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A Children's Crusade against Apartheid? Gunnar Helander's *Den vite mannens stövel*

Few countries participated more consistently or more vociferously than Sweden in the international campaign against apartheid between its imposition following the National Party's accession to power in 1948 and the dismantling of that system of racist social engineering during the early 1990s, and no Swedish *littérateur* exhibited greater prolificacy in this regard than Gunnar Helander (b. 1915). Between 1949 and 1986 he published no fewer than seven novels set in South Africa. The outspoken erstwhile missionary to the Zulus also wrote a children's geographical presentation of troubled South African society in the early 1960s, and for decades he frequently contributed articles to the Swedish press about political and social issues in South Africa. Helander also used television and radio when taking up the verbal cudgels against apartheid. During much of this time he was closely affiliated with the legendary Anglican cleric and activist Trevor Huddleston (1913-1998) through his service as a vice president of the International Defence and Aid Fund, an organisation which provided legal assistance to South Africans and others who fell foul of the legal system undergirding apartheid. In harmony with his stature in this international campaign, several of his novels were translated into German, English, and other languages. To date, however, surprisingly little of a scholarly nature has been published

either in Sweden or abroad about Helander's literary output,¹ and virtually nothing has appeared about his efforts to inform Swedish children and adolescents about racial politics in South Africa. It is the purpose of the present article to take steps towards redressing the latter aspect of this neglect by analysing the presentation of race relations in his penultimate and prize-winning novel of 1980, *Den vite mannens stövel*.

Critical reception of this work was generally laudatory, and its significance as a response to contemporary tensions in South African race relations did not escape critics. Reviewing it in *Svenska Dagbladet*, Ingrid Schöler praised Helander's treatment of contemporary South Africa as exceptionally good reading, warmly humane, and written with gripping irony. She called attention to his willingness to take a definite political stand on issues which she thought were an atavism from the colonial past which could endure only in that society. Clearly swayed by the discussion of political problems in *Den vite mannens stövel*, this critic did not comment on such artistic matters as Helander's characterisation of the ethnic groups concerned.² In *Göteborgs-Posten*, Margot Nilson judged Helander's penultimate novel to be particularly engaging and thought it no less appropriate for adults than for younger readers. Calling attention to Helander's status as a *persona non grata* in South Africa, she underscored his first-hand knowledge of its tribulations. Nilson cited his portrayal of the Afrikaners as evidence of his insight into the ethnic actors in the drama of oppression being played out at the southern tip of Africa.³ In retrospect, one gains the impression that

¹ Frederick Hale, "Urban Apartheid and Racial Stereotypes in Gunnar Helander's *Storstadsneger*", *Scandinavian Studies*, LXVI, no. 1 (Winter 1994), pp. 68-91, remains an exception to this generalisation.

² Ingrid Schöler, "Spännande för lite äldre", *Svenska Dagbladet* (Stockholm), 19 November 1990, ix.

³ Margot Nilson, "Detta händer i Sydafrika i dag", *Göteborgs-Posten*, 19 November 1980, p. 2.

the political correctness of this novel in the Sweden of 1980 was the determining factor in shaping critical perceptions of it.

This fictional reconstruction of South African life, which Helander regarded as his best novel,⁴ stood near the *terminus ad quem* of a crescendo of political radicalisation in his fiction which spanned nearly forty years. Before the Nationalists came to power under Prime Minister François Daniel Malan in 1948, Helander evinced little interest in promoting racial equality in the Union of South Africa. Indeed, when he first returned to Sweden after spending nearly a decade as a missionary in rural Natal, and was asked after delivering a lecture in Lund what the answer to South Africa's "race problem" was, he replied that he could have given an incisive answer nine years earlier as a newcomer in that country, but that was no longer the case. The longer one lived in South Africa, he stated, the more complicated it seemed to become. Helander thought it at least worth asking whether it was necessarily a consequence of the Christian faith to insist categorically on equal rights for everyone, regardless of race or educational level. The prospect of black majority rule did not seem appealing to him at that time, and he is not known to have commented publicly in Sweden on the revolutionary events of 1948 which drastically altered the political landscape of South Africa. Helander thought that granting suffrage to indigenes who could pass an examination was an option worth considering but did not commit himself to it. He also questioned the wisdom of expropriating white-owned farms in the interest of more equitable land tenure, as to him it appeared uncertain that blacks could responsibly manage the nation's food production.⁵

