

Caritas and Habitus in Dan Jacobson's 'The Zulu and the Zeide'

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Dan Jacobson is a prolific writer whose oeuvre spans some 65 years, and includes a range of different texts. He has lived in Britain for most of his adult life, but his roots are South African, and he set much of his early work in this country. It has however fallen into relative critical obscurity. His 1959 story 'The Zulu and the Zeide' has been widely anthologised, but deserves more serious and more specific critical attention that it has recently received, because it evinces at an elemental level the ways in which, and the extent to which, human caring was able to challenge, arrest and undermine the public proscriptions set up to define and control interaction between people in our country during the apartheid years. This essay explores the embodiment of caritas in the story, the spatialisation that reflects the boundaries (and the crossing of boundaries) of the apartheid world he depicts, the micropolitics of power between the characters in the story and within the complex of relationships that develop between them, and the ethics of our reading of the story.

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A striking television advertisement has been screening on South African channels for the past couple of years. It flashes up retrospective episodes that take place, one by one, in the life of a woman in the back seat of a large vehicle. We see her first old and grey and alone; then middle-aged, journeying to the hospital with a stricken husband; then as a young mother nursing a child; then as a teenager making out with a boyfriend; then as a ten-year-old in bunny ears on her way to a ballet performance. The narrative ends with her as a baby decked out in bonnet and booties, crying. The car has been hijacked – a common event in our society at this time. A uniformed man reaches in through the open door to lift her out. The man is black. The child is white. He cradles her small head as he holds her close. She clutches his arms with both chubby hands. The by-line goes: she may not remember him, but he has given her a lifetime of memories to come (Joe Public 2010).

Caritas is defined in the Concise Oxford as 'love of mankind; humanity'. One of the reasons the advertisement described above is so arresting, I think, is because it embodies *caritas*: it renders the immediate physical response of one human being to the needs of another. This rendition is intensified because the social context of South Africa continues to be structured by a heritage of *apartheid* binaries. The imagery of the advertisement invokes, and crosses, boundaries: the gender boundary of a man performing the nurturant role of holding a baby; the racial boundary of a black man's hand holding a white child's head, her chubby hands gripping his strong arms. How *caritas* is embodied – and especially how it is embodied in Dan Jacobson's story 'The Zulu and the Zeide' – is one of the issues I wish to explore in this essay, because it evinces at an elemental level the ways in which, and the extent to which, human caring was able to challenge, arrest and undermine the public proscriptions set up to define and control interaction between people in our country during the *apartheid* years.

In a 2002 article published in *Narrative*, Genie Babb argues that narrative theories of character have in recent times neglected the body. Her article seeks to remedy this by insisting on its importance; by 'unearthing' the body in narrative. Drawing on Husserl, and after him Merleau-Ponty, she distinguishes between two interrelated aspects of embodiment: 'Körper', the physical, objectified body studied by science; and 'Leib', the lived sensation of embodiment. Two of the concepts she uses to explain these aspects are particularly relevant to my essay, namely 'motility' (the movement through space which is 'enabled by the intertwining perceptions of environment, kinesthesia, internal sensation, and control'), and 'habitus' ('the automatic, habitual nature of embodied practice repeated over time, which does not occupy conscious thought ... those habit-forming processes that are instituted by social arrangements, such as the way spaces are delineated and used within domestic and public buildings [or] the way roads demarcate the cultural and political terrain', 205). Babb's interest is in the role of embodiment in representations of character. Mine is too, but I wish also to explore the light it can shed on the relationships in Jacobson's story, and on the spatialisation that reflects the boundaries (and the crossing of boundaries) of the *apartheid* world he depicts.

Dan Jacobson is a prolific writer whose oeuvre spans some 65 years, and includes writing in a range of different genres: fantasy, historical fiction, memoir, critical essays, travel writing, translations, and, of course, stories. Although he has lived in Britain for most of his adult life, his roots are South African: he was born in Johannesburg in 1929, and set his early work in our country. He is one of a number of South African Jewish writers who have shaped our literature (Sarah

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Gertrude Millin, Sydney Clouts, Ruth Miller, Nadine Gordimer, Lionel Abrahams, Albie Sachs, Barney Simon, Gillian Slovo, Rose Zwi are some others, Lenta 2001:92). *Encyclopaedia Judaica* describes this early work as 'contemporary in setting, realistic in mode, and liberal in political outlook', revealing 'an intense awareness of the currents of social and race conflict in South Africa'. Margaret Lenta traces the roots of this awareness to 'an intellectual and, even more, a critical tradition embodied in the relationships within [his] family' (2001:96). She cites Jacobson's 'rueful' remarks about the difference between his parents and the people of English descent in his home town, Kimberley:

It was not just that [the Pallings] celebrated Christmas and Easter, while we celebrated Passover and *Yom Kippur*. My parents spoke with a foreign accent; the Palling parents did not. Mr Palling was in employment as the chartered secretary of the local branch of a building society; my father managed his own business. The Palling parents called each other 'Mother' and 'Father'; mine did not. Mr Palling went every Sunday morning in a white shirt, white flannel trousers, and a blazer, to play bowls at the local club; my father did not. The Pallings' house was clean and orderly; ours was not. My parents discussed politics endlessly – local politics, Zionist politics, the war in Europe; the Palling parents never did. Our house was full of books and newspapers, and we were constantly going to the town library; the Pallings' house was altogether bare of reading matter. I and my brothers did well at school; the Palling boys did not. We argued with our parents; the Pallings did not (Jacobson 1964:76-77).

