

RICHARD RIVE: NON-RACIALISM IN A LIFE OF WRITING AND OF SPORT

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ABSTRACT

This article pieces together segments of the life and thought of writer, intellectual, sportsman and sport activist Richard Rive (1930–1989) in order to trace the genesis and promotion of his ideas of non-racialism, locating them in both his intensely personal experiences of childhood and youth, and in the formative socio-political, educational and sporting contexts of his time. It argues that formative to the man were his experiences as a child growing up under segregation and Apartheid in District Six, as well as the ideological influences of the intellectuals in the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) who were his teachers, and later colleagues and friends. The article, part of a larger project to write a biography of Rive, delineates and analyses his role in organised non-racial school sport from the 1950s to his death in 1989, and in the national non-racial body, the South African Council on Sport (SACOS).

Keywords: Richard Rive; Non-racialism; Non-Racial Sport; SACOS; Biography; School sport.

OVERVIEW

Richard Rive (1930–1989) is widely known in South Africa and abroad for his creative prose and literary critical work. His memoir, *Writing Black* (1981), reflects an assertiveness about being ‘Black’, not only as literal skin colouring, but primarily as a proclamation of a positive and resistant identity in the face of “the single most important theme in my life: constitutionalised racism” (Rive cited in Bowman, 1989:n.p.). This article, drawn from segments of the biography of Rive written by the author (Viljoen, 2007), traces the genesis and promotion of his ideas of non-racialism, locating them in both his intensely personal experiences of childhood and youth, and in the formative socio-political, educational and sporting contexts of his time.

Writing Black highlights the racial situation at the time of his childhood and adult years. The early chapters of the memoir focus on the two areas of Rive’s youth, which were to become foundational to his whole life – his ambition to be a writer and his keen interest in sport. Even at an early age Rive was a champion athlete, winning prizes at amateur competitions organised by the well-meaning social workers in District Six, the area in which he was born and raised. Peter Meyer, a long-standing colleague in the sporting world and fellow educationist, traces Rive’s development as a sportsman:

His interest in athletics started at primary school and developed under the guidance of physical education teacher ‘Lightning’ Smith at Trafalgar High School. ... He excelled particularly in the four-hundred-yards hurdles ... and the high jump. During

the late 1940s he became the South African champion in these events, participating in the colours of the Western Province Amateur Athletics [and Cycling Association].¹

Rive joined the “exclusive, upper-class ‘Coloured’” Aerial Athletics Club (Rive, 1981:7; Meyer, 1989:n.p.) while at high school. Even his earliest aspirations of developing his talent as a sportsman were frustrated by the demeaning politics of racism and prejudice: “At first the members, all fair-skinned, were worried about my dark complexion, but relented because not only was I a mere junior but I attended Trafalgar High School” (Rive, 1981:7). This racist and paternalistic attitude encountered by Rive early on in life must have increased his determination to get the best education he could, and, in addition, to flaunt it as a retort to people judging him by the colour of his skin. Besides his participation in organised sport at this time, Rive was also keen on mountain hiking, often walking up the numerous tracks on Table Mountain with friends and students. He occasionally went spear fishing with Jim Bailey, owner of *Drum* magazine, whom he knew even before Rive made his ground breaking trip to Johannesburg in late 1955 to meet fellow writers who were on the staff of *Drum* magazine.

Every other aspect of life selected for display by Rive in *Writing Black* – childhood, teaching, studying, travelling – is consciously and demonstratively linked to the colour question and the system of racial oppression in South Africa. Rive’s memoir is as much protest literature, or “anti-Jim Crow”² as he calls it, as it is autobiography. Rive links his drive to be a writer to his being a keen reader as a child, a connection made by very many other writers when recounting memories of childhood.³ He adds, however, that he read voraciously and indiscriminately everything he could get his hands on “to escape the realities of the deprivation surrounding me” (Rive, 1981:9). He also insists on capturing the racial assumptions about the world of books embedded in the perceptions and reality of the young Richard (Rive, 1981:9):

I never questioned the fact that all the good characters, the hero figures, were White and that all the situations were White Books were not written about people like me. Books were not written by people like me.

This chapter in his memoir, called “Growing Up”, covers the period between 1937 and 1955 and is in fact solely about Rive becoming a writer. It is noteworthy that a number of aspects of his childhood reading are foregrounded and conflated in his recreation of these early years. He establishes that he was a keen reader but also reveals that he was drawn to the classics of English literature (he names Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Scott and Haggard in particular) during his high school years. Clearly, Rive was not only genuinely inspired by what was canonised as great English literature, but was also consciously establishing and asserting his credentials as a cosmopolitan intellectual and writer in the memoir.