This cautious attitude gradually changed during the following decade after Helander's return to an increasingly disputatious South Africa and his transfer from rural Natal to the political cauldron of

⁴ Interview with Gunnar Helander, Uppsala, 29 November 1990.

⁵ Gunnar Helander, "Missionen som folkförsonare i Sydafrika", *Den Evangeliska Missionen*, CII, nos. 8-9 (August-September 1948), pp. 113-118.

Johannesburg. His first three novels, *Zulu möter vit man* (1949), *Endast för vita* (1951), and *Svart symfoni* (1952) dealt, respectively, with the plights of indigenous Africans, Indians, and Coloureds in a racially stratified society, and in all of these works he considered at length white attitudes towards racial pluralism. In *Storstadsneger* (1955) Helander addressed the social conditions of urbanised blacks on the Witwatersrand and sought to come to grips with aspects of racism in generalised Swedish thinking about ethnic groups. After a second furlough in 1956, when he wrote extensively about apartheid and related matters in the Stockholm press, this steadily more outspoken critic of the Nationalist government concluded that he could no longer function freely in South Africa, so he declined to return to that country in the short term. Indeed, his absence from it lasted until 1991, *i.e.* a year after the release of Nelson Mandela during the transitional period to a post-apartheid society. With increasing stridency, Helander castigated the ongoing series of laws which undergirded white supremacy; oppressive and condescending attitudes towards other ethnic groups, police brutality, lack of due process of law, and other ills in South Africa. In his novel of 1959, *Det nya kom från negern*, he envisaged a future civil war of liberation there, and by 1986, in his final fictional work about that country, *Uppdrag Zulu*, Helander called for international subversion of the government of P.W. Botha. To a considerable extent the evolution of Helander's attitude towards race relations in South Africa resonated in phase with that of Swedish opinion generally, at least that expressed in the editorial columns of the major newspapers, government policies towards South Africa, and statements made by such organisations as the Social Democratic Party and the Church of Sweden.

In terms of its position towards apartheid, *Den vite mannens stövel* clearly stands near the terminal pole of Helander's attitudinal evolution. Its plot begins to unfold in December 1979, *i.e.* the year after Botha succeeded B.J. Vorster as State President, when Josef Ma-

sondo, a young Zulu teacher at a boarding school for blacks near Durban, returns to the farm at New Hanover of Piet Vermaak, where his economically vulnerable parents are squatters. That Afrikaans farmer announces that henceforth Josef's mother must work in his manor and that Josef must also donate his labour on the farm during his Christmas vacation if the Masondos are to continue to reside on his land. After a few days of unremunerated toil, the politically conscious Josef chooses to give up his teaching post and join the anti-apartheid struggle in Johannesburg. At the railway station in New Hanover, however, he has a brush with corrupt Zulu policemen and flees on foot. Within hours a Swedish journalist, Martin Svensson, who has been involved in unspecified subversive activities and fears imminent deportation, assists a compatriot missionary named Lundberg in picking up the hitchhiking Masondo, who articulates from his perspective the woes confronting South Africa. Confident that this new contact can lead to interesting articles for his newspaper, the foreigner gives him a lift in a hired car to the City of Gold. There Svensson takes the young refugee, whose pass the police have confiscated, to the home of a Jewish lawyer named Moses Katzenellenbogen. This dissident, whose antipathy towards racial oppression stems from his childhood experience in the Third Reich, illegally harbours the young Zulu. The following day, however, the police raid Katzenellenbogen's home and detain him without trial for long-standing activities unrelated to Masondo, whom they also arrest for failing to produce a pass. In their zeal to get Katzenellenbogen convicted, the police torture the erstwhile teacher into signing a disingenuous confession implicating that lawyer in a supposed international communist plot against the South African government. At Katzenellenbogen's trial, however, Masondo retracts his confession, and the judge dismisses the fabricated case. Katzenellenbogen and his wife flee to the United Kingdom in order to escape reprisals from the police; Svensson returns to Stockholm and writes articles about