Despite this profile, he has fallen, at least in our country, into relative obscurity. My reading of his work dates back to mounting an honours course in South African literature during the 1980s, which included two novellas, 'The Trap' (1955) and 'A Dance in the Sun' (1956). Both variations on the *plaasroman* theme, they reveal acute insight into the dynamics of relationships in the *apartheid* state. Yet the survey I undertook in preparing for this present essay produced relatively little recent criticism, and that focused on his status as expatriate (Gready 1994a, 1994b), his autobiographical narrative (King, 2004), his travel writing (Klopper 2005). There was none at all that dealt specifically with his early fiction. Perhaps his attributes as white and male and the liberal vision that imbues this early work have made it seem unfashionable.

As too, perhaps, has his writing development away from South African concerns. In a 1985 review of Sheila Roberts and Bernth Lindfors's *WAYNE* study of Jacobson, Michael Wade refers to the trajectory of Jacobson's career: 'For a long time he continued to write about South Africa, until 'one day' he began locating his fictions elsewhere in time and place' (1994:601). In 1994, Paul Gready locates this shift within the context of models of literature of exile and counter-exile proposed by Claudio Guillén and Andrew Gurr. (The former is 'writing in which exile becomes its own subject matter' and the latter 'that in which exile is the condition but not the visible cause of an imaginative response often characterised by a tendency towards integration, increasingly broad vistas or universalism', 1994a, 18). Gurr, says Gready, identifies a pattern among exiled colonial writers who 'initially painstakingly reconstruct a vision of home in realistic prose fiction', and only 'if the vision is achieved and the therapy works, does the writer emerge, truly detached, homeless and historyless ... in Naipaul's gnomic phrase, 'in a free state'' (1994a:18). Gready argues, however, that Jacobson is 'definitively not detached, or in a free state' (1994a:21). Rather, South Africa has 'profoundly influenced the worlds made available to Jacobson as a writer, and is a primary world transposed back onto these other worlds. Nowhere is this more relevant than in Jacobson's insight into the workings of power' (1994a:21-22).

This insight, amongst other things, makes his early writing worthy of reconsideration, since in the 21st century it remains current here only in anthologies of South African stories. The story I wish to examine in this essay has featured in several of the short-story collections taught at first-year university level since the 1990s. In the classroom – mine is a classroom of black, second-language English speakers – it continues to elicit intense response. And, as suggested above, it is amenable to theoretical considerations of spatialisation and of embodiment; features of narrative that shape character and the power relations between them, and hence the ethics of our reading of the story. Its ethical complexity at least distinguishes the story as warranting more serious and more specific critical attention than it has recently received.

'The Zulu and the Zeide' is possibly Jacobson's most famous story (in Hirson & Trump 1994:165-177. All further references are to this text.). Published first in 1959, it has been widely anthologised since then, and was staged as a musical entitled 'The Zulu and the Zayda' on Broadway in 1965 (where it ran for 179 performances and featured Louis Gossett junior as the Zulu, Joe Silver as Harry, and Menasha Skulnik as the Zeide, with music by Harold Rome. A compact disc of this musical was released in December 2010). The story deals in interesting ways with issues of transnationality, border crossings and multiculturalism, because its central characters are, on the one hand, Jewish immigrants who have settled in Johannesburg in the Fifties; and, on the other, Zulu men with roots in the rural areas; 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' figures who are employed in the household of the immigrant Harry Grossman. In particular, the story presents a striking instance of the family drama, by inverting the common expectations readers might have about the relations between fathers and sons and by examining the micropolitics of linguistic, spatial and bodily power. The reaction it stimulates in class is partly due to its textual surprises: debates on it demonstrate marked differences between students who, like the

characters, are either sophisticated, urban and westernised, and hence sympathetic to a son facing the consuming demands of family, or deeply rural, and disapproving of Harry's abjuring what they see as his natural responsibilities towards his father. (Its surprises are made more intense by Jacobson's restrained style: Wade refers to its 'plainness' (601); King to the 'tentative and tactful approach he takes to the past and to the life of his grandfather' in *Heshel's Kingdom* (201); and Gready cites Jacobson's own comment from *Time and Time Again* that, 'Less and less ... do I find that that which really matters in imaginative literature emerges from the level of consciously held opinion or belief in the author or speaker, to that level in the reader' (1994a:20-21).)