It was the discovery of the writers of the American Harlem Renaissance – Rive mentions in particular Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer and Cedric Dover – that allowed the young Rive to find representations in literature that spoke directly to his own dilemmas and contexts and break the illusion that books were for and about “White Folks” (Rive, 1981:10). In his 1980 text “On being a Black Writer in South Africa: A Personal Essay”, Rive (1980) claims to have first encountered Hughes when he read *The*

ways of White folks at the age of 12, a book he found on the shelves of the Hyman Liberman Institute Library in Muir Street, District Six: “A new world opened up. This was about me and depicted my frustrations and resentments in a world obsessed with colour” (Rive, 1980:21).

SCHOOL YEARS

The young Richard was a top-performing pupil at St Mark’s Primary School until he passed standard four (Grade 6) and then attended Trafalgar Junior School in District Six until standard six (Grade 8),⁴ when he was awarded a municipal scholarship at the age of 12 to fund his studies at the prestigious Trafalgar High School in the District where, his memoir declares proudly, he studied “subjects with a ring about them” – Latin, Mathematics and Physical Science (Rive, 1981:6). Richard Dudley, a leading educationist and member of the Teachers’ League of South Africa, remembers encountering Rive at Trafalgar. Dudley was doing research at the school in 1944 when Rive was in standard seven (Grade 9): “[The young Rive was] an earnest, bustling, bright young lad, as yet unsure of himself ... Among a group of really gifted pupils, he was one who drew attention to himself.”⁵

Rive’s high school years coincided with the tyranny of Nazism in Europe and, with the defeat of fascism and its particular brand of racism, the renewed vigour of worldwide debate about freedom, equality, non-racialism, democracy and national independence. His years at Trafalgar High were to be formative intellectually and ideologically. Richard Dudley, a Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) stalwart, captures the decisive intellectual influence the school had on Rive’s outlook on life:

[A]t Trafalgar a climate and ethos had been created which was unequalled in any institution for the oppressed at that time. For among the teachers were distinguished scholars like Ben Kies, Jack Meltzer, Suleiman (Solly) Idros, George Meisenheimer, Cynthia Fischer and the equally distinguished science teacher, H.N. Pienaar.⁶ This generation of teachers ... were the articulate bearers of a new outlook in education, a team dedicated to excellence and selfless in their service to their pupils. ... It is here where the teachers brought into the classroom, from all corners of the world ... writers and their works to [nurture] the minds of their pupils. ... Through these teachers ... these scholars learnt that oppression was created by mankind, could be ended by mankind, and that a new society could be created too by mankind. (Dudley, 1989:n.p.)

The teachers Dudley refers to were part of an intellectual tradition coming out of the left-wing reading and discussion circles and broad social movements in the country, typified by the notion of a principled, programmatic struggle propounded by the All African Convention (AAC) and its constituent organisations, formed in 1936, and later by the NEUM, formed in 1943. Both these organisations propagated a struggle against racial oppression and economic domination on the basis of a minimum programme of demands, aimed at breaking with the dependence on ruling class largesse that was the premise of the nationalist politics of negotiation adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) at the time. These more radical intellectuals saw the limitations of narrow nationalism and were inspired by the ideals of the French and Russian revolutions, and by Marxism and Trotskyism. The NEUM, a broad front of civic and political organisations, reached the peak of its popularity in the late forties and

early fifties but then fragmented and was eclipsed by the more popular ANC and later Pan African Congress (PAC). The ideology of the NEUM, however, remained influential in the 1950s and beyond, and was marked by subscription to a radical anti-imperialist internationalism and to a policy of 'non-racialism'. Unlike the 'multi-racialism' of the ANC at the time, the NEUM version of non-racialism challenged the notion of the existence of the category 'race' and insisted on a common humanity of all people and on a definition of national identity that stressed common interests rather than differences among South Africans.

The positions of the NEUM on national identity and non-racialism stemmed from an analysis of the international and national situations, suggesting that the ruling classes, both national and imperial, used vestiges of tribal culture and racial policies to divide and rule the oppressed. Thus any obeisance to 'ethnic'/'racial' or regional culture was seen as fostering a false and divisive identity. From the late 1950s onwards, the ideas of the NEUM were kept alive by smaller groupings and remained influential nationally, but especially among 'Coloured' intellectuals in the Cape. Rive became a very close friend of one of the younger generation of NEUM leaders, Victor Wessels, having taught with Wessels's wife, Daphne Wessels, at South Peninsula High School in Cape Town. It was largely through Wessels, but later, also under the influence of prominent NEUM members like Ivan Abrahams (a colleague at Hewat College during the seventies and eighties) and Harry Hendricks (with whom Rive worked in the Western Province Senior School Sports Union and in the South African Council on Sport), that Rive consolidated and refined the intellectual leitmotifs of his life-commitment to non-racialism, principled struggle, universal equality and humanism. These had been seeded during his days under tutelage of the teacher-scholars at Trafalgar High School, from experiences on the sport field as described above and from ideas in the books in libraries he chanced upon by himself, as a determined, curious and avid, bright young reader.