the affair; and Masondo is convicted and sentenced to three years' imprisonment for violation of the pass laws, illegally entering Johannesburg, attempting to assault policemen, and carrying a deadly weapon. He emerges from his incarceration further embittered and chooses to devote his life to "The Struggle" as an operative of a British-based anti-apartheid organisation cryptically called the "RLU", which, according to Helander, is a pseudonym for the International Defence and Aid Fund.⁶ *Den vite mannens stövel* concludes on a defiant note of optimism that victory over apartheid is imminent. In fact, of course, it lay more than a decade in the future.

In the broad contours of his narrative, Helander thus broaches a fairly broad palette of South African issues which had received international attention by 1980, such as apartheid in general, the detested pass laws, police corruption, detention without trial, and physical abuse of political prisoners. All of these concerns, it should be emphasised, had long been on the agenda of International Defence and Aid. But beyond this obvious pedagogical dimension in *Den vite mannens stövel*, Helander includes a motivational one by underscoring the specifically Swedish intervention in Josef Masondo's case and, by extension, in the anti-apartheid struggle generally. The lesson for young Swedish readers could hardly have been more explicit: one can contribute to the liberationist cause from the other side of the world.

In *Den vite mannens stövel* one finds a replay of a dominant *Leitmotiv* in Helander's fiction, namely the demonisation of the Afrikaners. No more than in his previous works can the members of this section of the South African population do anything praiseworthy. Helander's Afrikaners are the embodiment of racism, cultural decadence, human degeneracy, reactionary politics, police brutality, a corrupt judiciary, and a general inability or unwillingness to come

⁶ Frederick Hale Private Archives, Gunnar Helander correspondence, Gunnar Helander (Uddevalla) to Frederick Hale, 28 July 1993.

to grips with the modern world. Given Helander's frustrations with the glacial pace of social and political reform under an Afrikaans-dominated government in South Africa and his personal clashes with personnel at the South African Legation in Stockholm during the latter half of the 1950s, his propensity for depicting Afrikaners in negative terms is understandable. At times, however, his portrayal of them as the negative pole in his Manichaean dualistic gallery of characters degenerates into what appears to be a personal vendetta which severely distorts reality and thereby detracts from whatever artistic merit this book might otherwise have.

The hapless Vermaaks are Helander's principal target in this regard, although they are not the only Afrikaners at whom he aims his poisoned rhetorical arrows. He dwells on the physical appearance of the Vermaaks as well as their conversation and behaviour amongst themselves to paint a thoroughly unflattering picture of these representatives of rural Afrikanerdom. Helander deals with Piet Vermaak relatively briefly, having devoted a few pages to him in relation to the Masondos and the prisoners on his private farm earlier in the novel. Within the privacy of his home, this man eats prodigiously, loosening the belt around his "välfyllda mage" and lighting his pipe after each meal (p. 30). He is an unmodern farmer; not only does he ride a horse, but he even refuses to buy a tractor. Such an investment seems rash compared to the low cost of maintaining a staff of fifteen labourers on his farm. His son, Willem, is a similarly uninspired and uninspiring bucolic Afrikaner. His formal education ended when he completed primary school. The most exciting weeks of Willem's year are the army camps at which he and others who have completed their spells of active duty shoot firearms, drink beer, and discuss the defence of white South Africa from its perceived enemies. His intellectual interests, like those of his parents, are nil:

Ingen i familjen läste böcker. Det behövdes inte.
Utlänningarna hade ju ändå fel. Regeringarna hade satt flera

tusen böcker på svarta listan och det bevisade att det mesta som skrevs var dumt och vilseledande, ett verk av klåfingriga liberaler eller upprorsmakare utan respekt för den goda ordningen. (pp. 32-33)

Helander saves his sharpest words - and there are many of them - for Vermaak's utterly degenerate spouse, Annekie, placing numerous signs on her. Her physical appearance is entirely rotund. Like many of her fellow Afrikaans women, Helander, insists, she is "enormous in the waist" and not only there:

Fingrarna såg ut som korvar och runt om handlederna hade hon veck som en baby. [...] Halsen var obetydligt smalare än huvudet och den väldiga barmen vilade tungt mot magen. (p. 30)

This corpulent woman lives to eat and drink. She begins with a relatively early breakfast at 7h00, continues with tea and biscuits at 9h30, consumes a large lunch consisting of meat, maize meal bread and peaches at 12h30, has coffee and pastries at 16h00 after her daily siesta, and enjoys brandy and soda or gin and tonic as sundowners at 18h00. The family then partakes of its calorific evening dinner, washing it down with beer. Dessert consists of pudding and, on occasion, port wine. When neighbours call on the Vermaaks in the evening, there are rounds of Castle beer or apricot brandy (p. 31).

The other Afrikaners in *Den vite mannens stövel* are all police or judicial officials, *i.e.* defenders of white supremacy in South Africa. All are negatively depicted, although not equally so. Helander describes the policeman who inspects Lundberg's car in search of Masondo in condescending terms as an "insecure and childish" novice who "tried to look severe". However naïve this constable may be, he makes no effort to disguise his racist demeanour. "Wie is die kaffer daar agter?" [*i.e.* "Who is the kaffer back there?"], he asks Lundberg upon spotting Masondo in the back seat. Helander

subsequently describes him as “den unge boerpojken” and explains that his attempts to “karska upp sig och tala i kommandoton” are a failure (p. 57).

The members of the Special Branch who search Katzenellenbogen’s house in Johannesburg and arrest him are anything but apprehensive rookies, however. They march into the building, proceed to ransack the rooms, and brusquely tell Katzenellenbogen that he is under arrest. Helander resorts to his imagery of degeneracy in describing the Afrikaner in charge of this group of men simply as “den fete”, an appellation which he repeats four times in the space of three pages. Helander also emphasises that this leader “talade engelska med boernas gutturala tonfall och hårda r-ljud” (pp. 90-93).

The two Afrikaners who subsequently interrogate Josef, namely Rossouw and Snyman, are sadistic and apparently paranoid fanatics who have no sense of justice but are thoroughly dedicated to the cause of maintaining white supremacy in South Africa. Rossouw refuses to believe that Masondo knows virtually nothing about Katzenellenbogen and, presuming guilt, repeatedly insists that the young Zulu declare that Katzenellenbogen is an agent of a terrorist organisation. His colleague Snyman does not hesitate to beat Josef in the head and face as punishment for refusing to pronounce a disingenuous admission of guilt. A third Afrikaans police official reinforces this image of Afrikaner racism and paranoia by calling Josef “lille nigger” and “lille kaffer”. He insists that “vi vill inte åt er nigrer, bara ni lyder”. The real enemy, this policeman informs Josef, is “vita som snackar om FN och svartas rösträtt och sånt där dravel” (p. 97).

The prosecutor in the Katzenellenbogen case also conforms to the prevailing stereotype of Afrikanerdom that Helander helps to sustain. Bearing the same surname as the mounted policeman who accompanies Piet Vermaak and beats Josef early in the novel, Uys, he conducts himself “ceremoniöst och oljigt, salvelsefull som en

predikant”. Moreover, this officer of the court is self-assured; pausing for a glass of water during his opening statement, he believes that his remarks are convincing. As he looks around the courtroom, however, he notices no signs that anyone has actually been persuaded. Perhaps reflecting Helander’s memory from the 1940s that some Afrikaners openly supported Hitler during the Second World War, Uys makes a very thinly veiled reference to Katzenellenbogen’s Jewishness in seeking to undermine whatever presumption of the accused’s innocence there may be on the part of the judge (p.105).