In a 2004 study entitled 'Structures of Autobiographical Narrative: Lisa Appignanesi, Dan Jacobson, W. G. Sebald', Nicola King considers texts she categorises as 'family memoir', in which 'the writers set out to excavate and narrate the stories – partially lost or obscured by the rupture of the Nazi Holocaust – of a parent or a grandparent' (2004:265). Jacobson's *Heshel's Kingdom* deals with a grandfather who died before he was born. In it, he 'acknowledges that his motive for exploring his grandfather's life is in part to work through his own tendency to blame his grandfather for having made a decision which, with hindsight, could well have meant the destruction of his family and the non-existence of Jacobson himself' (2004:265). King draws, for her analysis of these narratives, on work by Michael Andre Bernstein and Gary Saul Morson, and specifically on the distinctions they draw between foreshadowing, backshadowing, and, intriguingly, sideshadowing: 'a narrative position which respects the moment in which decisions were made: it is, as described by Bernstein, "a gesturing to the side, to a present dense with multiple, and mutually exclusive, possibilities for what is to come"' (2004:167). Since this is a feature of Jacobson's 1998 memoir, we do not expect to find it in his early third-person short story, but, allowing ourselves hindsight, we might nonetheless bring to our reading of this *Zeide* (or grandfather), an awareness of Jacobson's subsequent treatment of his own grandfather as figuring possibilities that were not and never could be actualised.

Unlike his absent grandfather, Jacobson writes old man Grossman as an absentee: he is impulsive and irresponsible, and has spent much of his life running away from the ordinary obligations of providing for his family. Sent from Lithuania to make his fortune in South Africa, he gets side-tracked *en route* by 'some other Jews' who are going to South America. 'Why are you going to South Africa?' they ask him. 'It's a wild country, the blacks there will eat you. Come to South America and you'll make a fortune.' He joins them, but finds life there intolerable. Six months of silence later, he gets a friend to write and tell his wife that 'he's dying in the Argentine, the Spaniards are killing him ... he must come home' (166). He is shipped back at his brother-in-law's expense. The family then emigrates as a whole to South Africa, where he takes up and loses many jobs. Once it is clear that his son will be able support the family, Grossman becomes suddenly, dramatically, so short-sighted as to be almost blind. His son buys him glasses, which he persistently loses or breaks, until it is 'made clear to him that he [is] no longer expected to do any work' (167). At the start of the story he is widowed and retired, and lives with his son's family in a large masculine house in the suburbs.

Grossman's son, Harry, is presented first in contrast to the old man. He is typecast as middle-aged and middle-class; a successful businessman, a responsible son, husband and father. By his hard work and dedication he has redeemed the debts incurred by his father, and thus secured a successful relocation for the family from old Europe to the new country, South Africa. He has a wife and children who respect him, and commands admiration within the community for his commitment, and sympathy for the troubles he has had to endure. He is in the habit of eliciting this sympathy by telling and re-telling the story of the old man's past. His 'reward' comes when his audience responds, 'at least you're being as dutiful to him as anyone can be' (165). Although he 'refuses' this reward, their comment hits the keynote to his character. The narrator remarks, 'Dutifulness had been his habit of life; it had had to be, having the sort of father he had, and the strain of duty had made him abrupt and begrudging' (166). The extent of his dutifulness is indexed by his refusal to send his father to an old age home. He doesn't like the idea, he says, because it would make his father unhappy. 'We'll look after him as long as we can. It's a job. It's something you've got to do' (166). His lack of imagination is both a strength and a limitation: he does what has to be done for him but he cannot understand his father. And his desire for sympathy for his own suffering shows both selfishness and a fixation on the past. In contrast to his father's spryness and escapism he is presented as solid and stolid, locked into the world he has created around him and the ways of thinking that have helped him create it.

Although the narrative begins with Harry's point of view, and seems sympathetic to it, there is a telling and ironic similarity between him and the old man. This has to do with their bodies. Harry is 'a thick-set, bunch-faced man, with large bones, and short, jabbing gestures'. He is 'in the prime of life' (166). His father, by contrast, is old and has grown thin. Yet we are told that Harry has inherited his strength from his father, 'on whom the largeness of bone showed now only as so much extra leanness that the clothing had to cover' (166). This physical connection operates at the level of what Babb, following Husserl, terms *Körper*, that is, the body described, the body as object perceived from outside (2004:202). This connection forms an essential part of the ethical framework of embodiment which serves to deepen and

to complicate their relationship of inverse dependency. Later in the story it becomes evident how hard Harry finds it to touch his father, and this failed physical contact sharpens the poignancy of the old man's death in due course.

The physical link between the two is contrasted with their occupation of and relation to space. In reflecting on the role of *Leib* in characterisation, Babb considers both conscious aspects of bodily experience and aspects that are beyond conscious awareness or control. Of the former, she notes that 'motility' involves 'exteroception' (that is, 'awareness and experience of external stimuli via the surface organs of the body'), 'interoception' ('internal sensations, originating in the viscera, that are available to conscious awareness'), and 'proprioception' (which refers to 'the double sense of one's own body as a possession and a position. This sense of ownership and spatial orientation is invoked implicitly any time a character moves volitionally', 2002:205). Of the latter aspects, she mentions 'viscerality' (vegetative processes such as respiration, digestion and circulation), and, more importantly, 'habitus' (the sense of bodily being in the world that is 'largely unconscious, habitual, taken for granted, [constituting] the lived sense of differentiation among individuals and among groups', 2002:207).