While at school, Richard joined the scouts rather than the church brigade, as the family, according to Rive, thought the former more respectable than membership of the church lads' brigade which entailed "marching through the streets behind a blaring, tinny band" (Rive, 1981:6). It was while he was in the Second Cape Town Boys' Scout Troop that he first met Peter Clarke, who was to become a good friend and fellow artist. Rive's developed sense of the iniquities of racialism and his courage to speak out against injustice even as a young adult, are clear in the following extract from a letter he wrote to Langston Hughes dated 10 February 1955:

Concerning the Boy Scouts in South Africa, it is divided into racialistic groups. When Lord Rowallen, chief scout of the world, visited South Africa, a preliminary meeting of Scouts was called to "decide on the questions he was to be asked". People started asking silly questions like official length of garter-tabs and colours of scarves. Everyone shirked the political issue till I asked "whether the division of Scouts into racialist groups as practised in South Africa was in accordance with true Scouting principle and tradition"! Complete chaos. When we met Rowallen I asked the same questions and of course things were made so hot for me that I resigned. My troop threatened to resign in protest. But I objected (Rive, 1954-1966).

In this letter there is a glimpse, in both the actual event recalled, as well as in the rhetorical representation of self in the narrative (with its evident sense of rhythm, drama and climax), the fearless, outspoken leader of the troop, the irrepressible and just voice of a leader of the silent, oppressed masses. These were qualities that were to serve him well in his later involvement in sporting organisations, giving him the articulate edge when it came to formulating policies and resolutions, and when tackling opponents and enemies alike.

STUDENT YEARS

After Rive completed high school in 1947, he worked as a clerk at a business called Phil Morkel, “[b]ut after two years,” Hendricks (1989:n.p.) suspects, “he must have felt that business talk was too limited a field for him”. Perhaps he had already decided to bide his time, earning the money he needed to pay his way through college. Then, in 1950, he registered at Hewat Training College in District Six where he completed his training to become a high school teacher of English. At Hewat, Rive met fellow students like Ivan Abrahams and Albert Adams, who became his friends, fellow artists and political comrades. Ivan Abrahams remembers first meeting Rive when the former arrived as a first-year student at Hewat and Rive was in his second year. Rive, according to Abrahams (1999), had garnered a reputation as a 400-yards hurdle champion. Abrahams, also a champion runner at his school, Athlone High, helped encourage Rive’s sporting career, even to the extent of carrying his tog bag. He remembers Rive having a very impressive style of sprinting which, Abrahams (2005) claims, Rive picked up from the Americans.⁷ What exactly Abrahams meant is unclear, but it was one of many intimate and formative connections Rive was to have with America throughout his life.

TEACHING YEARS

Rive completed his teacher training at Hewat College in 1951 and, according to Harry Hendricks, he then “taught at Vasco High School for a year and during that year was one of the teachers instrumental in the formation [and] the founding, in 1956, of the Western Province Senior Schools Sports Union.”⁸ After Vasco High, Rive joined the staff of one of the most prestigious Coloured high schools, South Peninsula High School, where he eventually became head of the English Department and where he taught for almost two decades, spending some of those years overseas and a few teaching at Athlone High School. He still lived in Walmer Estate at this initial stage but later, in order to be nearer his workplace, moved to lodge in Second Avenue, Grassy Park “with an aggressively respectable family, who insisted on ignoring their even darker neighbours” (Rive, 1981:111). At the start of his career at South Peninsula High he taught Latin and English, and his principal was Attie De Villiers – one of his own teachers at Trafalgar High.⁹

Together with colleagues at the school like Wilfred King, Rive established a reputation for South Peninsula as a top-performing contender in inter-school athletics championships. He also made his mark as athletics coach and administrator while at the school. In 1956 he continued to be a leading member of the Western Province Senior Schools Sports Union. He served on the executive committee of the body till his appointment at Hewat in 1975. In 1958 he helped form the South Peninsula Athletics Club in order to consolidate and extend the work being done in sport at school level. With the formation in 1961 of the South African

Senior School Sports Association, Rive became a national player in the field of athletics administration. Meyer observes:

Richard became a Western Province delegate to the South African Senior School Sports Association, and served on the executive for many years. His wit, his irony, his sarcasm, and eloquence in debate made him a fierce and feared opponent ... He could analyse a situation to the point of being clinical, and could formulate resolutions and motions very concisely and accurately. But he was sometimes very impatient and arrogant. He came across as somewhat of a braggart¹⁰ (Meyer, 1989:n.p.).