This may not be necessary. Helander tells us little about the judge, merely that his name is Henrik de Villiers and that he is “en av de unga och nitiska och nyttnämnda som regeringen kunde lita på”, as opposed to his less obedient, Anglophone colleagues on the bench who were not fully beholden to the National Party regime (p. 105). The concept of an independent, apolitical judiciary seems entirely foreign to Helander’s perception of Afrikaans-dominated justice in South Africa.

The indigenous African characters in *Den vite mannens stövel* are a much less homogenous lot than the Afrikaners in terms of cultural development, moral standards, and political ideology, but they too are, for the most part, stereotypes who reflect positions in the racial conflict rather than appearing as carefully limned human beings. To be sure, there are exceptions, beginning with the Masondo family. From the outset Helander underscores the essential cultural differences separating them from one another. The otherness of Bekidlozi Masondo stands out in bold relief, sharply contrasting with the cultural values of his son, his son’s wife, and Helander himself, who portrays him and his living conditions in repulsive terms. The elder Masondo is captive to traditional Zulu culture, particularly its animism. When his Westernised son returns from Durban, where he teaches at a mission school, to the kraal for Christmas vacation wearing a suit, he enters a different world. On the first page of *Den*

vite mannens stövel Helander emphasises this contrast by commenting on Josef's fine clothing and how he has to remove his shoes to protect them from the mud at the kraal. In another morsel of too apparent symbolism, Josef must stoop to pass through a door hardly a metre high to enter his father's hut. Inside the atmosphere is heavy with smoke, while the floor is dirty and provides a habitat for "en här av kackerlackor" (p. 7). Bekidlozi Masondo fits this environment no less well than do the insects with whom he co-exists:

Gubben visste ingenting, kunde ingenting, tänkte ingenting. Smutsig var han och insmord med kofett mot solen, och det hade han aldrig råd att tvätta bort. När arbetet var slut, satt han bara och stirrade in i elden och lät tiden gå. Illa luktade han. (p. 7)

Bekidlozi's beliefs and values are no less foreign to Swedish readers than are his nauseating appearance and surroundings. When Josef suggests that his father consider moving, the old man replies, "Flytta? Vart? Här bor mina fäder. De finns här runt om i hyddan. De är begravda under isibayan, där korna står. Jag måste stanna hos dem" (p. 8). Bekidlozi opposes his son's plans to return to the Durban area permanently and invokes his animistic beliefs to justify this hostility. "Du kommer väl säkert igen?" he asks Josef.

Din farfars ande var här förra veckan. Han kom som en grön mamba och kröp över gården. Jag tror inte han tycker om att du är borta härifrån. Han vill att det ska bli vid det gamla. (p. 10)

The elder Masondo is the diametrical opposite of politically conscious black South Africans and does not find intrinsic value in human life. He has considered killing his first wife, the ageing Nokusuza whom he married after her husband, Bekidlozi's older brother, died. This willingness to terminate her life, we read, is in harmony with venerated Zulu custom. As Josef's mother relates

the matter, Bekidlozi argues that it should not be wrong to kill a person if it is right to kill an animal (p. 14). Through his portrayal of this unsympathetic character, Helander makes clear his conviction that traditional tribal folkways, in curious tandem with white oppression, retard the cultural advancement of the Zulus and, in turn, militate against the anti-apartheid struggle. This is also expressed through the words and thoughts of Masondo's modernised son.

