

PLAYS, POETRY AND PRODUCTION:
THE LITERATURE OF THE GARMENT WORKERS

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'n Werker se Wens

Kom Werkers laat ons almal saamstaan
Al is die dag nog so ver
Laat geeneen ons pad versper

O, workers let us stand as one
Though our day seems far away
Though our progress takes so long
Let no-one bar our way. (1)

Nellie Raubenheimer

Nellie Raubenheimer who wrote this poem on workers' unity was a garment worker. (2) She was a member of the Garment Workers Union (GWU) which drew its membership from the ranks of white afrikaner women who worked mostly as machinists in the clothing factories on the Witwatersrand during the 1930's and 1940's. These garment workers wrote poetry, plays, songs, short stories and novels and even jokes on what they knew best - the factory, the boss, the trade union and its struggles, and poverty at home. (3) Even though Nellie Raubenheimer was white and Afrikaans speaking, the worker's wish she expressed, transcends its own specific environment and resonates with worker's problems in other situations. The impulse to capture this experience in literary form, also parallels the current upsurge of black worker literature in which workers have taken their own lives and experiences and have turned them into a "potent cultural product". (4) It goes beyond the scope of this article to account for the development or absence of such literary activities in South Africa's divided working class, but an analysis of the cultural products of the garment workers allows us to take a first step along the road to suggest

some perspectives which may have a more general application.

What prompted the garment workers to engage in a literary expression of the issues confronting them in their daily working and home environments? Firstly,

Like all literature, these tales emerge as an attempt of a group of people to make sense of their lives and give it, in their literature at least some imaginative coherence. (5)

Secondly, both the emerging black trade unions and the GWU instituted educational drives to teach their rank and file members the rudiments of trade unionism. (6) The GWU attached great importance to the education of their members to the extent that in the 1934 Program of Work, Solly Sachs, general secretary of the GWU stated:

...honest and loyal members should be trained to become union leaders and every facility be given to them to learn the theoretical and practical sides of the trade union movement. They must be taught to speak, to write, to organise and to lead. (7)

Thirdly, the volume of literature produced by the garment workers in particular could be attributed to a "passion for poetry": an enthusiasm for writing in Afrikaans which had gripped Afrikaners in the 1930's and early 1940's. (8) During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century several Afrikaans language movements were launched in South Africa with the express object to gain recognition for Afrikaans. (9) These movements were successful when in 1925 Afrikaans instead of High Dutch was recognised as an official language of the country. (10) The writers of the time set out to teach the "volk" how to read, to be aware of their common history and heritage as a cultural entity entirely different from the British cultural heritage. (11) The 1930's saw the rise of a new literary movement in Afrikaans called the "Digters van Dertig" (The poets of the Thirties), which included literary giants such as

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the brothers N.P. van Wyk Louw, and W.E.G. Louw, Elizabeth Eybers, Uys Krige, I.D. du Plessis and G.M. van den Heever. (12) They set out to eradicate the feeling of inferiority and backwardness which they felt still clung to Afrikaans by the production of less apologetic work, and work which could be critically evaluated on intrinsic merit alone. (13)

The literature of the garment workers, for the greater part drew on the same set of cultural values and symbols and laid claim to the same cultural heritage as the writers of the mainstream Afrikaans literature. The Great Trek, the Boer War, the solidarity and strength of the Voortrekker women, were all claimed by the garment workers as a past which was their own and of which they were proud. At the 1938 Voortrekker Centenary Celebrations the garment workers, although they divorced themselves from the nationalist organisers of the celebrations, staked their claim to this cultural heritage by sending an independent Kappie Kommando consisting entirely of garment workers to the celebrations at the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria. (14)

The literature of the garment workers, although it laid claim to a common Afrikaans cultural heritage, differed from the mainstream of Afrikaans literature. Whereas the mainstream literature addressed Afrikaners as a race quite apart and distinct from English speakers, the garment workers rather addressed their audience as workers. The literature of the garment workers was therefore an Afrikaans literature, by workers for workers and about workers. The women of the GWU writing about their own lives made an even more unique contribution to South African literature in general. Their's was an Afrikaans feminist workers' literature which focused sharply on the role of the working Afrikaner woman in the shaping of South African society. (15)

This paper will firstly discuss how, during the

1930's as part of the reorganisation of the GWU after their crushing defeat during the clothing strike of November 1932, a very definite program was followed to educate the women workers in trade unionism. Secondly, it will show that the fruit this education bore, exceeded the expectations of the GWU leaders, in that the women most effectively passed on the principles of trade unionism to their fellow workers by means of their songs, plays, and poetry and prose as published in the Garment Worker /Klerewerker, the official mouthpiece of the GWU.

