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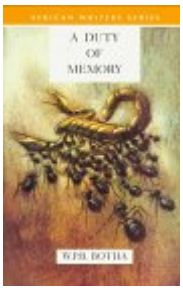

W.P.B. Botha. *A Duty of Memory.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1997. 229 pp. $13.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-435-91007-5.

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Born in 1952 in Johannesburg of working class Afrikaner parentage, W.P.B. Botha brings to *A Duty of Memory*, his third novel, a consciousness, often painful, of the full meaning of being a member of the Afrikaner culture. The first member of his family to attend college, Botha understands especially the corrupting influence that the evil of apartheid has wreaked upon the sensibilities of the Afrikaners themselves. In *A Duty of Memory*, Botha chronicles the effects of this evil on the lives of Johanna and Eeben, the daughter and son of Andries and Caroline Hartzenberg, and on Lettie, Mafimane and other black workers on Leeufontein farm, the ancestral home of the Hartzenbergs.

Structurally, the novel begins as the apartheid system is ending and the Truth Commission is beginning its agonizing task of hearing the tales of brutality that characterized the age of apartheid. Botha presents Afrikaner culture via Leeufontein and its vicinity as a microcosm of that culture. Botha peoples this region with the citizens of Afrikaner and black societies, all of whom suffer the effects of that culture's brutality: Andries, the embittered, cruelly abusive father; Caroline, the outsider wife and mother; Johanna, the sexually abused daughter; Eeben, the weak but sensitive son who becomes an agent of the brutality he loathes; Mafimane, son of black workers on the farm, who, formed by apartheid, cannot see beyond it; Lettie, mother of Mafimane and a black servant who is one of two voices of hope for a New South Africa; Sergeant Muller, Afrikaner policeman uncorrupted by his culture but without illusions about its savagery; Draak, Afrikaner capable of any savagery to maintain his culture and truly believing he serves God and that any deviation from the Afrikaner code is evidence of the satanic forces attempting to destroy his world.

The story of this family commences not long after the deaths of Eeben, his wife, and their children, all apparently killed by Eeben himself in a murder-suicide. Eeben has been driven to despair by both his own acts and those of the fellow Afrikaners who seek to kill him to prevent him from sharing with the South African Truth Commission a tape that graphically chronicles both the crimes of his circle of Afrikaner paramilitaries and his own growing desperation. A good portion of the novel, in fact, consists of Johanna (Jo), who has returned to South Africa from England for the funerals of Eeben and the others, listening to the tape, which bring back for her the demons against which she has struggled most of her life, demons beginning with the sexual abuse inflicted upon her by her father.

Botha's intent is to reveal to us the complexity of the Afrikaner culture, especially the complexity that drives its own citizens to become capable of savagery in the name of Christianity–not only to the racial groups vic-

timized by apartheid, not only to the *rooinek* (rednecks; any outsiders, but especially the English, as explained in the extremely helpful glossary of Afrikaner words and phrases included in the work), but to any and all of their very own who deviate from their code. Brutalized by their own siege mentality, they react violently to any deviation (e. g., to marriage to anyone outside the ethnic community, to straying from the master-servant, or baas-boy, relationship with non-whites).

Stylistically, Botha shows himself a master of using multiple viewpoint to reveal the complexity and variety of Afrikaners and their many individual dimensions, and how that culture moves toward, even seeks to destroy itself, a self-destruction illustrated graphically by Botha's characters.

Eeben's tape reveals to us the tormented Afrikaner in the person of Eeben himself. Eeben's taped message is riddled with a sense of the hopelessness and, much worse for them, the meaninglessness of the Afrikaner cause. "What was it for? Ag, Jesus, what was it all for?" becomes Eeben's refrain. Observing Jo, the voice of Beth, a *rooinek* who cares deeply about Jo, narrates the devastating effects the system has had on Jo, whose seeming uninhibited life is actually born of desperation. The desperation comes through also in the voice of Afrikander police Sergeant Muller. Though uncorrupted by the Afrikaner system himself, he recognizes the meaningless and despair. Talking to Beth of the death of Eeben and the relationship of that death to the Afrikaner culture, Muller says "It's made me think sometimes it would be better if we Afrikaners we all just … you know, like those people in Jonestown? Ja, don't look so surprised. Eeben he's just the latest in a history of Afrikaner suicides."