Helander does not attempt to portray Josef as a Zulu in name only who has become thoroughly Europeanised, but he emphasises the distance which exposure to European-South African ways has placed between this young man and his tribal culture. As already mentioned, this begins with a description of his clothing as he approaches his family's kraal. Inside his father's hut, Josef feels physically uncomfortable because he has forgotten how to sit as conventional Zulu men do without the benefit of furniture. He feels caught between two cultures. Josef thinks that the situation at the kraal is "eländigt". "Här hör jag inte hemma", he believes,

och när skolan är slut, finns det ingen plats för mig i den vite mannens värld heller. De lyfter oss upp ur hedenhös, men så släpper de oss igen. Vi bryter upp från det gamla men når aldrig det nya. (p. 7)

Josef's differing relationships with his parents underscore his feeling of alienation from both worlds and foreshadows his participation in the international campaign against apartheid. However distant he feels from his father's world, he reveres his mother, Nomusa, and indeed regards her as his best friend. The two are the only literate people in the family, and they sometimes speak English with each other. Nomusa's appearance symbolises her partial break with tribal customs. She does not wear skins but rather a tattered cotton dress. Her hands are clean, and her face is not coated with cow fat. As Helander puts it, "Själv hade hon gått åtta år i

skolan och befann sig i utvecklingen cirka tretusen år före sin man. Hon passade inte bland de gamla andarna" (pp. 12-13). Although as a married woman Nomusa is essentially trapped in the life of the kraal, she has an outlet in Josef, her pride and joy, who is "trösten i hennes liv, enda fönstret mot den stora världen" (p. 13). One gains the impression that if his father would evince some measure of cultural flexibility, Josef could improve his mother's lot significantly.

Opportunistic blacks who not merely tolerated white supremacy but actively undergirded it by assisting whites by oppressing fellow Africans long impeded the struggle against apartheid and added a frustrating element to the disunity which tribalism, religious pluralism, economic disparities, and other factors which militated against a co-ordinated effort against the government. Helander first introduces adolescent Swedes to this theme in his description of Motlaung, the exploitative foreman on Vermaak's farm. This character is thus problematical not merely because he is a Basuto rather than a Zulu, but also because he imitates his white master by promoting his own interests through mistreatment of indigenous agricultural labourers. He arrives at the Vermaak farm, confidently declares that he knows how to keep "niggers" in their place, and suggests without reservation that he be hired as a foreman. Bolstering his own case, he informs Vermaak, ingenuously or otherwise, that he has been a guard at a gaol in the Transvaal but lost his post there when there was an investigation after the suspicious death of a prisoner. Vermaak hires him on the spot. Motlaung's cruelty, symbolised *inter alia* by his custom of carrying a whip made of hippopotamus hide, the infamous *sjambok* which long served as a literary sign of police brutality in South Africa, immediately drives a wedge of animosity between him and the labourers whom he oversees, including Josef Masondo. Indeed, Motlaung both envies and resents this particular Zulu's educational background and relatively cultured demeanour. When some of the labourers complain to Motlaung that their blankets are full of lice and consequently they cannot sleep soundly, he

responds by striking their spokesman with his whip.

The only other black people who play significant rôles in *Den vite mannens stövel* are even more explicitly collaborators with the white power system, namely the two police constables in New Hanover who illegally take Josef's pass and try to advance their careers by arresting him on false pretences. They subsequently perjure themselves in court against Josef, thereby sending him to prison for three years. Helander calls these two men "quislingarna" (p. 110), a term whose abominable political connotations immediately brand them as villains and which reveals their place in the social ethical scheme of this novel. They nowhere emerge as realistic individuals but merely play a functionary part as representatives of the detested collaborator element which impedes black liberation in South Africa.

All in all, in *Den vite mannens stövel* Helander does go beyond prevailing Swedish stereotypes of black Africans, including those which he helped to create in his earlier works. There is an enormous difference between the behaviour of the Africans in this novel and that of those of the politically inactive, sexually licentious, and otherwise mischievous young Zulus in, for example, *Storstadsneger*. Nevertheless, Helander apparently finds it difficult to emerge fully from preconceived notions, perhaps owing to his absence from South Africa for approximately a quarter of a century when he wrote this work. At one extreme stands - or squats - Bekidlozi Masondo, who lives in squalor, believes firmly in the spirits of his ancestors embodied in snakes, and desires to kill his most burdensome wife. At the other is his son, the principal hero and protagonist of this novel, who is fairly well-educated and a Christian, has a progressive outlook on life, and is committed to the cause of black liberation in South Africa. Between these poles, but clearly much closer to her enlightened son, is Nomusa Masondo, whom Helander portrays as a fully sympathetic figure. The black villains are obviously Motlaung and the two corrupt Zulu po-

licemen in New Hanover, all of whose misdeeds are linked to collaboration with oppressive whites.