I Education.....

In March 1933, a few months after their defeat during the 1932 strike, the GWU proposed to open a Workers Club which would offer classes in hygiene, first aid, and provide regular cultural entertainments for the workers. (16) A few months later, the union sent a circular to all members inviting them to a series of lectures dealing with the "history, struggles and problems of the working class". The first lecture to be held on June 2, 1933, was entitled "The History of the Labour Movement". A monthly prize of a guinea was to be awarded to the union member who wrote the best essay either in Afrikaans or English on the topic of the lecture of the preceding month. (17)

The 1934 Program for Work, outlined a more detailed strategy for the education of the workers. It was proposed to publish a pamphlet in both English and Afrikaans, explaining the necessity of a trade union to the garment workers, to establish worker cadres for the education of the workers in trade union matters and to set up training classes one evening per week. A library was to be established to make available the most important books dealing with the working class movement. (18) In September 1939 the Library Committee reported the majority of their 110 members read Afrikaans books, to the extent that the books in the Afrikaans section were falling to

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pieces. By 1940 the Library was extended with branches in Germiston, Fordsburg and Potchefstroom. (19) In the same year the readers of the Garment Worker/Klerewerker (GW/KW) were gently reprimanded to look after their library books and return them in time, rather than not at all.

Lectures and a library service were not considered to be enough. In November 1939, the GWU announced that they wanted to form a workers' sports organisation, a choir, a dramatic section and wanted to bring the workers together on weekends and after work for "cultural enlightenment". Classes in physical education as well as hikes and picnics were organised. (20) The hike of December 9, 1933, which included a program of sports and the provision of refreshments, was advertised by a short poem:

The machine, the boss, the noise and trouble,
we will all forget on that day.

We will hike together to Aasvogelkop, there a
beetjie om te vry.

(to neck a little) (21)

The 1934 Program of Work also stated that: "the social life of the workers should be taken in hand by the union more energetically." (22) Physical culture classes were usually held on Tuesdays and Thursdays; the hiking club left the union offices at 8 am on Sunday mornings and the sports section offered basketball and dancing. The introduction of hockey and stagecraft was being considered as well. (23) By 1937 Germiston women workers were regularly attending the local Social Club for Factory Girls which also offered physical training classes. In 1940 a Mrs Bass was still giving these classes and a Mrs Jean Pretorius was giving music lessons in the evenings. Both Solly Sachs and Johanna Cornelius often remarked that it was most important to "keep the workers healthy". (24) In 1940 Miss Kotie Augustyn, vice-president of the Union, and an employee of S Malk's had mustered a basketball team who played but lost against the Voortrekker team of

Boksburg. She also organised a dance to collect money for the team. (25)

In 1938 an appeal was made to the workers to take an interest in the affairs of the union and to attend the evening classes on Fridays in the Union Hall. In 1941 these classes were still held and Nellie Raubenheimer, in an article in the *Garmentworker /Klerewerker*, urged the workers to attend and explained why these classes were so important. They explained concepts such as class struggle, the proletarian revolution, and capitalism to the workers. (26) Lively discussions were also held at the meetings of the *Joint Factories Committee*. At a discussion in February 1938 conducted in Afrikaans by Johanna Cornelius on "Confinement Allowances for Working Mothers", the women concluded by suggesting some amendments to the Factories Act in this respect. (27) At another debating evening, the topic "'n Vakunie is tot voordeel van die Werkers" (A Trade Union is to the Benefit of the Workers) was discussed. A daughter of Mrs S Nel of S Malk's sang and played the pianoforte; Miss Wilhelmina Smit also of S Malk's recited a poem, whilst Tina Niemand of Anglo African organised the factory's choir to sing and Rosie Gatton of the same factory brought a friend to demonstrate tap dancing and acrobatic dancing. (28)

In 1940 the owner of a farm some 10 miles from Johannesburg offered accommodation on his farm to the GWU to hold Weekend Summer Schools for the workers. The Millinery Branch of the GWU, established in 1941, appointed Mr E Weinberg to hold study classes on Saturdays at 1 pm to teach the milliners about trade unionism. (29) In 1942 about 13 members of the Central Executive Committee of the GWU offered to attend a series of 24 lectures on Labour Organisation held at the University of the Witwatersrand each Thursday from 18 June onwards. It was indicated that some Germiston workers too would be interested to attend these lectures. (30)

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The wish to "elevate the social and cultural side of our lives" through the organisation of training classes, debates, choirs, dances, picnics, physical training, musical evenings and sports, formed an important part of the agenda of each year's organisation. In a circular of the Joint Factories Committee Hester Viljoen and Johanna Cornelius urged the workers: "We must educate ourselves to fight for the rights of our class."
(31)

II Songs.....