In 1952, while teaching full-time, Rive decided to register as a part-time student for his Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Cape Town, majoring in English. He continued to write creatively in his spare time. Teaching, writing, organising sport, and studying made their demands on his time and he eventually graduated with his BA ten years later, in 1962. It was in one of the registration queues, in 1959, that Rive and Alf Wannenburg met and became friends and writing comrades with a shared passion for sport.¹¹

In one of his very first letters to Langston Hughes, dated 30 July 1954, the budding 24-year old Rive paints a detailed, fascinating picture of his typical day at the time:

I awake at six in the morning at my home in Walmer Estate (a select Coloured area where Africans are seldom seen, but don't blame me), and catch a bus to Cape Town Station. I am allowed to sit anywhere in the bus, but in Johannesburg I can only sit upstairs, three seats from the back and in Durban I will be allowed to sit where I like (because I'm Coloured) but Africans and Indians must sit upstairs.

At the station I board a section of the train where anyone may sit, but under no condition may I sit in the compartments labelled '*Blankes Alleen*' as those are reserved for Whites. I have regular friends I meet on the train, Hepburn who is a Master of Arts and has a keen sense of humour, Bill Currie who is an outstanding actor but will never be able to act in National Companies because of his colour and Arthur whom I suspect seeks solace in Roman Catholicism. Our conversation reaches a high standard, most probably far higher than most of our counterparts.

At Deep River I alight and walk 200 yards to pleasant South Peninsula High (a school for Coloured pre-University students) where the students are well dressed and fed and come from better-class homes. Here I meet fellow lecturers who mostly belong to the Teachers' League of South Africa (a militant teachers' body now outlawed by the Department of Education). I lecture in Latin and English Literature and in addition take students for track athletics and swimming. After finishing here I attend lectures of the University of Cape Town (one of the two Universities in South Africa where no colour-bar is in operation) and am allowed in the same lecture room as White students. I should have mentioned that there is no academic segregation but a rigorous social segregation is observed, and I am not allowed to represent my University at Sport or functions attended by Apartheid Universities. After my lectures I usually go home and then to the Athletics Track, which we are allowed to use on two nights a week when the Whites do not use it. After this I either go to a political lecture, N.E.F. (New Era Fellowship, a militant Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) organisation) or

M.Y.S. (Modern Youth Society, a group of radical youths with Leninist tendencies) or listen to the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra (no colour bar) or have the option of attending a Coloured cinema where a notice is usually displayed bearing the legend 'Not for Natives (Africans) and children under 12!!!' Or I watch the University Ballet in which Coloured Artists are allowed to perform or drama at the Little Theatre. I belong to the University Library, Public Library and Educational Library (in any other provinces there would be no library facilities for Non-Europeans whatsoever).

Were I an African, life would by no means be quite as pleasant. I would have to live in a location about 30 miles from Cape Town (Langa) earn a mere pittance and find a social if not economic bar to most cultural matters. I would also be open to abuse from both Whites and Coloureds. An African friend of mine Mchigi was almost knocked over by a Coloured skolly (hooligan) and told 'Voetsek Kaffer!' while in my company. Mchigi holds an M.A. degree in philosophy but is spurned as a Kaffer. The favourite term of abuse for Coloured people is 'Hotnot' or Hottentot. I have been called '*Kafferboetie*' (friend of Kaffers), a frustrated intellectual, a pernicious [sic] influence, '*geleerde Hotnot*' (educated Hottentot), cynic, etc. During vacation I usually travel extensively through South Africa, and that is when the fun starts. It is then that I am made to feel my Colour and see the system in operation.

This letter is remarkable for the manner in which it conveys a finely observed sense of how racial politics infiltrated and demeaned every aspect of the young Rive's daily life; for what it reveals of the young artist's eye for lurking class distinctions nevertheless present within the overriding issue of race; for Rive's empathy with those like Mchigi who were even worse off than he was; for his strong sense of himself and his circle as cultured, urban intellectuals and members of a radical resistance to racial oppression; for his ability to portray character in concise and vivid ways; and for his irrepressible wit and the humour that cannot help but rear its head in his writing.