The issue of space is most strongly focused on the old man because, having spent his past life metaphorically escaping his family, he now does so literally. As I will go on to show, Harry is critically inhibited in regard to the spaces he will enter, especially within his own home. The old man, by contrast, is free-floating and venturesome and this presents an acute problem to his son. In good health, 'quite spry', able to 'walk far', and 'jump and duck' if he has to, he is 'worse than a nuisance', a 'menace', a 'butt and a jest' to the whole neighbourhood – because he keeps running away. It is impossible to keep him in the house because he takes any opportunity to slip out: 'a door left open meant that he was on the streets, a window unlatched was a challenge to his agility, a walk in the park was as much a game of hide-and-seek as a walk' (165). He has a passion for freedom that Harry cannot grasp or share. Rather, Harry's response is gnomic, categorical, historical: 'He's always been like this. He's my father, and I know what he's like. He gave my mother enough grey hairs before her time. All he knew was to run away' (166). Harry's fixation on the past as shaping the present is clear in this judgement, this claim to the warranted authority to define his father. The tension with which the story opens, then, is a spatial one: between Harry's conservative attempt to contain his father, and his father's anarchic, usually successful, efforts to escape.

Of course, the problem does not just belong to Harry. His father is old, even senile, and so he becomes physically and mentally disoriented. Although he will generally wait to be found, and is frequently brought back home (by large young policemen who wink at Harry as they return him), his disorientation causes him distress, and when, towards the end of the story, Harry finds him weeping he is reminded of his father's tears on the occasions when he got lost and had to be found.

To Harry's credit he resists pressures put on him to solve the problem by institutionalising his father. His wife, who does not like the old man, has found a home for aged Jews, a place 'which had impressed her most favourably with its glass and yellow brick, the noiseless rubber tiles in its corridors, its secluded grassed grounds, and the uniforms worn by the attendants to the establishment' (167). Harry refuses to incarcerate his father, however, insisting that he wouldn't like it, he'd be unhappy. This said, the house in which they live is not unlike a prison. It is big and single-storeyed, with a 'corrugated iron roof above and a wide stoep all around'. It looks old-fashioned: it is 'solid and prosperous', with furniture made of 'the heaviest African woods, dark, and built to last', passages 'lined with bare linoleum', and pictures on its walls that are 'brown and grey mezzotints in heavy frames' (168). The house belongs to Harry, and by association helps to characterise him. More importantly, it seems to be the imprisoning solidity of this house, its unhomeliness, that old man Grossman seeks continually to escape. (Space does not permit a detailed investigation here, but Freud's concept of the *unheimlich* (1919) might help explain the old man's constant desire to escape.)

Ironically, while he resists belonging to the house he also disputes his son's ownership of it. Being senile he sometimes recognises his son and at other times does not. On those occasions, he challenges him, 'Who are you?', 'What do you want in my house?', and threatens, 'Out of my house!' The pathos of his fury is emphasised by Harry's patronising smile and his mean-spirited teasing, 'Your house? Do you call this your house?' (167). This recurrent contest for ownership indirectly emphasises his (chosen) displacement out of the household and out of his role within the family.

The introduction into the household of the third significant character in the story brings a solution to the problem of his persistent absconding – but also a complication of the delineation of space according to the micropolitics of *apartheid*. Paulus is the 'Zulu' of the title. Like Harry and the old man he is characterised in terms of physical strength. His body is huge. He is 'a muscular, moustached and bearded African' who wears a pair of khaki shorts that are too small for him, and a shirt with no buttons: 'buttons would in any case have been of no use for the shirt could never have closed over his chest'. He swells 'magnificently' out of his clothing. Despite his strength he is shy: as Harry speaks to him, he looks to the side of Harry's head, and stands 'with his hands behind his back and his bare knees bent a little forward, as if to show how little he [is] asserting himself, no matter what his 'brother' might have been saying about him'. His 'brother' Johannes presents him to Harry as 'a good boy, come straight from the kraal'. He is 'strong, he is a hard worker, he is clean', and he

can be 'as gentle as a woman' (168-169). Paulus's body is significant in several ways. In the first place his physical strength links him with Harry and the old man, and so hints at the triangular relationship that will develop between them. In the second place, it equips him to do the job he is given, which involves caring physically for the old man, including lifting and carrying him when necessary. In the third place, it lends irony to the self-deprecation that is necessary if he is to gain admittance into the household. *Apartheid* categories diminish Paulus: his manliness, his manhood, must be effaced if he is to become the 'boy' who is employable, the 'good boy' whose services his friend Johannes will vouchsafe. And yet through the shifts from 'man' to 'boy' to 'woman' Jacobson is, I think, challenging these categories. Their spuriousness becomes especially evident when, at the end of the story, Paulus's stature is restored with the emergence of his roles as husband and father, and the narrative recognition given to them.