Songs played an important role in the work of the GWU. They used the tunes of well-known Afrikaans folk songs such as "Sarie Marais" and "Bobbejaan klim die berg" to compose their own strike songs and songs for rallies. "Wat maak Oom Kalie daar", became the Strikers Song which was composed especially for the tobacco workers strike in Rustenburg which had been organised by GWU officials:

Wat maak die brandsiek daar? 2x
Die brandsiek ruik na vrotte vis
Die mense dink dis die Railway bus
O, wat maak die brandsiek daar?

(What are the scabs doing there?
The scabs smell of rotten fish
People think 'tis the Railway bus
O, what are the scabs doing there?) (32)

The "Answer of the Factory Slaves", composed to the tune of "Sarie Marais" especially for the meeting of March 18, 1941, ridiculed Ivan Walker and Walter Madeley, the Secretary and Minister for Labour at the time. To the tune of "Bobbejaan klim die berg", the garment workers sang:

O, moenie buk nie en moenie buig nie
vir slawerny en fasiswet
Ons moet verenig en almal saamspan
sulke lae lone is geen pret.

(O, do not bow and do not sway
to slavery and fascist law
We should all unite and together stand
Such low wages are no fun.) (33)

The two Cornelius sisters, Hester and Johanna, often collaborated to compose songs for the Union. In 1939 they suggested songs to be used as the song of the Garment Workers Union Guard and in 1940 composed the song "Stryk wyl die yster gloei" (Strike while the Iron is hot):

Hoe heerlik sal dit wees
As almal werk, geen werklose meer,
En ons geen honger ly.
Daar's rykes min en armes veel.
Ons regte is gesteel.
Maar ons laat staan die klaery,
Vaarwel aan slawerny.

(How wonderful would it be,
If all worked, no unemployed you or me,
And we no longer hunger any.
The rich are few and the poor many
Our rights have been stolen
Let us cease this complainin'
Farewell to slavery.) (34)

Internationally famous songs such as the International and the Red Flag too were translated into Afrikaans and sung at strikes, rallies and other gatherings:

Staan op! O, slawe van die wereld!
Ontwaak! wat dors en honger ly,
Kom help 'n nuwe aarde opbou,
Want die oue gaan verby...

and the Red Flag:

Die volk se vlag is rooi soos bloed,
Dit dek ons mense in die dood,
En eer hulle daar le styf en koud,
Word hulle bloed daaraan vertrou. (35)

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On February 22, 1940 a Trade Union Rally for a Living Wage was held in Johannesburg City Hall. At the rally the women claimed their place as workers for the future of their country:

Ons vrouens neem ook deel aan die geveg!
Ons werk ook, ons bou onse land.
Ons vrouens, die helfte van ons volk.
Veg vir die vooruitgang van Suid Afrika.

(We women too share in the fight,
We too, work, build our land
We women, half of our nation
Fight for the progress of South Africa.)

A pageant of unity was performed and the International, the Red Flag, the Transvaalse Volkslied were sung, as well as songs of the people, such as Loch Lomond, "Sarie Marais", "Stryk wyl die yster gloei", "Suikerbossie" and "Prices Rise", a satire on Three Blind Mice. (36)

The songs of the GWU therefore drew strongly on Afrikaans traditional folksongs in its efforts to promote solidarity, unity and cohesion. Its songs appealed to the women not only as workers but certainly as Afrikaners as well.

III Plays.....