His fearless breaking of the silence on racial issues must have been spurred on by his own experiences of racist attitudes towards him because of his dark skin. While the progressive teachers at Trafalgar High were to help him formulate his non-racialism, there were others whose reactionary attitudes must have hurt him deeply and alienated him. Gilbert Reines, who was a fellow pupil with him at Trafalgar, remembers one such standard six teacher he and Richard had at the school:

You know, in those days, you had to bring your mug to school to receive milk, and if you've forgotten it, [this teacher] used to put a saucer on the floor with milk in it, and make you lick it, you know, lap it up like, like a cat. ... And ... he always tried to catch Richard out, I think for something or other. But one day ... he said to Richard very seriously, 'oh d'jys 'n slim kaffir' ['oh, you're a clever kaffir'] (Reines & Reines, 2005:27).

In the classroom, on the sport field, in the street, inside the home – wherever he turned, it must have seemed to him that he was being ceaselessly assaulted by soul-destroying hatred.

Concurrent with Rive's highly conscious and ideologically well-developed opposition to racism was a fraught subjectivity with regard to his own dark complexion. Rive was widely known to students at South Peninsula High School and at Hewat College of Education¹² where he lectured, as 'Chokka', an affectionate but nevertheless bigoted reference to Rive's very dark skin colour (the word 'Tjokka' is Afrikaans for squid or cuttlefish and alludes to the creature's intense black secretion).¹³ Van Wyk (1999), who came to know Rive and his work in the mid-seventies and eighties, says about this nickname:

[Rive] was also treated with contempt by some of his students, who resorted to calling him 'Chokka', a corruption of chocolate because of his dark skin. This was a label, which he totally abhorred. On the other hand, he also enjoyed making fun of himself by saying: "I'm so black, I'm navy blue."¹⁴

It was, however, not a nickname anybody dared use to his face as there was an intuitive awareness of his sensitivity and also, possibly, users understood that the name, despite its affectionate or playfully deflationary connotations, carried derogatory or even racist overtones whether these were intended or unintended.

SOME WRITINGS

Almost 20 years later, Rive entitles his memoir *Writing Black*. The title is an accurate polemical statement of Rive's political allegiances, and possibly concomitantly an astute marketing strategy, for Black Consciousness had become a popular philosophy and commodity by the time Rive's memoir was published. 'Black' has now become a positive, political signifier inspired by Fanonism and the confidence that came to the oppressed with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in America and its refraction in South Africa, the Black Consciousness Movement of the late sixties and early/mid-seventies. It is for Rive what Daryl Lee accurately calls "a strategic blackness" (Lee, 1998:12).

Concurrent with this Africanist rhetoric evident in the title of the memoir, one continued to hear Rive's very pronounced hallmark Oxbridge (to the South African ear at least) accent, deliberately cultivated by him even before he spent time at Oxford completing his doctorate. He in fact asserts this (Western) cosmopolitanism he deliberately embodies as a very conscious antidote to 'racialised' and 'ghettoised' 'Coloured' identity imposed by Apartheid when he proclaims in *Writing Black*:

I, personally, am able to empathise with no world other than that of Western European sophistication and unsophistication. I have never had the opportunity to identify, like Langston Hughes in *The Weary Blues*, with
The low beating of the tom-toms,
The slow beating of the tom-toms...

I cannot be what the propounders of negritude or the African Personality cult would have me be. I am Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. I am Langa, Chatsworth and Bonteheuwel. I am discussion, argument and debate. I cannot recognise palm-fronds and nights filled with the throb of the primitive. I am buses, trains and taxis. I am prejudice, bigotry and discrimination. I am urban South Africa (Rive, 1981:23).

It's as if here Rive is defiantly saying, you see me and pigeonhole me as a Black man, inferior, primitive, but I defy you – I am not your 'Black'; I am cultured, cosmopolitan, and, as the accent would testify, have the best education in the world. Rive's affected, accentuated manner of speaking is another reflection of his very conscious but also paradoxical self-fashioning, and of his drive and defiance.

From December 1962 to September 1963, Rive travelled up the coast of Southern Africa by boat and then through Africa on to Southern Europe and finally to London, funded by a Farfield Foundation Fellowship secured for him by his dear friend, mentor and fellow writer Es'kia Mphahlele. On his return to the Cape, in September 1963, at the relatively early age of thirty three, Richard Rive had clearly arrived as an established, celebrated writer widely known locally and internationally, but in a country now once again controlled with an iron fist by a White supremacist regime where both his books had been banned – *African Songs* (1963) while he was travelling abroad and *Emergency* (1964) soon after he arrived back. Later, in 1965, *Quartet* (1963) was also banned. With his wry sense of humour, he claims in his memoir, "I was now part of a small élite of South African writers not allowed to read their own works in case they became influenced by them" (Rive, 1981:109). On the verge of returning home from his trip abroad, he had, as he says, "serious doubts about the wisdom of returning" (Rive, 1981:108). It is clear that he grappled with the dilemma – to stay in London would mean freedom from all he had fought against; to return meant facing a harrowing, uncertain and unsafe future. He finally chose not to stay in London where he felt he could "avoid all this" (Rive, 1981:108) but to return to what was his home. He does not say what swung the balance, but does speak of an intense longing for home that took hold of him towards the end of his long and frenetic trip abroad:

I longed once again to hear the traffic faintly roaring past my flat on Rosmead Avenue. I longed to dive into the cold water outside Gif Kommetjie and prickle the fleshy lace-edge of abalone between the rocks. I longed to climb along Waterfall Buttress under dark caves wet with dripping ferns. I wanted to share the hilarity of interschool athletics with rosettes, caps and war cries. I wanted to sit at the quiet of my desk in the very early morning, working away at my writing (Rive, 1981:107).

The yearning for the landscape and rituals of home, and in particular his strong sense of obligation and self-fulfilment, even exhilaration, that attended his work in education and sport were what seemed to draw him back. But perhaps the pain of home was simultaneously the very source of his creative life. And, in addition perhaps, it was his sense of commitment to a writing life and struggle back in South Africa that brought him back home.¹⁵

On his departure for Oxford in 1971 to undertake doctoral studies at Magdalen College, Oxford, Rive must have felt enormous relief at the prospect of respite from the relentless, enervating conditions of the oppressive middle and late 1960s at home. His first two months at Oxford, September and October of 1971, were, however, filled with a yearning for home and depression associated with dislocation and the ever-present burden of the demanding doctoral work that lay ahead. His research was finally completed by 1973.

On being awarded his doctorate, Rive must have been elated, reaching the zenith of the quest to educate himself; a path that he relentlessly embarked on when he was still a teenager, often

against daunting odds. On his return to Cape Town he went to his sister Georgina to proudly proclaim (as he would to many others), in typical, somewhat camp Rive-pose when he was chuffed with himself – his thumbs tucked under his armpits and fists limp in front of strutting chest, lips pouting – that he was “a doctor of literature, *not* of medicine”.¹⁶ His pride at his Oxford achievement would also be reflected in the way he peppered his Selous Court flat with Oxford memorabilia, and in his frequent wearing of his Oxford T-shirt and display of other forms of Oxford heraldic symbols. But as on every other sojourn out of the country, his elation at what he had achieved and his determination to go back home were deflated by the dispiriting reality of the situation back home:

I was returning to South Africa because that was where I belonged. I had no idea what to expect, whether there had been meaningful changes or not. I certainly did not expect any preferential treatment. In spite of my achievements and qualifications, I was still an unenfranchised Black suffering under a policy of racial discrimination, born and nurtured in a notorious slum in a beautiful city in a bigoted country (Rive, 1981:145).

Despite this, returning as a doctoral graduate of Oxford, he could use this educational status and defiantly see himself as “a member of one of the largest, most exclusive and influential old-boy networks in the world” (Rive, 1981:145).

After resuming his normal working life on his return, Rive continued to be active in school sport and it is in this regard that Wannenburg contacted him during this period. As a journalist for the *Sunday Times*, Wannenburg was asked to edit a page reporting on Coloured sport as the newspaper had only depicted White sporting events till then. Rive agreed to help and, according to Wannenburg, organised a number of his former pupils to gather sporting results and match reports. However, Rive insisted on having a weekly column that often raised questions of sport and politics and which the conservative editors disliked. They put pressure on Wannenburg to cut out Rive’s column altogether. This caused a break in their friendship, recalled by Wannenburg in his memoir of Rive:

Inevitably there was a showdown with Richard, who arrived at my home one Sunday morning, demanding to know why I hadn’t used his column. Naïve about the workings of newspapers, he brushed aside my explanations and, insisting that it was a case of interfering with editorial independence, broke with the *Sunday Times* – and with me (Wannenburg, 1990:37).

What to Wannenburg was naivety was to Rive a matter of principle. Rive could be a formidable adversary in an argument or a conflict, not baulking at confrontation, standing by what he believed to be right and just even if it meant ending a friendship. But on occasion ‘principle’ was imbricated with ego and self-promotion. Having agreed to write for such a ‘separatist’ sport page in the first place, Rive must have strategised that he could use the opportunity to make comments on sporting issues and, inevitably, on the political aspects of sport at the time. His profile as a writer and columnist would, at the same time, be raised in the most widely read newspaper in the country.

A year after his return from Oxford, in 1975, Rive took up a senior lectureship in English at Hewat Training College where he was to remain for the next 14 years, till his death in 1989. Taking up a lectureship at his alma mater, where some of those who taught him were still on the staff, must have been cause for pride, especially returning there as ‘Doctor’ Richard Rive. He was at this time back in his flat at Selous Court, and Stephen Gray, fellow writer and friend, teasingly talks of him at this time as “*Rishard of Saloo Court*” (Gray, 1999:163) while others begin affectionately and admiringly calling him ‘Doc’.

