

om jou en miljoene ander te laat glo net jy maak saak” (86), al het hy nooit behóórt aan New York nie.

Daar is troos in die mens se aanpasbaarheid. Ten spyte daarvan dat Marita van der Vyver se protagonis, Janien, niks begeer nie en dat sy na jare saam met haar gesin in die historiese hart van Parys selfs al Frans lýk, is daar tog ’n “aanhoudende hunkering wat sy nooit met [haar man] sal kan deel nie” (46). Sy wonder of ’n “minnaar die holte diep binne-in haar kon vul?” (47). Sy het ’n geheim. Hoewel sy nie ’n kat in die donker knyp nie, kook sy in die middel van die nag skelm melkkos, wat haar na haar ouma laat verlang. Hierdie geheimpie oorweldig haar deur “herinnerings aan ’n tyd en ’n plek en ’n persoon wat sy verloor het” (50), maar dit bring tog vertroosting.

Verlies as tema word deurgaans gejukstaponeer met dit wat deur verplasing gewen kan word. James Scott se vriend herinner hulle byvoorbeeld dat hulle nie Suid-Afrika verloor nie, maar Australië by kry (77). Hy skryf: “Ons het almal die potensiaal om gewoon te raak aan die afwesigheid van die bekende. [...] Om betekenis in verlies te vind is om in die rouproses iets van onself en die lewe te probeer leer. Enige verlies kan in ’n groeigeleentheid omskep word” (80). So ook ervaar diegene wat weer terugkeer ’n verlies van dit wat hulle daar gehad en ervaar het. André-Pierre du Plessis probeer byvoorbeeld “aan jou verduidelik, maar veel eerder aan myself, hoekom ek nie meer in New York woon nie” (86).

*Ver in die wêreld* is ’n insiggewende bundel wat, tipies van die reïsnarratief, sorg vir groot leesplezier. Die verhale wys nie net op die realiteite wat ons tuis in die oë staan nie, maar ook dat vat-jou-goed-en-trek nie altyd so maklik is nie. Dan bied dit ook hoop vir diegene wat wel só ’n geleentheid kan aangryp. Met die lees van die bundel wonder ek minder of dit slaag in sy oortuigingswaarde, of die essays en verhale wat daarin saamgevat is my daarvan oorreed dat die lewe oorsee soveel mooier is as hier, of dat ek alle drome van moontlike emigrasie liever moet laat vaar. Eerder is daar ’n besef dat die mensdom—“’n rustelose skepsel [...] begerig om elders te wees” (9)—ook maar net sy beste doen om sy plekkie onder die son te kry, ongeag dit *hier* of *daar* is. As ons stories soos hierdie kan lewer om uiting aan daardie ervaring te kan gee, dan is dit ’n baie goeie aanduiding dat Afrikaanse expat-literatuur ’n blink toekoms het.

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### **Mirage.**

David Ralph Viviers.

Cape Town: Umuzi, 2023. 230 pp.

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A novel in which the reader meets “*Boophone distica*” (13), a sentence from Einstein in German (partly glossed), (19), and a phrase in Classical Greek “*Bous phonos*” (transliterated but not translated), (29), within the first 30 pages presents clear challenges to the reader. Viviers invites his readers to share with his various characters (roughly separated by a century) in a process of gradual and never-quite-complete decoding. Because of this it is difficult to say what the book is ‘about’ without giving away information that would provide a series of spoiler alerts and defeat the author’s purpose. Two principal narratives (both fictitious) intertwine: the earlier is that of a late Victorian novelist, Elizabeth Tenant, trying to write a novel at the ‘railway village’ of Sterfontein in the Karoo in the late 1890’s, and of Michael Marais, focaliser of the novel’s ‘present’, working on a thesis on Tenant, who visits Sterfontein as part of his research activities. Both ‘past’ and ‘present’, however, in terms of the novel’s parameters, are relative terms, as one of the ideas which Viviers is pursuing in his self-styled “novel of ideas” (228) is Einstein’s assertion (referred to above) that “‘The distinction between past, present and future is nothing but a stubborn illusion’” (35).

The ideas are indeed wide-ranging, and invoke black holes and their collision, a detailed knowledge of the botany of the Karoo, and the potentially more familiar paleontology of the Karoo. They are linked in a fresh exploration of “the imaginative possibilities of the South African landscape, its skies and its flora”. Another theme (linked to the “melancholy” Viviers finds in the Karoo) is the human sense of loss, of absences, of bereavement, and of the difficulties of sustained relationships, and Viviers uses the term ‘black holes’ as a kind of metaphor for such losses.