The plays produced by garment workers deal mostly with the struggles of the women workers in the factories and at home and strongly expressed the women workers' point of view. These plays seemed to have enjoyed great popularity for they vividly portrayed the lives of their audience. In October 1939 the dramatic section of the Union under the direction of Maggie Kruger was already going strong. (37) Also in 1939 the Potchefstroom garment workers were practising a play. (38) In July 1940 Maggie Kruger produced a play which was first staged with great success in Vrededorp, making a profit of R3. In August 1940 it was staged once more with members of

the CEC helping with the refreshments. (39) On the 1st of May 1941, the play "Broers" (Brothers) as well as an English one act play "The Great Philanthropist" were performed in the Johannesburg Trades Hall. Later that year the English play as well as another Afrikaans play, "Unieseel" (Stamp of the Union), were performed at Kingston House, Pritchard Street, Johannesburg, at the request of the sweet workers. (40)

An unnamed play, most probably intended to be called "Slavin van Suid-Afrika" (Slave of South Africa), written by Hester and Johanna Cornelius relates the lives and struggles against poverty of six sets of women, both in the factories and in the rural areas. Act One finds young boys struggling to do the housework and preparing the supper whilst waiting for their mother to return from the factory. (41) The scene then moves to a factory where the young female workers comment on the misery and poverty in which they have to live. They resolve to unite all the (white) women of South Africa to fight for a better life for all (white) workers. They demand land for the farmer, higher wages for the worker and decent housing for all. In the later scenes other women, on farms, pensioned, pregnant, young shop assistants, all heed this call for unity:

We women are the slaves of our country and of the system which oppresses us. The men who make the laws of our country, have so divided our nation with their political intrigues, that today we women and children have to die of misery and hunger. We women should for once wear the breeches, to save our country from destruction and ruin. We will follow in the footsteps of the Voortrekker woman who said, "Even if we have to cross the Drakensberg on bare feet, we shall not return to this country of oppression!" (40)

The play the "Trial of the 22", portrays another aspect of the life of a woman worker. Mary's

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husband Jim, an unemployed dockworker in Cape Town, feels humiliated that he, the former provider and breadwinner of the family, is forced to be dependent on his wife for his daily bread:

Jim: Ja, dankie! Ek moet nogal dankbaar wees. Jy werk vir my. I don't want your bread! (He throws the bread on the table, his wife picks it up.) (Thank you very much! I have to be grateful. You work for me!)

...This life...its better to be drunk or dead or maybe in jail...but to live like this...Yes I see! I must kiss the hand that feeds me.(47)

The plays "Eendrag" (Unity) and "Drie Spioene" (Three Spies), by Hester and Johanna Cornelius respectively, although they are not very remarkable as plays, deal with the struggles of women in the factories. "Eendrag" puts across the message that the workers, when they unite and confront the boss en masse, can improve their conditions. "Drie Spioene" relates how three members of the CEC of the Johannesburg GWU enter a Cape Town clothing factory in disguise and whilst working amongst the women convince them that they should strike and no longer tolerate the abuse and bad treatment which they have to suffer from their boss and his forelady. (44)

The play "Broers" (Brothers), which is incomplete, deals with the conflict and division in a family in which two brothers support two opposing ideologies, socialist and fascist. Their beliefs play an important role in the animosity and hatred between Jan, the striker, and Hans, his policemen brother. Their loving but grieving mother, sympathises with both, and fears for the safety of both. (She even hides her striker son's hat to prevent him from leaving the house to join the strikers.) Netta, Jan's girlfriend, an ardent trade unionist, argues with Hans who is convinced that absolute obedience to duty is the highest ideal in life. Netta accuses Hans:

Only through betrayal can you get rid of your

duty towards your class...when you let yourself be used to break a strike, it is nothing but treachery. That is all! (45)

"Die Offerhande" (The Sacrifice), is the only garment worker play to be published in their magazine. It was staged by the Germiston Division of the Volksteater, (Theatre of the People), on Monday, November 10, 1941, in Johannesburg and on November 17, in the Germiston Town Hall. It portrays the conflict between rich and poor; the heroine a pawn between two camps. Should she marry the rich man, Hans Botma, whom she does not love, and so save her family's farm, or should she marry her own true (but poor) love? True love wins, the family departs for the diggings in the hope of a quick fortune. The son, whose wife Werda, is an ardent trade unionist, turns to illicit diamond buying, and his mother dies on hearing of his crime. The play resolves in a call by Werda for all workers to unite:

Shall we allow this rotten system to exploit us any longer and turn us into poor Whites? The workers, the farmers, the diggers are the victims of this system...On one sixth of the earth today millions of farmers and workers live under a new system, a system which has no boss, no rich farmer to oppress the poor... It is the Soviet Union. A country governed by the worker and the farmer. (46)