Harry's attempt to control his father takes the form of verbal definition. Likewise, Paulus's employment contract is meticulously spelt out: he is given a room, a uniform, food three times a day and a bar of soap once a week, cast-off clothing at odd intervals, the sum of one pound five shillings and one afternoon off per week. The verbal power that defines this contract is evident also in Harry's construction of Paulus's employment as 'something in the nature of a joke – almost a joke against his father' (169). The crux of the joke is that neither speaks English. Despite the working relationship that develops between them, Harry persists in regarding it as a joke, and the more the arrangement succeeds the more determined he is to turn it into a joke not only against his father but also against Paulus. What he most mocks are their names for each other, which refer, incidentally, to bodily attributes:

'Baas Zeide! That's what *der schwarzer* calls him – have you ever heard the like of it? And you should see the two of them, walking about in the streets hand-in-hand like two schoolgirls. Two clever ones, *der schwarzer* and my father going for a promenade, and between them I tell you you wouldn't be able to find out what day of the week or what time of day is it' (172).

His father never learns Paulus's name, calling him always, '*Der schwarzer*', the black one. Paulus follows traditional patterns of courtesy in response to age: he adopts the grandchildren's name for the old man, prefacing it with the Afrikaans term of respect, 'Baas Zeide' (172).

Paulus's geographic roots help to define him. He is introduced as a 'raw boy' because he comes from the rural areas and his lack of sophistication carries with it moral innocence because he has not been tainted by the city. He is 'not one of these town boys, these street loafers: he [is] a good boy, come straight from the kraal. He [is] not a thief or a drinker' (169). Johannes's opinions are confirmed by Paulus's shyness and by the fact that he sets aside two-thirds of his income as savings. Johannes also volunteers a spatial solution if his employment goes awry: if Paulus fails in any respect, then he, Johannes, will deserve to be chased away, will voluntarily leave.

Significantly, Paulus is also given a room 'in the servants' quarters in the backyard, into which he brought a tin trunk painted red and black, a roll of blankets, and a guitar with a picture of a cowboy on the back', and in which he is 'allowed to entertain not more than two friends at any one time' (168). He is given space in the household, but only at its margins, in its back rooms. Peripheral as it is, this space will later function crucially in the relationship between Harry and his father, because the old man is able to enter it and Harry will not. In *apartheid* terms it is delineated as black space prohibited to a (conservative) white person – even the owner of the house.

As Harry derisively indicates, the relationship that emerges between his father and Paulus is a physical more than a linguistic one. Because the old man speaks only Yiddish, he is isolated even within the family home. Harry's wife puts up with the old man, she does not talk to him, and the grandchildren have nothing to do with their grandfather ('they were busy at school, playing rugby and cricket, they could hardly speak Yiddish, and they were embarrassed by him in front of their friends; when the grandfather did take notice of them it was only to call them Boers and *goyim* and *shkolzim* in sudden quavering rages which did not disturb them at all', 168). Even Harry does not talk to the old man so much as talk about him to others. And yet once Paulus and the old man get beyond initial suspicion and hostility, they find ways of communicating with each other. They speak in their own languages and they use physical gestures that refer to the spaces they share: 'they both commented on or complained to each other of the things they saw around them, and often they agreed with one another, smiling and nodding their heads and explaining again with their hands what each happened to be talking about' (171).

The rapport they achieve comes after a long and slow process of physical habituation. Because Paulus is new to the city, and speaks no English, it takes him some time to work out a *modus operandi*. He has to conquer 'not only his own shyness and strangeness in the new house filled with strange people – let alone the city, which, since taking occupation of his room, he [has] hardly dared to enter – but also the hostility of old man Grossman, who [takes] immediate fright at Paulus and [redoubles] his efforts to get away from the house upon Paulus' entry into it.' The old man's persistence is matched by Paulus's quiet determination, however; 'a willingness of spirit' that the old man cannot 'vanquish' but can only 'teach' (170). After a few days of bewilderment Paulus finds his way, and that is simply to go along with the old man.

Initially he follows him at a distance, because he knows he is not trusted, but by degrees he gets closer, walking side by side with him, and even, when the traffic is particularly heavy, crossing the street with him hand-in-hand. Whereas Harry's solution to the problem of his father is to lock him in, or to take him out on a leash, what Paulus does, effectively, is enter and share the habitus of the old man. This is something Harry is unable to do, despite his verbal protestations and avowals. There is more than character involved here: public space is socially as well as politically demarcated, and Harry's role as respectable *pater familias*, his role as provider not minder, debars him from accompanying his father into the world he constantly explores and inhabits.

