

HONORARY GRADUATE

Dan Jacobson

Dan Jacobson was born in Johannesburg in 1929. He was educated at Kimberley Boys' High School and at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts in 1949. He worked as a teacher, a journalist and in commerce before the publication of his first novel, *The Trap*, in 1955.

From 1955 to 1975 Dan Jacobson was a self-employed writer, with occasional academic appointments in the United States and in England. In 1976 he took a permanent position in the Department of English of University College, University of London, where he acquired a reputation as an active and inspiring teacher. He was appointed Reader in English in 1978, Professor of English in 1985 and Professor Emeritus in 1995. During those years he served as Chairman of the Board of Studies and as Graduate Tutor. He is at present an occasional teacher in the Department of English and in the Graduate School; he is Chairman and convener of regular interdisciplinary seminars for members of the Faculties of Arts, Law, and Social and Historical Sciences. He also teaches a 'Law and Literature' course to Jurisprudence students.

From 1972 to 1986 Dan Jacobson was a member of the Editorial Board of *Index on Censorship*, published by Writers & Scholars International. He has also been Deputy Chairman of the Literature Panel of the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Dan Jacobson's outstanding achievements have been in the field of creative writing. During the 1950's Jacobson was among the very few writers to explore the themes of racial prejudice and inter-group animosity - subjects which for him personally, were a response to moral imperatives. He treats life in the apartheid era with intelligence and humanity, always subjecting the objects of his investigation to the rigours of an acute and astute interrogation. Never content with merely reproducing stereotypes, his work is subtle, complex and compassionate. His novels and numerous short stories of this time remain fresh and relevant today. He is the author of eleven novels, three volumes of short stories, a book of autobiographical stories, two books of criticism and two books on travel.

Jacobson's later novels move away from the South African situation. His artistic flexibility is demonstrated in the way in which his approach to fiction has modified with changing aesthetics of the novel. Dealing with subjects as diverse as biblical narrative to fantasy, he works with what he calls a 'greatly heightened naturalism ... where we recognise what's written about but see it transformed as if in a flash of lightning ...'. In his journalism and non-fictional writing one can trace a continued concern for his country of birth, where his balanced comprehension, his lucid prose and keen eye for detail constantly enliven and illuminate his material. His work has been translated into German, French, Swedish, Dutch, Polish, Finnish, Russian, Hebrew and Japanese - a tribute to the world-wide relevance and appeal of his oeuvre.

Widely acclaimed in Britain, he received the John Llewellyn Rhys Award in 1958 for his collection of short stories, *A Long Way from London*; the W Somerset Maugham Award for 1962 for his first collection of essays, *Time of Arrival*; the 1979 H H Wingate Award for his novel, *The Confessions of Josef Baisz*; the 1986 J R Ackerley Prize for Autobiography for *Time and Time Again*; the 1986 Society of Authors of Great Britain Travel Grant 'for work in general'; and, in 1992, the Mary Elinore Smith Poetry Prize for a sequence of poems, *A Month in the Country*.

It is entirely fitting that the University of the Witwatersrand, his *alma mater*, should honour this distinguished writer, who has made a major contribution not only to South African literature but also to world

literature in the English language. Dan Jacobson has brought lustre to the University, to South African letters and to scholarship generally.

The University recognises the achievements of one of its own graduates in the course of a distinguished career by conferring on Dan Jacobson its highest honour, the degree of Doctor of Literature *honoris causa*.