These plays seem to have features in common. Both the policemen, the boss, as symbols of oppression, and the "ardent trade unionist" tend to be rather unconvincing characters. Both types are drawn in caricature. The policeman as symbol of the forces of law and order and the state is portrayed as unsympathetic to the cause of the workers. Hans Botma, the ex-suitor turned policeman, in "Die Offerhande", is accused of being a "mean Judas" and a traitor like Hans in "Broers". The public prosecutor and policemen giving evidence against the strikers in

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the "Trial of the 22" are likewise discredited and ridiculed by the council for the defense. (47)

The Boss and his henchmen (women), the figures of authority and exploitation in the factory are equally negatively portrayed. These characters are mostly portrayed as one dimensional caricatures and are called by nicknames such as "Ou Snoek" (a type of fish), and "Ou Geldduiwel" (Money Devil). (48) Devices such as making them speak in English and swear extensively alienate them even more from the other characters. (49) The bosses in both "Eendrag" and "Drie Spioene" are equally repulsive, in the latter Mr Kelly swears, assaults women on the factory floor and fires a girl who is in tears because of the death of her mother. (50) In both plays the foregirls who support the boss are not even traitors, they are the "brandsiek". (51)

The fear of employers is poignantly apparent in a joke about a machinist who works frantically all day because she mistakes her own coat hanging behind her for her boss spying over her shoulder to ensure that she works fast enough. (52)

The trade unionist tends to be rather one dimensional as well. Mary of the "Trial of 22", tells Hetty the "ardent trade unionist" who helps her to prepare her evening meal: "Hetty, you're too good...like a mother. What would I do, if you did not come here?" (53) Hetty is described as being a "lively woman, not very young anymore, but with a kindly smile on her face". (54) Minnie the "ardent trade unionist" of "Drie Spioene" also valiantly defends a young victimised worker. (55) In the short stories written by garment workers and published in their magazine, the "Garment Worker/Klerewerker", on their life in the factories and the role of the trade union in their lives, the trade unionist is portrayed in a similar fashion, to the extent that one trade unionist lovingly forgives an erring worker: "Not to worry child, it is nothing. We never become angry

with our workers". (56)

The antagonist and protagonist, the boss and the "ardent trade unionist" as well as the characters with whom they interact, are nonetheless portrayed in such a way that they fit in with the experience of the audience and readership. They are left with no doubt at all that the boss and his cronies are indeed villains, whilst the trade unionists are the heroes of the situation. The message comes across clear and unfettered by any form of nuance and therefore served to increase the appeal of the plays to a worker audience.

IV The Garment Worker/Klerewerker.....

With the publication of the poem "The song of the Shirt" by Thomas Hood in the Garment Worker/Klerewerker in December 1929, a first attempt was made to introduce the garment workers to workers' literature. (57) The magazine only reappeared in November 1936 and again in 1938 when it was brought out regularly with the aim of combating the extreme right wing ideas of the time. The magazine was in Afrikaans and English, each section comprising twelve pages and printed back to back. It appeared on average once every two months. The Afrikaans section usually published a wide variety of writings by members of the Central Executive Committee as well as rank and file members of the union. Only in 1945 did some literary works appear in the English section of the magazine. (58) The volume of literary work produced by the garment workers was remarkable. They wrote short stories, autobiographical sketches, reports, poems, translated serials, reminiscences, travelogues, union propaganda, speeches, political commentary, court cases in which the GWU was involved, and a type of back page column on the life of one "Valentine" who spoke a mixture of English and Afrikaans. (59)

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Several themes emerge from an analysis of the literature of the garment workers. Most striking is the vast amount of didactic literature either in the form of short stories or as discussions. The philosophy, aims, aspirations and task of the union are put across in the form of a play, poem or short story. Strikes, victimisation, taskwork, exploitation of the workers, underpayment, the need for unity amongst the workers as well as organisation not only in the Garment Workers Union, but in unions elsewhere were the main concerns of these writers. The contributions of Johanna Cornelius ranged from for example an essay "Hoe kan ons ons fabriekslewe aangenamer maak", (How to improve our life in a factory), to a poem, "Die Stryd in die Stad", (The Fight in the City), to a didactic tale on victimisation "'n Alledaagse Gebeurtenis" (An Everyday Occurrence) to a play "Drie Spioene". (60) Hester Cornelius wrote as prolifically. She wrote the play "Eendrag", reported on her trade union work in Germiston as secretary of the branch and translated serials for publication in the magazine, e.g. "Noem my Timmerman" (Call me Carpenter) by Upton Sinclair and "Moord Gepleeg in Duitsland" (Murder Committed in Germany) by Heinz Liepman. The latter ran during the late 1930's and the former during the early 1940's. Sinclair was followed by "Die Kinders van Hitler", (The Children of Hitler) a translation of the film script based on a book by Georg Ziemmer, which "Shocked the world". (61)