It is enlightening to compare the depiction of black South Africans in this novel with that in Helander's previous works. Continuities are found in his censorious attitude towards non-Christian blacks, especially their veneration of ancestral spirits, their coercion of women into unwanted marriages, and, to some extent, their loyalty to tribal rituals and the practices of the *sangoma*, or traditional healer. Discontinuities, either partial or full, which reflect greater respect for black South Africans are the relatively brief discussion of negatively depicted folkways, the absence of mob violence, a highly sympathetic portrayal of Josef Masondo, and the absence of unrestrained sexual activity. Consciously or otherwise, Helander's treatment of indigenous Africans continues to be a justification for Christian missions.

How do the Swedes in *Den vite mannens stövel* fare under Helander's pen after two decades of hibernation? In his earlier novels they are a morally, emotionally, and spiritually mixed lot, stretching from racists in *Big City Zulu* to the embittered victim Erik Forss in *Endast för vita* to the semi-pietistic missionary Fredrik Örn. Some are quite ignorant of conditions in South Africa, despite years of residence there, while others, perhaps most notably the veteran female missionary Agda Frykenstam, have an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of traditional Zulu folkways. Generally speaking these Swedish aliens in South Africa evince little concern about political change in the country, although some, especially Örn and his colleague Halvdan Knutson, are defenders of individual oppressed blacks both in Zululand and on the Witwatersrand. In this respect Helander's Swedes very generally reflect Swedish attitudes towards South Africa during the 1940s and 1950s.

But Swedish public opinion, especially as indicated by journalistic stances, changed notably during the course of the 1950s as the public became more conscious of South African politics, and to a

great degree it became quite radically opposed to apartheid during the years of the Verwoerd and Vorster regimes of the 1960s and 1970s. Helander, of course, participated in the formation of public attitudes during those decades, and his Swedish fictional characters of the 1980s vividly reflect this transformation.

Most of the Swedes in *Den vite mannens stövel* are obviously on the heroic side of a simplified ledger, although their rôles are minor ones. Helander consciously keeps the limelight primarily on Josef and uses the Swedes as supporting actors in his cast. Their significance lies entirely in relation to him and, by extension, their modest contribution to the anti-apartheid movement. This is even the case with Helander's presumably ageing spokesman, Fredrik Örn, who was already a seasoned missionary when he made his debut in Helander's first novel some thirty-one years earlier. Örn's only two purposes in the present work are to remind a newcomer to the field that times have changed and that one must treat the Zulus with more deference than was previously the case, and to express Helander's understanding of the sole legitimate function of missionaries in contemporary South Africa.

Lundberg and Svensson, missionary and journalist, respectively, are thus the only Swedes on whom Helander concentrates on page after page. In light of the author's campaign in Sweden since the 1950s, it is not coincidental that Swedish members of these two professions co-operate in opposing racial oppression. Of the two, the former is more positively depicted. Among other things, he assists Josef in the first place, understands that the broadcast warning about this Zulu fugitive from the law is severely distorted, and has established himself as a foe of the South African government. "Jag är inte född i går", he remarks to the others (p. 54). Lundberg converses intelligently with Josef before leaving the narrative when the three men arrive in Dundee. One suspects that Lundberg is a projection of Helander, who had been unable to enter South Africa for more than two decades but whose desire to undermine apartheid

had become intense. This projection would reach its zenith six years later in his final South African novel, *Uppdrag Zulu*.