This is not the case for Paulus. Despite the boundaries of race and of age that exist between him and the Zeide, he is free to accompany him on his ventures. And the image of two innocents wandering in wonderland is emphasised by their reactions to their environment, and by its reaction to them. They walk together in the streets of the town that is strange to them both, looking over fences and into foyers, standing on pavements and watching cars and trucks, walking in the parks, and resting together when the old man is tired (170). Yet Harry's mockery of their relationship is echoed in the reactions of the people around them, the hostility of the habitus they are moving in. Public space is socially and politically demarcated and the old man's perambulations are disruptive to the spatial order. The opening paragraph couched him as a nuisance not only to his family but to others: 'he was a menace to himself and to the passing motorists into whose path he would step, to the children in the streets whose games he would break up, sending them flying, to the householders who at night would approach him with clubs in their hands, fearing him a burglar; he was a butt and a jest to the African servants who would tease him on street corners' (165). Paulus's company brings protection and support to the old man, but it exposes Paulus to the ridicule the old man triggers in others. When lost Paulus asks for help and generally receives it, but he also gets teased for his 'rawness' and for holding the sort of job he does. And there are people who avert their eyes from the sight of the old man's 'degradation, which could come upon a man when he was senile and dependent' (171). Their environment, too, is structured in ways that are antithetic to their growing closeness. When the old man gets tired, Paulus finds him a park bench to sit on, but since only whites are allowed to sit on the benches, he himself must squat at the old man's feet.

Paulus's care of the old man involves a sensitivity to and management of his physical needs. He is able to recognise and respond to the range of sensations the old man has that would otherwise remain interoceptive. He paces their walks and includes periods of rest to prevent the old man from becoming exhausted. This is very different from Harry's verbal interpretation of his father's physical state, and makes particularly unfair the accusation Harry levels against him later when he feels excluded from their closeness: 'The *oubaas* was tired tonight,' he accuses. 'Where did you take him? What did you do with him? ... What did you do with him that he looked so tired?' (174). Paulus reacts physically to the accusation, but Harry continues to use language to denigrate and demean him:

The sight of Paulus's puzzled and guilty face before him filled him with a lust to see this man, this nurse with the face and figure of a warrior, look more puzzled and guilty yet; and Harry knew that it could so easily be done, it could be done simply by talking to him in the language he could not understand. 'You're a fool,' Harry said. 'You're like a child. You understand nothing, and it's just as well for you that you need nothing. You'll always be where you are, running to do what the white baas tells you to do. Look how you stand! Do you think I understood English when I came here?' Then with contempt, using one of the few Zulu words he knew: '*Hamba!* Go! Do you think I want to see you?' (174)

Harry's power lies in words which he uses to give vent to his own intense emotions which are reflected here as sadistic 'lust' and 'contempt', though they have their roots in jealousy and frustration at being excluded from the intimate nurturance and care that Paulus gives his father. Here Harry threatens Paulus directly by categorising Paulus's locatedness as fixity and limitation, by emphasising the linguistic demands of the place in which they both find themselves, by contrasting his own development in response to it with Paulus's linguistic stultification, and by dismissing him with a peremptory and insulting command.

Yet Paulus's physical presence and absence retains crucial significance in the story. For one thing, it reveals how the demarcation of the public space of the neighbourhood is echoed within the private spaces of Harry's household, because, although Harry owns the house, there are spaces in it that he will not enter. In a key conversation with his father later, he threatens jokingly to send Paulus away. His father does not believe him, and goes straight to Paulus and sits in his room with him, in the 'servant's quarters in the backyard' (169). In doing so, he finds a refuge from his son because Harry 'would never have gone into any of his servant's rooms, least of all that of Paulus' (173). Paulus's room is demarcated as 'black' space, demeaning for a white person to enter. It is the old man's senile innocence that frees him from the hysteresis of spatialised race relations and enables him to go where Harry cannot and will not. All his son can do is bluster, 'Another time he won't be there' (173). Ironically, he is right. As we will see in due course, Paulus's absence at a critical moment brings the old man distress, bewilderment and ultimately death.

Harry is also excluded from the two spaces within the household of greatest physical intimacy between Paulus and his father. Because Paulus quite rapidly takes on the role of manservant, even nurse, he gains entry into areas of privacy from which his race would otherwise debar him. He has to do so because the old man cannot – or will not – take adequate care of himself. Paulus dresses him, bathes him, trims his beard, and attends to him at night when he wets himself. Harry is drawn by this physical closeness. Night after night he comes to the bedroom where Paulus is dressing or undressing the old man, or to the ‘steamy, untidy bathroom’ where the old man is being bathed. Although Paulus’s smile encourages him to draw forward he does not do so; rather he stands ‘dourly and silently ... in his powerful, begrudging stance’. Paulus accompanies his actions with a running commentary to the old man, ‘in a soft continuous flow of Zulu’, to encourage and to praise him. And when the old man is particularly tired, he stoops low and picks him up to carry him easily down the passage to his bedroom (173). Harry is left to watch the door close behind them.