Maggie Meyer's poem "Die Plig van die Vrou" (The Duty of the Woman), found inspiration in her trade union experience and background, as well as her general knowledge of South African history to paint a rather grand picture of the role of (white) women in South African history from the time of the Great Trek and the Voortrekkers' quest for freedom to the 1930's and the strikes in the clothing industry. "Capital" is portrayed as the destroyer of the women's freedom and happiness. This viewpoint differs considerably from the standard Afrikaans

approach where the conquest of the British rather than that of "Capital" was seen as the cause of the destruction of the rural idyll of the Voortrekkers.

Die vryheid het nie lank geduur,
Want wat eers soet was word toe suur
Toe Kapitaal die oorhand kry,
Was sy die een wat swaar moes ly.

In die fabriek van vroeg tot laat,
Daar leer jy kapitaal te haat,
Saam word daar 'n besluit gemaak
In 1932 gaan hul uit op staak.

As ons net saamstaan sal ons wen,
Die mans sal dit ook moet erken.

(Freedom did not last too long,
For what was sweet, then turned sour.
When Capital gained the victory,
She was the one that had to suffer.

In the factory from early till late
There Capital you learn to hate
Together a decision was taken
In 1932 on strike they would go.

If we stand together we shall have victory
The men would also have to agree.) (62)

The comparison between life in the rural areas and in the city forms an important theme in the garment worker literature. They tend to idealise the bygone rural life on the farm and regret having left loved ones, parents and relatives. "Rype Ondervinding", a two part serial by a garment worker, embodies many of these elements. Anna Cloete, the central character, a trouser machinist in a Johannesburg factory regrets leaving the Bushveld. Ever yearning for change, she had tired of the "eentonige plekkie" (dull little place) and wanted to earn money to care for her parents in their old age. Part Two finds Anna in a rented room in Fordsburg, preparing the

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evening meal of some meat, bread, coffee and tinned milk. The interior is described as though the writer is personally familiar with such circumstances; the furniture included a tin bath, a table and two candle boxes as chairs and a cushion. (63)

As poor people the garment workers are doubly conscious of the differences between rich and poor. The poem, "Die Lied van die Armes" (The Song of the Poor), juxtaposes the rich and the poor;

Na vuil agterplase
is die armes verja
om rykes en dwase
se laste te dra.

(To filthy backyards
the poor are herded
to shoulder the burdens
of the rich and the idle). (64)

The playlet, "Kersfees vir die Armes" (Christmas for the Poor), gives an insight into the dreams and expectations of the poor, they yearn for the things money can buy - an escape from their drab existence. But they are disillusioned: "There is no Father Christmas for the poor. Remember that. He is not on our side". (65) Throughout the literature of the garment workers one finds a consciousness of "Die Werkendeklas" (working class); they are the workers and as such wish to organise themselves into a cohesive unity. The plays they wrote were "Werkendeklas dramas", and titles such as "Werkers Regeer" (Workers Rule) and "Wees Trots Klerewerkers" (Be Proud, Garment Workers) abound in the magazine. (66)

However the garment workers did not write totally independent, ignorant or contemptuous of the mainstream of Afrikaans literature. They were familiar with it, most probably through their education and setwork books at school. As an

alternative to the mainstream of Afrikaans literature, the writings of the garment workers do not create Literature or Art for the sake of it, but use the form of the play, poem or short story in an attempt to reach and convince workers. (67)

The garment worker poets and playwrights were mostly in good command of the form they employed. In the poems the principles of rhythm, rhyme, and metre were applied with ease as were those concerning the plot of a play or short story. Their literature was devoid of all forms of subtlety, such as metaphors, similes, or symbols, for it put across its message with a simplicity and clarity which would not cloud the central issues. They were intimately connected with and built on the cultural aspirations of their readers who could identify and participate in what they read and what they saw performed on stage. As Hester Cornelius remarked:

Workers who participate in the theatre do it...to transform the working class struggle into drama, to present it to the workers and to suggest solutions to our daily problems.(68)

Conclusion.....