Rive taught English literature and didactics at Hewat, and continued his active involvement in the Western Province Senior School Sports Union, Hewat College being a participating member of the union, competing at the self-same athletics meetings as the high schools. When he could, he continued writing, albeit haltingly, and continued to play an active role in sport administration. Michael Chitter’s biographical vignette of Rive traces his recollection as a young school athlete of a trip to Johannesburg in 1975 under Rive’s supervision. The piece captures the fascination and the fear Rive induced in the minds of his young charges:

[Rive] was part of the teacher contingent that accompanied about one hundred Western Province athletes to the national South African Senior Schools Sports Union Athletics Championships. I was walking alongside him and five other fourteen-year old Western Province athletes... The rule was always to remain obscure in his presence. I was always trying to prevent becoming a victim of his often stinging insults and disparaging remarks.

He had a way with words and most of the youngsters could not avoid hanging around him – even at the risk of becoming targets. He entertained them with his vocabulary. Any feature along the wayside that reminded us of the Cape Flats would make for entertaining comedy. The secret was to remain relatively obscure, but within earshot of his antics (Chitter, 2004:103).

He made it known and those around him felt it – he was at the top of the ladder of educational achievement; he was Dr. Richard Moore Rive. Yet, while relishing the respectability, he remained radically opposed to racial inequality and relentlessly continued to undermine White superiority wherever he could.

The waves of popular opposition to Apartheid rule inside South Africa ushered in by the student revolts of 1976 continued to grow in the eighties; by 1985 the trade union movement had established itself as a major force in resistance politics locally and nationally, the exiled resistance movements had established internal presences and the ANC-inspired United Democratic Front (UDF) was launched with widespread support in ‘Coloured’, Indian and African townships. More socialist-orientated groups like the New Unity Movement and the Cape Action League had also started to emerge. The organisations with which Rive was associated, the New Unity Movement (a reincarnation of the Non-European Unity Movement) and the South African Council on Sport, had garnered widespread support within civic and sporting associations, and amongst teachers in the province through the influence of the Teachers’ League of South Africa.

Hewat College, where he had been lecturing for 12 years by 1985, was surrounded by

primary and high schools and the contacts between the schools and the college were particularly strong because the schools were used by the student teachers from Hewat for their practice teaching sessions. In addition, the college was quite strategically located between two main arteries, Thornton and Belgravia Roads that lead from central Athlone, the heart of the Cape Flats, down to the townships in the South. When the schools erupted during the protests in 1985 and 1986, Hewat was equally affected. Hewat, like the schools around it, faced a series of student actions like sit-ins, marches, refusals to write final examinations and demonstrations against retaliatory actions of the state, including the closing of the schools. Rive and some of his colleagues at Hewat played a critical role in helping to support, redirect or defend the actions of the students and the wider civil action that the surrounding communities and political organisations had initiated. Besides the school protests, two historic events of this period occurred on or just next to the Hewat campus. The callous shooting of children by policemen concealed in a truck (what came to be known as the Trojan Horse incident) happened in Thornton Road and the regrouping of the march, led by Alan Boesak, from Athlone stadium to Pollsmoor prison to free Nelson Mandela, also took place on Hewat grounds.

For the last four decades of his adult life Rive had been campaigning against one or other form of racial injustice. While he continued to be active in sporting organisations in the last few years of his life, his literary work consumed his time and energies in what was the most productive period of creativity in his life. By the mid-1980s he had achieved a reputation as a leading and flamboyant literary and civic figure in local and national anti-apartheid struggles. He continually insisted, in both his 1986 novel, *'Buckingham Palace'*, *District Six*, and his critical essays and speeches (Rive, 1983), that the struggle for District Six was to be seen not as singular but as representative of all forced removals around the country. His fiction and critical works influenced the thought of fellow activists and intellectuals trying to reconceptualise memory, space and identity. Rive's refrain in his novel *'Buckingham Palace'*, *District Six*, often mouthed by the hero/gangster Zoot but clearly authorial in voice, that District Six "was never a place – that it was a people" (Rive, 1986:198), is a rhetorical articulation of his position that physical space and human dignity are inextricably interconnected.

