

## Literary Tourism in the Karoo - Darryl David

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### Summary

#### **THE KAROO**

The Karoo stretches about 600 km from Calvinia in the west to Cradock in the east, and also about 600 km from Marydale in the north to Calitzdorp in the south. There are at three main sub-regions: The Nama-Karoo (northern parts), the Klein-Karoo (southern parts), and the False Karoo (in southern Free State). It straddles four provinces. These areas have different climatic features, which has led to different agricultural and population profiles. There are at least 66 towns which are located within the Karoo, or on its borders:

##### ***Nama Karoo:***

*Northern Cape:* Calvinia, Williston, Carnarvon, Vosburg, Prieska, Hopetown, Britstown, De Aar, Victoria West, Fraserburg, Richmond, Colesberg, Orania, Phillipstown, Petrusville, Hutchinson, Douglas, Griquatown, Sutherland, Loxton, Williston, Hanover, Strydenburg, Marydale.

*Eastern Cape:* Noupoort, Middelburg, Graaff-Reinet, Nieu-Bethesda, Cradock, Aberdeen, Steytlerville, Pearston, Somerset East (bordering on Midlands), Willowmore, Cookhouse, Venterstad, Hofmeyr, Steynsburg (bordering on Sneeu-berg), Klipplaat

*Western Cape:* Beaufort West, Laingsburg, Matjiesfontein, Murraysburg, Prince Alberg, Leeu-Gamka, Merweville, Tankwa-Karoo area (north of Tulbagh).

***False Karoo (Skynkaroo):*** *Free State:* Philippolis, Fauresmith, Luckhoff, Koffiefontein, Oppermansgronde, Bethulie, Gariep Dam, Springfontein,

### Introduction

*Alongside the prophets and queens, storytellers - dreamers, travellers, thinkers, life's legendary witnesses - are mankind's original celebrities, the ones we have carried in our hearts throughout the ages, cherishing their works, teaching their names to our children and our children's children : Virgil, Homer, Ovid, Plato, Dante, William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, Leo Tolstoy, Federico Garcia Lorca, to name but a few from the canon. Their fame is inseparable from Western civilisation's glory... ( Shacochis in Brooks :2000)*

*If there is any universal truth about writers, it is that they are place bound. In every sense .*

*A writers place colours the voice with which he [sic] writes; his origins provide the rooms, the streets and the faces that his imagination worked into art. ... ( Eisenberg in Butler Adam, 1990 : 28 )*

This semioticization of space is achieved primarily through language, through the practice of naming, classifying and mapping. ( Sienaert et al : 1996: 92-96 ).

Culler ( 1998:15), on the other hand, sees all tourists as " agents of semiotics: all over the world they are engaged in reading cities, landscapes and cultures as sign systems" In the discourse on literary tourism, the reading of space into place is usually a positive one, all in the name of the commodification of literature for tourists. Very often, the landscape is romanticized. This is what Tuan(1974) refers to as *topophilia*- a love of landscape. Even when the relationship is one of *topophobia*, ( a fear or hatred of landscape), such dislike of landscape can be utilised to highlight socio- historical problems that inform the novel.

In literary tourism, the transformation of space into place can be explained by what Rojek refers to as *indexing and dragging*. According to Rojek et al ( 1997: 52 - 74 ) , a tourist site may be defined as ' a spatial location which is distinguished from everyday life by virtue of its natural, historical or cultural extraordinariness '. Urry ( 1990: 11 ) argues that tourist sights are predicated in a binary opposition between the ordinary/ everyday and the extraordinary, and that this opposition is culturally constructed. Examples of such spatial locations and objects are the Niagra Falls, Table Mountain and the Taj Mahal, to mention but a few.

Rojek goes on to explain that myth and fantasy play a large role in the social construction of all tourist sights.. As Urry (1990:11-12) expresses this point: " Spatially speaking then, travel experience involves mobility through an internal landscape which is sculptured by personal experience and cultural influences ...'. Related to this last point is the point which is central to my comparison. The cultural significance of sights ' engender representational cultures which increase the accessibility of the sight in everyday life. Rojek speaks of an index of representation. By this, he means a range of signs, images and symbols which make the sight familiar to us . Rojek goes on to make the point that representational culture is not a uniform entity. He speaks about 'files of representation. ' A file of representation refers to the medium and conventions associated with signifying a sight. Thus, examples of files of representation relevant to literary tourist culture would be travellers tales, printed texts in the form of travel flyers, brochures, as well as intertextual novels and poems associated with Joyce's Dublin ; Wordsworth's poetry of the Lake District; Sir Laurens van der Post's Bushman of the Kalahari.