The literature of the garment workers therefore is important in three respects: Firstly, their literature was a feminist literature, which clearly depicted the position of the Afrikaner woman in her society and outlined a possible line of action within that society for its betterment. Secondly, this literature is written in Afrikaans. It developed independently from the mainstream of Afrikaans literature of the time and is still unknown in the Afrikaans literary context, and it dealt with themes that the mainstream of Afrikaans literature rarely if ever touched upon; the Second World War, trade unionism, worker consciousness, and a feminist consciousness which is evident amongst a cohesive and united group of Afrikaner women workers. Finally it is a literature about workers, by workers and for

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workers. The "Garment Worker/Klerewerker" therefore very aptly remarked in 1939:

Garment workers therefore do not only make gentlemen's and ladies' clothes, they can also sing, write, versify and do a number of other things in life as well. (69)

Footnotes:.....

1. The Garment Worker/Klerewerker (henceforth GW/KW), Jan/Feb 1941. Translation was done by the author, unless otherwise stated.
2. Nellie Raubenheimer - an employee of the Ideal Clothing Manufacturers - also published a poem called "Rus Alleen" (Repose Alone), GW/KW, April 1939, and an article "Werkers Regeer" (Workers Rule), GW/KW, Jan/Feb 1983, on the role of trade union education in the life of a garment worker.
3. From the early twenties Afrikaner women increasingly found employment in the clothing industry on the Witwatersrand. They actively participated in two major strikes in 1931 and 1932. After the split between the factory and bespoke sections of the GWU in 1934, the women began to feature prominently in the organisation of the GWU which constituted the factory section of the old union.
4. "Union Struggle on Stage", in SALB 8.7, Aug 1983, p72.
5. I. Hofmeyer, "Mad Poets - An Analysis of an early sub-tradition of Johannesburg Literature and its Subsequent Developments", Wits History Workshop, 3-7 Feb, 1978, p4.
6. See: "Lectures for Workers", SALB, 8.8 & 9.1 Sep/Oct, 1983.
7. Program for Work for 1934, by S. Sachs, to the Central Executive Committee of the GWU, 2/2/1934, CPSA, GWU, 8cfl.
8. D.J.Opperman, *Digtors van Dertig*, (Cape Town 1953), p53.
9. J.C.Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaans Literatuur Vol I*, (Cape Town, Pretoria 1978),

- p92,93.
10. T.R.H.Davenport, South Africa, A Modern History, (Johannesburg 1978), p200.
 11. Kannemeyer, Geskiedenis, p265; Langenhoven's aim was to teach the volk to read. Langenhoven was extremely popular with the garment workers. His Ope Brief ann die Keiser van Duitsland, 1914" (Open Letter to the Kaiser of Germany) was reprinted in full in the GW/KW, Nov/Dec 1941. Extracts of his poetry and of his sayings were often quoted in the magazine, eg. GW/KW, Jun/Jul 1940, p8.
 12. Opperman, Digters, Contents.
 13. Ibid, p13.
 14. H. Cornelius, "Ons en die Voortrekker Eeufees", (The Voortrekker Centenary and Us), GW/KW, Oct, 1938, p4; and M. Kruger, "Eeufees", (Centenary) GW/KW, Dec 1938, p7.
 15. As yet neither the literature of the garment workers nor the writings of Hester or Johanna Cornelius, have been mentioned in any standard text on the history of Afrikaans literature.
 16. Annual (Adjourned) General Meeting of the GWU, 30/3/1933, GWU, Bad 1.
 17. Pamphlet, Educational Classes, GWU Tvl., 29/5/1933, 8cc 1.53.
 18. Program of work for 1934 by S.Sachs, to CEC of GWU, 2/2/1934, 8cf 1.
 19. 19th Meeting of CEC of GWU, 14 Feb 1940, Baa 1.
 20. GWU Circular, 23 Nov 1933, Bbc 1.162.
 21. GWU, Notice of Hike, 7 Dec 1933, 8bc 1.74. The poem is very appropriate, since about half of the garment workers were under 21.
 22. Program of Work for 1934 by S.Sachs, to the CEC of the GWU, 2/2/1934, 8cf 1.
 23. GWU to Miss Mavis Sharples, 6/3/1935, 8bc 1.52.
 24. 43rd Meeting of the CEC of GWU, 31 July 1940, Baa 1; Minutes of Conference of Factory Representatives, 15/8/1940, Bad 1.
 25. GW/KW, Aug/Sep 1940, and 44th Meeting CEC of GWU, 7 Aug 1940, Baa 1.
 26. Annual General Meeting of GWU, 24/2/1938,