Svensson is also portrayed in a generally favourable light, but less so than Lundberg. Initially one could gain the impression that this journalist's interest in aiding Josef is exclusively in getting a sensational story to advance his own career. That this remains part of his motivation for remaining involved in the case seems beyond dispute. Yet Svensson establishes his moral credibility through other means. When he drives from Dundee to Johannesburg with Josef, he refuses to enter a racially segregated roadside restaurant from which his passenger would be excluded and instead buys sausages and cold drinks which the two consume together under a jacaranda tree near Volksrust (p. 63). This incident reflects Helander's regrets about his own willingness to leave black colleagues in the Christian ministry outside restaurants while he went in to dine during the 1950s.⁷ Otherwise, Svensson is not particularly well informed about South Africa, and some of his comments reveal a natural ignorance about black South Africans' resentment about being told what the whites can do for them, but this journalist has the sensitivity to ask Josef whether he has inadvertently stepped on his toes with any of his questions and remarks (p. 68). After Svensson returns to Stockholm, he writes the previously mentioned articles about Josef's case which are subsequently published in prominent British and American newspapers. This, of course, harmonises fully with the popular Swedish attitude towards contributing to the anti-apartheid movement from afar. Yet Helander is careful not to canonise Svensson. Illicit sexuality is a recurrent sign of moral imperfection in Helander's novels, and in Svensson's case it finds expression in his interest in becoming romantically involved with Katzenellenbogen's attractive French wife while her husband is in police custody.

⁷ Interview with Gunnar Helander, Uppsala, 30 November 1990.

Svensson's personal activity in the Masondo and Katzenellenbogen cases is a catalyst for international intervention and serves as one of Helander's means of prompting readers to become involved in the contemporary South African struggle. The minister of justice in Pretoria particularly fears publicity surrounding especially the incarceration of the Jewish lawyer for 180 days without trial, as the responses it would prompt pose a lethal threat to the vulnerable apartheid regime. He thinks:

Blev det känt att en oppositionsman lästes in på obestämd tid, kunde man vara spiksäker på att det kom en jämn ström av brev från Amnesty folk i England och Sverige och Holland och andra länder [...] och ideliga tal i FN, och artiklar och förslag till bojkott och förbud mot investeringar och annat elände. (p. 108)

It is a stirring if indirect call for greater action of the sort which the International Defence and Aid Fund had long advocated.

Den vite mannens stövel is thus no less a motivational than an educational work, one in which young Swedes are obliquely challenged to join the campaign against apartheid which had begun in Sweden on a small scale during the early 1950s, gained increasing momentum after the forced removals from Sophiatown in 1955 and the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 received extensive virtually worldwide publicity, and accelerated during the 1960s and 1970s in harmony with international endeavours to pressure the governments of H.F. Verwoerd, B.J. Vorster, and P.W. Botha through economic, diplomatic, and other means into effecting noteworthy reforms. Helander's sixth novel cannot be said to have broken virgin soil by placing South African race relations before the eyes of young Swedish readers; by the time it was published it was not uncommon for them to have been taught *Nkosi sikelel' I Afrika*, the acknowledged anthem of the black protest movements in South Africa, to cite but one illustration of this educational effort. But in

Swedish literary history *Den vite mannens stövel* did break new ground as the first noteworthy lengthy fictional presentation of apartheid for adolescents. In the context of Helander's nearly forty-year authorship regarding South Africa, it is particularly remarkable that in this work he created more politically mature black characters but sacrificed the Afrikaners wholesale on the altar of propaganda. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, in *Storstadsneger* he explicitly lamented ethnic stereotyping but nevertheless engaged in it repeatedly.⁸ His creation of characters, especially Afrikaners, in *Den vite mannens stövel* demonstrates that a quarter-century later he was still utterly prone to such caricaturing, although it now proceeded not from deeply ingrained attitudes towards black South Africans but from antipathy to the National Party regime and its lackeys who frustrated decades of international efforts to undermine apartheid.

⁸ Hale, "Urban Apartheid and Racial Stereotypes in Gunnar Helander's *Storstadsneger*".