A TRAGIC END

Rive's tragic and senseless death on 4 June 1989 at the hands of two young men in what was clearly a gay-bashing, made headlines in the *Cape Times* – "AUTHOR RICHARD RIVE MURDERED". There was an eerie silence in the staff room at Hewat as we arrived for work and stood around in groups talking in strangely hushed tones.¹⁷ Colleagues like Ivan Abrahams had to cope with a barrage of questions from newspaper reporters about Rive's homosexuality in the week that followed. He refused to confirm or deny that Rive was gay.¹⁸ The press that week was filled with numerous articles on the murder and tributes to Rive. J.M. Coetzee was quoted in the *Cape Times* article of 5 June as saying that Rive was a "distinguished writer and critic, although not adequately recognised in South Africa" (p. 2). As there was no next of kin to whom those who wanted to pay homage could write, the College took on that role.

A very small and private burial and cremation were arranged by some of Rive's closest and

most loyal friends on 10 June and a memorial service was held at Hewat College on 13 June. Present and on the panel paying tribute were Es'kia Mphahlele, Ivan Abrahams, Richard Dudley, Jan Rabie, Edward Pratt, Peter Meyer and Harry Hendricks. Obituaries and tributes by fellow writers in the form of poems and short recollections appeared in a number of publications. There was a collective sense of utter incomprehension and of nihilism at the brutal murder of a most remarkable storyteller, a writer and a fighter, and a visionary. His voice and spirit continue to this day, through his legacy we have in his creative work, and, in less obvious and more embattled but no less powerful ways, the legacy he has left in the history of non-racial sport in a country that remains deeply divided.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Peter Meyer's tribute, read at Hewat College memorial service for Richard Rive soon after his death in 1989. The audiotape of the tributes of Hendricks, Meyer, Dudley, Pratt *et al.* was in the possession of Dwane Harris but has subsequently been donated to the District Six Sound Archive. This quotation and subsequent ones of other tributes at the memorial used in this article were taken from transcripts of these recordings.
- ² In 1979 Rive was one of the keynote speakers at the conference of the African Literature Association of America held at the University of Indiana in Bloomington. His paper was titled "The Ethics of an Anti-Jim Crow" and emphasised the complete exclusion of Black people from normal national civil society in South Africa. *Writing Black* grew out of this paper.
- ³ See Antonia Fraser's (1992) compilation, *The Pleasure of Reading*. She documents accounts by a number of prominent writers who recall what avid readers they were as children.
- ⁴ Information about the schools Rive attended is taken from Harry Hendricks's tribute to Rive at the memorial service for Rive at Hewat College.
- ⁵ Richard Dudley's tribute to Rive at Hewat College memorial service.
- ⁶ Ben Kies was the most influential of these scholars and teachers. He was regarded as the leader among the NEUM leadership. His tall and sturdy bearing complemented his incisive intelligence, encyclopaedic knowledge and his ruthless, forthright manner. While Rive revered him as a teacher and as an intellectual, Kies was disparaging of Rive's character and dismissive of his work and ideas. Kies felt that he tended to be an opportunist and a poseur and that his work was trite and reinforced stereotypes.
- ⁷ Ivan Abrahams. Personal interview. What Abrahams means by "American" style of running and how Rive picked this up is unclear. But it is yet another perceived or real link between Rive and America.
- ⁸ Harry Hendricks's tribute to Rive at Hewat College memorial service gives this date as 1951. Rive, in a letter to Hughes dated 30 July 1954, also gives this date as 1951 contradicting the date (1952) he gives on page 111 of his 1981 memoir. The course at Hewat was a two-year offering and the memories of Abrahams and Adams, and the evidence from the Hewat magazine as well, place him there in 1950 and 1951.
- ⁹ Hendricks's tribute to Rive at Hewat College memorial service.
- ¹⁰ Peter Meyer's tribute to Rive at Hewat College memorial service.
- ¹¹ Date taken from Wannenburg's "Memories of Richard".
- ¹² Hewat Training College changed its name to Hewat College of Education, probably when the institution was transferred from the Cape Education Department to the Coloured Affairs Department in 1963.
- ¹³ Craig Mackenzie, one of the external examiners of my work on Rive when it was submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation, suggests that this explanation of the etymology of the name is a dubious one.
- ¹⁴ Milton van Wyk. A written response to a personal interview.
- ¹⁵ The biography I am working on raises issues around Rive's homosexuality, and both his own and his peers' silence on the matter. There are, however, indisputable encodings of both homoerotic desire and envisioning of alternative family structures in his fiction, I argue.

¹⁶ The Manuels' (2002) claim that "when he graduated he went to her [his sister Georgina] to say he was a doctor 'of literature, not of medicine', something he often used to stress." The description of his proud and camp pose is my own reconstruction, not theirs.

¹⁷ At the time of Rive's death I was a colleague of his at Hewat, having joined the English Department, which he headed, in 1987.

¹⁸ Ivan Abrahams. Personal interview.