Rojek also notes that metaphorical, allegorical and even false information remains a resource in the pattern of tourist culture as an object of reverie, dreaming and speculation.. This last point alludes to the social construction or framing of tourist sights.

Another useful concept introduced by Rojek is that of *dragging*. The term dragging refers to the combination of elements from separate files of representation to create a new value. This is accomplished through tourist marketing, advertising, cinematic use of key sights and travellers tales. Rojek uses the example of the *Schindler's List* tour that has operated in the Polish town of Krakow since 1994. Spielberg used Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter of Krakow as the setting for his film. Tour guides frame the history of the area in terms of set

pieces from the film. Thus, we say that cinematic events are dragged on to the physical landscape, and the physical landscape then gets reinterpreted in terms of the cinematic events. It is interesting to note that Kazimierz only became a tourist hot-spot after the film. In other words, the film transformed Kazimierz into an extraordinary place, a place worth visiting. Moreover, it is worth noting that the film took place not only in Kazimierz, but also in the Podgorze ghetto on the other side of the river Vistula and in the nearby Plaszow concentration camp. This is a perfect example of how distortion, myth, and fabrication operate in the social construction of tourist sights.

In the context of South Africa, I suppose Sir Laurens van der Post's stories about the Bushmen did for Philippolis what Spielberg did for Kazimierz.

### **Reminder of what I am trying to achieve**

In this paper, I will firstly outline what is literary tourism, followed by a discussion of the state of literary tourism in South Africa. Secondly, I will talk extensively on why literary tourism needs to be developed in the Karoo. This will entail a detailed description of the seminal writers, literature and historic buildings associated with Karoo writers.

The thrust of the paper is really a literary route through the Karoo, which will evolve from the discussion above. As a preamble, I will talk about route tourism in general. Apart from a general route through the Karoo, I will also attempt to map an Olive Schreiner route through the Karoo. Lastly, I will talk about the crown jewel of literary tourism in the Karoo ( and indeed South Africa!), Book Town Richmond to give delegates a sense of why the Karoo should be promoted as the literary heartland of South Africa.

#### **Karoo Writers**

Laurens van der Post	PHILIPPOLIS
Pieter Fourie	PHILIPPOLIS
Patrick Mynhardt	BETHULIE
Karel Schoeman	
C.M. van den Heever	
I.D du Plessis	
Olive Schreiner	CRADOCK
Guy Butler	
Atholl Fugard	NIEU-BETHESDA
F.A. Venter	
<i>kenhardt/carnarvon/strydenburg/hopetown</i>	
Eben Venter	PRINCE ALBERT/
Burgersdorp???	
N.P. van Wyk Louw	SUTHERLAND
W.E.G. Louw	
Boerneef???	
Ingrid Jonker / Andre Brink	DOUGLAS (close to Magersfontein : leroux
Langenhoven	OUDTSHOORN
Etienne LeRoux	
18. Anna M. Louw	Calvinia
19. P.J. Philander ( a short while in Calvinia )	

20. Dolf van Niekerk
21. G.A. Water Meyer ( Middelburg )
22. Braam de Vries
23. Breyten Breytenbach
24. Ernst van Heerden
25. The Diary of Iris Vaughan
- 26.-Walter Battiss  
SLAGTERSNEK
27. Chris Mann / Isobel Dixon
28. Eve Palmer  
CAMDEBO
29. Mikro  
Williston
- 30) Etienne van Heerden = Cradock/ Graaff-Reinet
- 31) Pirow Bekker = Smithfield
- 32) George Weidman = Cradock
- 33) Joan Hambidge = Aliwal North
- 34 ) Hennie Aucamp = Dordrecht

LADISMIT  
MONTAGU  
PEARSTON  
CRADOCK  
SOMERSET EAST /

THE PLAINS OF

#### **OLIVE SCHREINER ROUTE**

Cradock  
Hanover  
Matjiesfontein  
De Aar  
Buffelskop  
Herschel  
Leliekloof  
Middelburg (married)