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- GWU, Bad, 1; and GW/KW, Jan/Feb 1941.
27. 4th Meeting of the Joint Factories Committee, 16/2/1938, GWU, 8cf 1.
 28. 3rd Meeting of the Joint Factories Committee, 3/2/1938, 8cf 2.1. There is not much evidence of GWU choirs, probably because the ASAF choirs were so popular at the time in Johannesburg; see: E.L.P. Stals, *Afrikaners in die Goudstad*, (Pretoria 1978).
 29. 16th Meeting CEC of GWU, 16 Jan 1940, Baa 1, and 4th Meeting CEC of Millinery Branch, 7 Oct 1941, Bbc 14.4.1.
 30. 34th Meeting, CEC of GWU, 27 June 1942, Baa 1.
 31. Joint Factories Committee, Circular, 21 Jan 1938, by Hester Viljoen and Johanna Cornelius, Bcf 1.
 32. GW/KW, May/June, 1941, p7.
 33. Ibid, March/April, 1941, p9, pl2.
 34. Ibid, Feb 1939, pl4. The Union Guard was a uniformed guard established in 1939 to keep order at the GWU meetings. It consisted of young factory girls who wore a blue and white uniform and paraded in military fashion.
 35. Ibid. May/June 1941, p7, and Program and Resolutions for Rally of 18.3.1941, Bcf 4. The translation of both songs were the ones used by the GWU. The tune of the Red Flag is also used in Afrikaans for the song "O Boereplaas".
 36. GW/KW, Feb 1940, p7, and Program for Rally, 8cf 4.
 37. 4th Meeting, CEC of GWU, 4 Oct 1939, Baa 1.
 38. GW/KW, Oct 1939, pl2.
 39. CEC meetings of the GWU, 38th, 40th, 41st, 44th, in June, July and Aug 1940, Baa 1.
 40. GW/KW, May/June 1941, pl1.
 41. Anon. Play, pl Bad 1.2.
 42. Ibid, Act 3; see: de Villiers, *Barrevoets oor Drakensberg* (Barefoot across the Drakensburg), (Johannesburg 1975).
 43. Trial of the 22, pl, Bcd 1.2.
 44. Ibid.

45. Broers, p6. Bcd 1.2.
46. GW/KW, Nov/Dec 1942, p5, and July/Aug 1942, The name "Werda" was a cry of Boer sentries during the Anglo Boer war, meaning "Who goes there?".
47. Trial of the 22, pp4-6, Bch 1.2.
48. "Ou Snoek" was used in "Rype Ondervinding" (Rich Experience), GW/KW, Feb 1940, p14, and "Ou Geldduiwel" (Money Devil) in Act 2 of the Anon. Play, Bch 1.2.
49. "'n Alledaagse Gebeurtenis" (An Everyday Occurrence), GW/KW, Nov 1936, p6.
50. "Eendrag", Act 4, Bch 1.2.
51. The garment workers translated the English word "scab" to its literal meaning "brandsiek", i.e. the disease sheep contract and not to its proper Afrikaans rendition viz. "onderkruipers".
52. GW/KW, Sep 1938, p11.
53. Trial of the 22, p2, 8cd 1.2.
54. Ibid, p2.
55. "Drie Spioene", Bcd 1.2.
56. GW/KW, Nov/Dec 1944.
57. Garment Worker, 1929, Bcf 1.2. In May/June 1942 the GW/KW published an Afrikaans translation of the "Song of the Shirt" by one N. Beets.
58. Eg. "First Novel", and "You can't trust a woman" by M Hall, GW/KW July/Aug, and May/June 1945.
59. Valentine by Valie was published during the course of 1943.
60. GW/KW Aug 1938, p9; Dec 1939, p1; Nov 1936, p6; and Bcd 1.2.
61. Ibid., 1939 and 1941. The translator of "Kinders van Hitler" was not mentioned.
62. Ibid, Aug 1939, p8.
63. Ibid, Feb 1940.
64. Ibid, Nov/Dec 1944, p6.
65. Ibid, Nov/Dec 1941, pp5-6.
66. Ibid, Jan/Feb 1941; Sep 1939, p5.
67. D.J.Opperman, Digters.....p53.
68. H. Cornelius, Eendrag Teater (Unity Theatre), GW/KW, May/Jun 1941.
69. GW/KW, April 1939, p11.