Harry has threatened his father, ‘Another time he won’t be there’ (173). Having brought safety to the old man by his presence, Paulus’s absence at a crucial point leads him into danger. Although Harry mocks the linguistic disparities between the two, it is the physicality of their relationship that so unsettles him, because it is so intimate. To him, as we have seen, caring for his father is a duty: ‘It’s a job. It’s something you’ve got to do’ (166). This means he cannot fill in for Paulus when he is away. One day Harry returns home to find his father wandering around the house, shouting for *der schwarzer*. His wife has told the old man repeatedly that Paulus has the afternoon off, but it does not help. The old man goes from room to room, ignoring Harry, until he reaches his ‘own bare bedroom’, and then confronts Harry, demanding over and over, ‘I want *der schwarzer*’. Harry offers himself instead:

He threw his arms towards his father, but the gesture was abrupt, almost as though he were thrusting him away. ‘Why can’t you ask me? You can ask me – haven’t I done enough for you already? Do you want to go for a walk? – I’ll take you for a walk. What do you want? Do you want – do you want – ?’ Harry could not think what his father might want. ‘I’ll do it,’ he said. ‘You don’t need *der schwarzer*’ (175).

His reaction is cerebral and verbal, and not surprisingly his offer is rejected. Perhaps his earlier threats help explain the old man’s bewilderment and dismay. His father turns his back on him, and Harry sees that he is weeping. Harry does not reach forward to comfort him, to respond to his father’s need, to breach the physical barriers that define their relationship. Rather he thinks of himself: the tears remind him of all the times in the past his father failed him, all the times he lost yet another job. He sees his father’s body as object, as *Körper*, and what most defeats him is the inscription of Paulus’s care upon it: ‘he could not look at his father’s back, at his hollowed neck, on which the hairs that Paulus had clipped glistened above the pale brown discolorations of age – Harry could not look at the neck turned stiffly away from him while he had to try to promise the return of the Zulu. He dropped his hands and walked out of the room’ (176). Although Paulus is absent, the traces of his presence are powerful enough to alienate Harry from his father. Correspondingly, his father has become so fixated upon Paulus that he cannot allow his son to minister to him. The old man has never learned Paulus’s name, but his racial term for him has become emblematic: it has become shorthand for the *caritas* he receives from Paulus.

Paulus’s absence, on this occasion, leads the old man again to run away, and his end comes fast. No one sees him get out of the house and through the front gate and onto the road. He is struck down by a man on a bicycle, and dies a few days later.

Harry’s response to his father’s death undergoes an interesting physical transition. The tears that the old man shed before his son are reprised in the tears of most of those who are left behind. ‘Harry’s wife wept, even the grandsons wept; Paulus wept.’ But Harry does not weep: he is ‘stony, and his bunched, protuberant features’ are immovable, they seem ‘locked upon the bones of his face’ (176). The passive construction ‘locked’ suppresses agency and tantalises our interpretation. Is this a conscious attempt on Harry’s part not to break down, to suppress the internal emotions he feels? Or is it a visceral reaction of which he is unaware? In his conversation with Paulus after his father’s death, Harry is not initially angry. He says to the other servant Johannes, ‘Tell him he must go. His work is finished.’ Paulus waits, however, to collect the savings he has left with Harry. As in their first encounter, he will not meet Harry’s eyes. Harry understands that this is not out of fear or shyness, ‘but out of courtesy for his master’s grief’ (176). Yet the sight of Paulus’s body ‘in the mockery and simplicity of his houseboy’s clothing’ angers Harry, and he feeds his anger by asking, snidely, what Paulus has been saving for, what he will do with the ‘fortune’ he has made. Paulus’s innocent reply triggers Harry’s breakdown. Johannes translates: ‘He says, baas, that he is saving to bring his wife and children from Zululand to Johannesburg. He is saving, baas,’ Johannes said, for Harry had not seemed to understand, ‘to bring his family to this town also.’ The two Zulus are bewildered, then, by his reaction. His ‘clenched, fist-like features’ fall from one another, he stares with guilt and despair at Paulus, and he cries, ‘What else could I have done? I did my best!’ before the first tears come (177).

Harry’s physical expression of grief is perhaps triggered by remorse; by guilt and shame at his failings as a son, compared to the care that Paulus has managed to give his father, compared to the ‘son’ that Paulus has become. But

Paulus's containment in the role of 'boy' has broken down, and his status been restored to him of man, of husband, of father. Thus Harry's grief is also triggered, I suggest, by his confrontation with the care Paulus shows his own family. Harry feels envy because he sees the father in Paulus that he himself has never had.

