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told in the camera close-up technique of first
person; Jo's in the long-distance one of third
person and through the recollecting minds of
Eeben and Beth. Then a part of Caroline's is
told through her letters, as are some parts of
Mafimane's. There are also Jo's memorial
flashbacks, which make the past not far away
and long ago, but a continuous, immediate
present. All these give the narrative the pace
and quality of a slow-motion picture in which
the camera lingers continuously on the faces
of the actors, to register their minute and
slowly changing emotions. The technique also
enjoys the reader to constantly adjust her/his
emotional involvement in the story, in addi-
tion to adding to its technical as well as the-
monic complexities. This is particularly ap-
prosite in a novel about time and memories, as
the title emphasises. As Beth surmises, 'memo-
ries were not the same as facts.... Without
memories facts were like the bricks of a de-
molished house. It was memories that held
them together, gave them shape, meaning'
p.88). Indeed, at another point, there is a brief
debate about the uses of memory between Beth
and Lettie. 'Old memories,' says, Lettie, 'are
like too much fat. They block the arteries.' No,
Beth disagrees, '...they're the oxygen in the
blood'(p.133). It is memories of their repressed
childhood, of their brutal father as symbol of
Afrikanerdom, that destroy first Eeben, and
then Jo. But then, it is also memory, a refusal
to sweep the past under the carpet of naive
forgiveness, that will save the future nation
from its horrendous past. Individuals like Jo,
Eeben and Mafimane may be crushed, but as
long as the nation is saved, their tragedies
would not have been in vain. At the group level,
the point that Andrie's story drives home is
that the Afrikaners have been as much dam-
aged by their oppression of others (to oppress
others, you have to repress yourself) as the
Black people; but that because they are the victimisers, their own damage has remained
repressed, hidden and unrecognised.

Written in a simple lyrical style that verges
on the poetic (especially in the numerous land-
scape descriptions), A Duty of Memory invites
reading as a political allegory, especially of its
numerous, obviously symbolic objects, actions
and episodes: the tape as hidden/repressed
memory which has to be brought out into the
open; the birth of Jo and Mafimane at the same
moment and together, plus the posthumous
combination of their names in Jomane Enter-
prises, both encapsulating the past and future
of South Africa; Jo's failed solo attempt to build
a memorial wall in the kraal and her dream of
Lettie (African), Beth (English) and Muller
(Boer) cooperating to build it, and many more.

Although holding the advantage of numeri-
cal superiority, Blacks in South Africa never
looked forward to the day when the Afrikaners
would be driven into the sea, even in the days
when war was considered the only option left
for achieving freedom. Literature of reconcili-
ation and racial integration has always poured
forth from them, and from the pens of Coloured
and Anglo-South African writers. Now that
Afrikaners like W.P.B. Botha are adding their
voice to this genre, we have reason to look for-
ward to a real attitudinal sea-change in the
country. For what A Duty of Memory shows is
that, beyond its political and economic mani-
festations, apartheid was fundamentally a re-
ligious doctrine.

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Reading Faces
Owen Logan

Roger Ballen, CETTE AFRIQUE LA, photo
Poche Societe, Paris, 1997. 55 pp

To summarise Roger Ballen's pho-
tographs in South
Africa involves in-
evitable simplifica-
tions. The pictures are for
the most part of white South Af-
ricans and have been made in
a way slightly reminiscent of
Diane Arbus. Extending the
parallel with north America
one might borrow the term
'white trash' which, although
harshly pejorative, doesn't
seem out of place when ap-
proaching the images. Lionel
Murcott's introduction to the
photo poche publication re-
marks on the 'atavistic' bleak-
ness to be found in these pic-
tures. Ballen has indeed
sought out a particular ver-
son of whiteness in South
Africa which may appear sub-
versive in the context of the
former apartheid regime. The
psychological sense which
Ballen has brought to the pic-
tures suggests perversely
damaged and fragmented
identities which seem to spit
on South Africa's former
white face. Many of the pic-
tures also suggest an unseen
violence which is more fright-
ening by its very absence. A-
part from the occasional
gun or truncheon, Ballen
draws on more ambiguous

Glendora Books Supplement

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props; soft porn posters and small pets, dogs of various sizes, domestic wiring and family pictures which all come together in this series to lead the viewer towards a view of increasingly internalised disturbance.

Ballen is quoted in Murcott's introduction, speaking metaphorically, of pinning a man against a wall to squeeze the essence out of him. The apparent brutality of Ballen's representation is tacitly exoneration within the framework of South Africa's racism, poor people rarely get this treatment by photographers unless they are also deemed to be scarily. Murcott's introduction raises the ghost of Heart of Darkness in which Joseph Conrad made Africans into savages only just aware of their own bitter suffering at the hands of a mercantile colonialism. Murcott goes on to say that Ballen's images stand at an ironic angle to that vision; 'the most basic, almost animalistic man can surface in any group or locality'. The introduction may be an ill service to the photographer given that the writer seems unaware of the more subtle post-colonial critiques of Conrad's novel and with these in mind the 'ironic angle' becomes an extremely acute one. Until Chinua Achebe's critique of Conrad's 'classic', Heart of Darkness had always been revered as English literature's great indictment of colonialism specifically on the basis of the novel's exposure of the colonialist's moral descent. Ballen's images conjure with the same kind of Conradian trauma leaving Africa as a domain against which civilisation may be measured. This Africa' is a place where Ballen's subjects are revealed in all their 'naked intensity', and the continuing suggestion in the text is that of a documentary process of unmasking. Colonial and settler mentalities have however, always been able to encompass their own 'savagery' and have revelled in notions of their own primality as a virtue of their supposed position at the vanguard of 'civilisation'.

It is difficult as a photographer to look at these pictures without being drawn into a comparison with David Goldblat's very different pictures about white South Africans. Where Ballen is bold Goldblatt is understated and looks to complexities of relationships and nuance both within and beyond the language of documentary. It would of course be unfair to suggest that one photographer should be more like another but looking at one of Ballen's pictures showing a couple with their small boy one senses a missed opportunity which begins to pervade the whole body of work. The picture made in a typically full frontal way shows a couple - a white car mechanic with his black wife, on a bed between them their small son sits with his legs apart and arms waving. Encountered here the family seem to be simply another aberration. The questions raised by the picture are largely overlooked in Ballen's pictures which fail to escape apartheid's categories of racialised identity but rather in an attempt to make a direct opposition ends up taking them at face value.

Logan, an independent photographer, has worked extensively in Morocco and Nigeria.