**Contributor: Craig MacKenzie**

**Entry: Bosman, Herman Charles (1905-1951)**

A short-story writer, novelist, poet and journalist, Bosman was born in Kuils River near Cape Town, but spent most of his life in the Transvaal, and it is the Transvaal milieu that features in almost all of his writings. He became known in the 1940s for his ‘Oom Schalk Lourens’ stories, and his use of this simple-seeming but wily narrator has ensured his place in South African literature as one of the country’s most enduring and best-loved storywriters. Schalk Lourens features in the short-story collections *Mafeking Road* (1947) and *Unto Dust* (1963), while Bosman’s prison memoir, *Cold Stone Jug* (1949), set the trend for this important genre in South Africa.

Bosman was educated at Jeppe Boys’ High School, the University of the Witwatersrand and Normal College, where he qualified as a teacher. In January 1926 he received a posting to the Groot Marico in the remote Western Transvaal, as it was known then. Despite its short duration, this stay later inspired almost all of his 150 short stories. In July 1926, on vacation at the family home in Johannesburg, he became embroiled in a family quarrel and shot and killed his step-brother David Russell. He was tried and sentenced to death – a sentence that was later commuted to imprisonment for ten years with hard labour. He eventually served four years of this sentence and was released on parole in August 1930.

Bosman then embarked on a series of journalistic ventures with Aegidius Jean Blignaut. The journals launched by the pair carried some literary material, including in the first edition of *The Touleier* (December 1930) Bosman’s first major Oom Schalk Lourens story, ‘Makapan’s Caves.’

In October 1932 Bosman married Ellaleen Manson and the two departed for London in 1934. For the next six-and-a-half years Bosman contributed a steady stream of stories and sketches for South African magazines, including ‘In the Withaak’s Shade’, ‘The Music Maker’ and perhaps his most famous story, ‘The Mafeking Road’, in 1935. In 1940 the Bosmans returned to South Africa, and in 1943 Bosman was appointed editor of a biweekly newspaper published in Pietersburg, in the then Northern Transvaal. This milieu provided the fictional settings of ‘Kalvyn’ in his first novel *Jacaranda in the Night* (1947) and ‘Willemsdorp’ in the novel of the same name (published posthumously in 1977). In 1944, after divorcing Ella, Bosman married Helena Stegmann, and began the most productive period of his career, producing some thirty bushveld stories and all of the nearly eighty ‘Voorkamer’ (‘parlour’) conversation pieces, which appeared regularly in the South African weekly *The Forum* until his sudden death from heart failure.

Bosman achieved a posthumous fame far greater than that achieved in his own lifetime. Numerous editions of his stories and essays have appeared over the years, and between 1998 and 2005 his works were completely re-edited and re-released in fourteen volumes. Many of his stories contain references to events that are staple items in Boer folk history, including the two Anglo–Boer wars and the various skirmishes between the Boer communities and African tribes. His stories contain a highly distinctive combination of humour and pathos, and their enduring interest to the South African public has ensured Bosman’s place in the canon of South African literature.

**References and further reading**

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**List of works**

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