In the classroom, I have, over the years, been puzzled about how to read this story, what balance of theory and pedagogy to bring to it. We must, of course, acknowledge the shaping influence of the formulaic master-servant relationship. My students' response tends to highlight the variations of the father-son bond that complicate this relationship. Other ways of reading might recognise something of an oedipal tension between the son growing up and replacing the father in his role within the family. Perhaps in Paulus's intuitive, natural response we could see Jacobson representing the organic unity of the primitive, and challenging with it Harry's civilised repression. Or we might argue that Paulus's relaxed occupation of space and the natural decency he brings to the meanness of this household are enabled because he's not constrained by language. It seems unlikely, for example, that Johannes, who does speak English, would manage the same grace of affection Paulus lets himself feel for the old man, who is both a job and a person to him. A politically minded critic might emphasise the limitations of Jacobson's moral vision: realistic in mode and liberal in outlook, his enlightenment is necessarily constrained. He does not advance in this story, or in his other South African fiction, broadscale solutions to the divisiveness of the *apartheid* system. The age of the father and the jealousy and rage of the son are set up in opposition to the closeness that emerges between the Zulu and the Zeide, rendering this relationship necessarily transient. Their closeness does not destabilise social structures, nor bring about significant social change. Rather, as Wade notes of *The Price of Diamonds*, Jacobson seems to suggest that 'heroism is individual, not political or related to ideologies or plans of action' (1985:603). Hence the story's ending follows from the internal logic written into it. It is also true that when we read, we look back and see differences between ourselves in the 21st century and characters so contained by the excrescences of *apartheid* (it causes a jolt, for example, to read in class the racial terms used by Harry in his conversations with his servants, and with his friends about them).

This essay has focused on spatialisation and embodiment. In concluding I would like to recur to the concept of *caritas*, defined variantly in the Concise Oxford as 'Christian love of humankind; charity'. Is this an arbitrary choice for a story about Jewish people and rural Zulus? Might it have been more apt to use the term *Ubuntu* promulgated by our previous president in keeping with the African renaissance, and expressed in several Bantu languages as, 'a person is a person because of other people'? Might this better explain why many of my students who come from rural backgrounds find it hard to understand that Harry cannot care, simply and naturally, for his father, when my more westernised students have a stronger sense of why he needs to employ someone else to do so for him, and of how aggrieved he is that his father did not fulfil a nuclear father's role? It is true that writing in 1959 Jacobson presents a story of interaction across the colour bar that makes certain general points about human closeness and human difference. But to me, the concept of *caritas* is able better to explain the very individual relationship that develops between the Zulu and the Zeide, its surprising nature that turns the general upside down. To me, Jacobson's story is not 'of its time', rather it has an enduring, transcendent appeal that lends it fleeting greatness as literature, because he captures something unique that arrests us, that engages us ethically with his characters and their relationships. And I would argue that this has to do with the language of the body; of the embodiment, in this story, of habitus and of *caritas*.

Physical particulars make the relationships among the characters unique and moving. I would like to illustrate this by considering the several references to hands that occur in the story, because they qualify and supplement and sometimes substitute for verbal communication. Harry is an intense and an intensely repressed person, and his jabbing gestures, his tight hold on his wrists with elbows supporting his waist, his arms that seem to thrust away in the very act of reaching towards his father show his physical unease in relation to others. Paulus, when he first meets Harry, keeps his hands behind his back, but quite soon after this he is holding the old man's hand to cross a street, and both he and the old man use their hands to explain what they are talking about in their own languages. When Paulus is flustered at being castigated by Harry, 'his hands beat in the air, but with care, so that he would not touch his baas'. Unable to communicate with him in English, 'he brought both hands to his mouth, closing it forcibly', and then, remembering that Johannes can interpret for him, he flings his hands away. Stopped short from calling him, however, he can only 'open his hands in a gesture to show that he understood neither the words Harry used, nor in what way he had been remiss that Harry should have spoken in such angry tones to him' (174).

It is in the bathroom scene that the care he gives the old man is most strikingly rendered. In the running commentary that Paulus keeps up, in Zulu, he encourages the old man and exhorts him to be helpful, and expresses his pleasure in how well the work is going. Earlier I indicated how Harry's breakdown is presented from the point of view of the two Zulu men watching him. Intriguingly, given Harry's lack of patience with black people, but fittingly, given how verbal he is, we must infer here that the meaning of Paulus's commentary is translated for us by Harry. It is a delicate touch that gives his character depth and lends poignancy to his later loss of his father. As Harry watches, he sees that, 'The backs of Paulus's

hands were smooth and hairless, they were paler on the palms and at the fingernails, and they worked deftly about the body of the old man, who was submissive under their ministrations' (173). The old man, to Paulus, is work, but he is also a person, and it is in the grace that combines this recognition of him, this regard for him, that *caritas* is embodied.

Caritas, here, is transgression of *habitus*. Whereas Harry is prevented by habitual restraint from physically caring for, or even touching his father, the relationship between Paulus and the old man crosses the boundaries that ordinarily structure interaction between blacks and whites, between masters and servants, between men and men. And it is Harry's eye that registers this; Harry's tongue that renders it. In the Tracker advertisement with which I prefaced this essay, I noted the hands of the man that cradle the baby's head, and the hands of the child that clutch his arms. In this story, the hand that Paulus gives the old man embodies care; in his hands, the old man's humanity is secured.

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