The “Prologue” presents us with two women—Elizabeth Tenant in Sterfontein in 1899, and Erica (who will become Michael’s mother) in Somerset West in 1989—if you like, two different sets of space-time co-ordinates (and note the interchangeability

of the digits). Both possess a certain knowledge of both Astronomy and Botany, both are convinced that Sterfontein is an ideal place for viewing 'the heavens', and, partly because of this, a place where space-time co-ordinates might blur ('mirage?') or merge. Elizabeth, after a long struggle, names her central character Michael; Erica deliberately names her son to mark her respect for Tenant's novel. Erica drops out of university in her final year of astrophysics; Michael's father is a devoted botanist. And so the play of ideas is set in motion. It is important to note, however, as a measure of Viviers's achievement, that the characters are not mere pasteboard masks representing a particular set of beliefs or theory of the universe, which is a danger faced by any novel of ideas. They are fully realized characters in the sense enjoyed by readers of novels. One is also grateful that Viviers—for all his exploration of the boundaries of time and place and, indeed, of human personality and consciousness—has not adopted the stream-of-consciousness techniques of his twentieth-century predecessors such as Joyce and Faulkner.

*Mirage* is a courageous book: on one level it could be read as a hymn to the mysterious hold of the Karoo for the twenty-first century readers, and perhaps only fiction or poetry is an adequate medium for portraying the hold that landscape gains over anyone alive to its great spaces and silences. In both the novel and his "Notes" at the end, Viviers deliberately references Olive Schreiner, whose *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) first brought the region to the world's attention. Two worthy contenders in the twentieth century are Eve Palmer's *The Plains of Camdeboo* (1966) and Guy Butler's *Karoo Morning* (1977), though neither of these is fiction. Viviers reminds us that *Mirage* was Schreiner's original title for her *Story*. The references in Viviers's novel to details of Schreiner's life and thought are multiple and complex and perhaps best left to each reader to explore. It is hard to resist asking, though, whether the name of the owner's house at Sterfontein—"Millthorpe House"—is not a coded reference to Millthorpe (near Sheffield, UK) where Edward Carpenter, a friend and correspondent of Schreiner's, lived with his 'working-class' lover. Carpenter was an early advocate of feminism and of gay rights, and the recipient of some of Schreiner's ecstatic letters on the Karoo after she returned to South Africa in 1890 (and found how well Matjiesfontein suited her asthmatic lungs).

The Karoo both as social construct and geographical region evokes multiple meanings in all who make any kind of contact with it: Viviers is to be commended for evoking in *Mirage* a new constellation of meanings for new generations to explore.

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### **Sexual Humour in Africa: Gender, Jokes, and Societal Change.**

Ignatius Chukwumah (editor).

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ISBN 9780367776244.

*Sexual Humour in Africa* is a compendium of fourteen chapters that examine sexual humour in diverse African contexts. Grouped into six broad thematic areas, the chapters draw from an array of disciplines that include cultural studies, anthropology, and linguistics to explore what the editor Ignatius Chukwumah terms the "ways to let off the forbidden in modes permissible by [the] immediate environment" (xviii). Through in-depth analyses and case studies, the chapters in this book examine various themes such as power and gender dynamics, social change, and identity construction within the realm of sexual humour in Africa. The chapters deal with how sexual humour is presented in social media, popular fiction and music, advertisements, and many other media and cultural productions. *Sexual Humour in Africa* presents a laudable endeavour to shed important light on an often-overlooked aspect of African cultures. The book goes beyond considering sexual humour as merely lewd or prurient for the sake of being prurient, this book successfully captures the vibrant and intricate nature of sexual humour, demonstrating its capacity to subvert established norms and challenge power structures. The inclusion of a range of disciplinary perspectives provides a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

As previously stated, this book is divided into six main sections. The first, "Sex joke: Typology, Modes, and Mores", reveals that, while sexual humour conveys some gender(ed) stereotypes, it also allows for the revelation of hidden desires and tensions. The chapters in this section also demonstrate how social media have influenced how sex jokes circulate and are consumed. Importantly, the virtual circulation and consumption of sex humour has enabled localised sex mores to interact with global sex mores. The second section, "African language, folk music, and rhetorical strategies", explores sexual humour through and in traditional African