A central theme, then, of *A Duty of Memory* is victimization leading to hopelessness, but not only that of Jo and Eeben. Andries is himself a victim of Afrikaner culture. While on tour is England as a star of a South African rugby team, Andries meets and impregnates Caroline, a teenage worker in a bacon factory. Caroline journeys to South Africa where she and Andries marry. But because Caroline is an outsider, a *rooinek*, Andries is denied a place on Springbok, the national rugby team. Embittered, Andries becomes a cruel alcoholic who not only rapes Jo but also bullies weak, sensitive Eeben to try to make him into the same kind of sjambok (whip) wielding Afrikander that Andries has become. When Caroline discovers Andries' sexual abuse of Jo and spirits her away to England to live with her grandparents, the enraged Andries donders (beats) Caroline, who, subsequently, goes mad and is institutionalized.

Eeben, who has always struggled to fit in, eventually marries Gessie, whom he has known since childhood. Soon, Eeben is forced into working with her brother Draak, with whom Eeben and others began their careers of savagery by mercilessly beating homosexual men. To Draak, the paramilitary forays against the opponents of apartheid represent God's work against Satan. Though Eeben knows that it is Draak who is in league with Satan, Eeben proves too weak to resist and actively participates in beatings and murders.

Jo, seeking revenge, overgeneralizes so that she hates all Afrikaner males and, likely, all males everywhere, and uses her own body to attract them, only to discard them. Jo attempts also to use Mafimane, her soul-mate, and Eeben's tape to gain her personal revenge. Blinded to the truth by the evil done to her, Jo comes to distrust those who love her most, including Beth, her lesbian partner, and Sergeant Muller, an Afrikaner policeman uncorrupted by his culture. Pursued by the demons of the past and in her blindness, Jo dies in a hail of commando bullets intended for the corrupt police who seek Eeben's tape in order to destroy it to protect themselves and Afrikaners in general.

But *A Duty of Memory* is anything but a novel of despair. Rather, it is a novel of purging, of cleansing, of hope for a new South Africa. While Eeben and Jo both die, perhaps must die, they see clearly. For Eeben, clarity of vision reveals that "It's we, the Afrikaners, who have helped to bring the country to its knees. It's we who brought into the world the Sharpeville, Thokosa, Khatlehong… We Afrikaners [have] crossed the last mountain range… We're fighting what is our final battle. With ourselves."

For Jo. the vision brings release from her demons, an end to her hate-driven desire for vengeance and acceptance of her own wrongdoing. As she dies, Jo recognizes that she has attempted to use Mafimane as her agent for revenge, that "She has betrayed Mafimane with her hunger for vengeance; for love…. It's love she wants to speak of, but can't…. [Death is] denying her the chance to say sorry."

Even more hopeful is that fact that while Eeben, Mafimane, and Jo all die, the victims of Afrikaner evil, the tape is delivered to the Truth Commission. More importantly, reconciliation comes from truth. Lettie, mother of Mafimane, Sergeant Muller, the now ex-policeman Afrikaner who has won the battle with self that Eeben could not

win, and several of Lettie's relatives unite to form Jomane (Johanna + Mafimane) Enterprises, a venture that has purchased Leeufontein Farm to begin building what Lettie refers to as a "new South African," a South Africa growing out of the legacy of Johanna and Mafimane. "Jo and Mafimane are still with us, working for a new South Africa," Lettie concludes.

With this work, certainly personally painful for a son of Afrikaner culture to write, Botha successfully opens to the world the Afrikaner mentality and seems to have fulfilled his one personal "duty of memory."

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