism. This intersects with doubts about Zuma’s own “Zuluness”, since he is ancestrally Nxamalala, a group incorporated by Shaka but that “remained peripheral and also subaltern”. Such marginalities have to be suppressed in the project of learning a generalizable “isiZulu”. He ends this section with what works as a summation

of the book, as well as on a self-mocking re-simplification:

If realizing this generalization of learning is not ready to be admitted to consciousness, it nevertheless remains for the learner of Zulu, as historically determined—the Jarvis boy, the white reader of Fanakolo handbooks and Nyembezi’s *Learn More Zulu*, the non-Zulu African migrant, me—to join the critical Zulu scholar or intellectual in order to effect this generalization by loosening the identification with the name—which in the story I am telling myself about myself—is also the masculinist and heteronormative phantasy-identification with the agent of sexual violence. Whatever the size of the phalli outside the court, and of the carnivalesque wooden *imishini* [machine guns], the Presidential penis is just a penis. And Zulu is, after all is said and done, just another language. (114)

Coming from a scholar whose previous books are entitled *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (2002) and *Ambiguities of Witnessing* (2014), one might expect an attunement to deep complexities—even when Sanders injects some critical jibes about academics’ propensity to over-complicate things. Yet there were places I wanted to wield my Occam’s Razor in the midst of some rather abstruse and entangled passages: at one point he employs, almost self-parodically, that common academic impulse to cite several fashionable sources in rapid succession: “what N P Van Wyk Louw called a *bestaanreg* [...]

what Freud calls *Nachträglichkeit* [...] what Jacques Lacan called the Symbolic [...] what Lacan called the Imaginary" (78), these all within twelve lines. He admits theory has limits: "the sheer contingency of some of the events narrated in turn challenges the final say of psychoanalysis as a theoretical framework" (10). He has covered his back, all right.

This may also be responsible for his ending the book somewhat inconclusively, rather like the classic meandering "familiar essay" (10), with "everything [rendered] unknowable and unverifiable" (144). This is probably wise—and his frustrations will echo others'. That said, this review has scarcely begun to reflect the book's attentiveness to nuance, the density of erudition, and the courage with which Sanders faces South Africans with both the necessities for, and the problematics of, cross-cultural language-learning. *Learning Zulu* is a very important, unquestionably groundbreaking study.

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### Post mortem.

Pieter Fourie.

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Dood en afsluiting vorm kerntemas in Pieter Fourie se jongste gepubliseerde dra-

mateks. Daarby is die handelingsverloop direk en oënskynlik ongekompliseerd. Die toneel open met 'n kaal verhoog en drie grafhope sand. Die oorledenes, Basjan (plaasboer), Vytjie (huiswerker, en haar ongebore kind in 'n juwelekissie) en Gulu (plaaswerker) sit elkeen by die kop van sy of haar graf. Die enigste lewende persoonasie is Trien, Basjan se vrou. Soortgelyk aan die openingstonele in *Ek, Anna van Wyk* (1986) en *Die koggelaar* (1988), laat sy die oorledenes hul verhale in die vorm van 'n spel binne 'n spel as 'n *post mortem* op die verhoog uitspeel.

As lid van 'n potensieële gehoor verneem die leser van die plaasboer se verhouding met 'n huiswerker oor klasse- en kleurgrense heen. Vytjie, 'n naam met seksuele ondertone, is egter ook in 'n verhouding met Gulu betrokke, maar Basjan raak van hom ontslae deur hom van wyn afhanklik te maak en, so is die suggestie, te vergiftig. Basjan en Vytjie ry gereeld saam dorp en aasvoëlkamp toe en elke keer skuif Vytjie nader totdat sy op Basjan se skoot sit en help bestuur. Die krisis breek aan wanneer sy Basjan se kind verwag. Haar swangerskap loop daarop uit dat Basjan haar soos 'n skaap keelaf sny. Hy pleeg daarna selfmoord. Trien ly aan depressie en dit is duidelik dat haar en Basjan se verhouding onherstelbaar verbrokkel het.

Alhoewel die stuk vir die eerste keer in 1993 in die Wynand Moutontheater (Universiteit van die Vrystaat), daarna op Kampustoneel en in 2000 weer in die Wynand Mouton opgevoer is, is hierdie teks die eerste formele publikasie van die teks. Dit bly 'n vraag waarom