

THE FORA

Literature and Art in South Africa

**Chaucer and the
*Cape Times***

Michiel Heyns

**Literature and
African Nationalism**

Laurence Wright

The Empire Paints Back

D. M. Leigh

**The Sculpture of
Andries Botha**

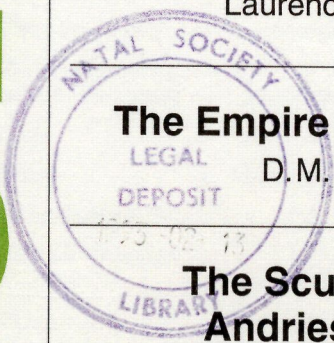
Michael Chapman

**Dialogism in Two
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**Ndbele's *Rediscovery of
the Ordinary***

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October 1992

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THEORIA

A Journal of Studies in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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Theoria, a scholarly, non-disciplinary journal in the humanities, arts and social sciences, is intended primarily to serve the purpose of encouraging reflection on, and engagement with, the more important intellectual currents and social, artistic and political events by which the contemporary world is configured. The compass of the journal is wide, and the editors believe that this purpose can be served in a variety of ways – ranging from recondite scholarly meditations on the early historical forces that gave shape to our world to sharp critical interventions in contemporary public debate. Thus, any matter of moment – whether it be the epistemological implications of new research in the neurosciences, the impact of post-modernist styles in architecture, new departures in philosophy or literary criticism or exploration of development strategies in southern Africa – will, in principle, be able to be addressed in the pages of *Theoria*.

The editors have, however, decided that although each issue may carry contributions in a diversity of fields, the contents of each issue will be largely dictated by one or more governing themes. In order to secure contributions in good time, these themes will be announced well in advance of publication.

The editors are, furthermore, of the view that the purposes to which the journal addresses itself will be best served if contributions take a variety of forms. In particular, we wish to encourage, in addition to ‘conventional’ articles, communications from readers designed to further debate around issues dealt with. Also, we hope to establish a review essay tradition in *Theoria* – in our view an important genre that has not been well served in South African journals – as well as a book review/book note section.

Note to Contributors

Contributions are invited both in response to advertised themes and on any topic within the general fields covered by *Theoria*. Contributors using word processor software are requested to submit two hard copies and a disk copy (any major word processing package will be accepted). The Harvard style of referencing is preferred. *Theoria* does not use footnotes; if contributors elect to use endnotes these must be included in a separate file. The authors of manuscripts not prepared on a word processor may be required to submit a disk copy if the article is accepted. It remains in the discretion of the journal’s editors and referees to amend or reject manuscripts.

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Editorial

The study of literature and the arts in South Africa is in a state of flux. In the 1960s and 1970s the focus was on the autonomous text. In reaction we had various Deconstructive studies, neo-Marxist approaches, and debates about the (artificial) polarization between politics and aesthetics, Afro- and Eurocentrism. Yet university curricula in English continued to focus mainly on the British and American canons, while many Afrikaans scholars tended to view the literary work outside its informing context. This has begun to change as we rewrite our own history, including its myths. In both politics and literature the truth about South African society forces on us crucial revaluations.

The articles, interviews, position papers, conference reports and reviews presented here are alert to currents since the unbanning of February 1990. The tendency is to reinterpret literature through the historical matrix (see Thompson on Plomer and Kearney on Van der Post) and to work increasingly across linguistic and cultural borders (Voss on Pessoa, Campbell and Dhlomo). Recent Afrikaans novels are examined here by De Jong, while the question of women's role in society and in South African writing is raised in the conference report 'Mad Women in the Tropics' and in the position paper, 'Speak Up: Women Who Do and Women Who Don't'. In 'Quo Vadimus?' Dominik gives a provocative description of 'Classics at the Crossroads', while Chapman and Leigh offer different perspectives on the visual arts in contemporary debates.

Making sense of our European connections as Africans is central to Appiah's study, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (1992), reviewed by Freund. Other views on the African perspective are provided by Serote (interview) and by Morphet on Ndebele's achievement as a critic.

In offering a cross-section of views from several 'constituencies' the papers enter into the complexities of literary and cultural discussion, arguments, even polemics in a society undergoing massive change.

* * * * *

Theoria 81/2 will be a special double issue on the theme 'Our Catastrophic Century'. The choice of this theme seems appropriate as the twentieth century has been marked by the conjunction of extraordinary technological advances with catastrophes on a scale previously unimaginable. One need only mention the Holocaust, Stalinism, the two World Wars, Vietnam, starvation in Africa and elsewhere and world-wide environmental damage to register the magnitude of these catastrophes.

Thus we need to ask the question 'whatever happened to the promise of progress embodied in both the ideologies and programmes of modernization by which this century has been so decisively shaped?' Has the Enlightenment project failed? Have liberalism and socialism, the great universalizing and democratizing doctrines of modernity and bearers of the hope of a rational and free society, been exhausted? Has the 'steady march of progress' been halted by seemingly endless ethnic squabbles and the politics of virulent nationalisms? If so, why? Has the promise of freedom and justice, of human rights and dignity, been rendered hollow by the 'civilization of productivity' and 'culture of accumulation' so pivotal to modern capitalism? Which indeed is the villain of the piece – modern consumer capitalism or western modernity itself? In the light of this, what kind of 'order' is the 'new world order', ushered in after the collapse of East European state socialism, likely to be? Does it suggest the consolidation of some kind of capitalist rationality on a global scale? If not, what does it portend?

On another level, we need to ask whether the conceptual and theoretical apparatuses of the human sciences – sociology, economics and political science, for instance – are equal to the task of explaining these catastrophes. If so, how might they? If not, how might they be re-cast?

These, among many others, are the possible themes that contributors might address. Contributions should be received not later than 15 May 1993.

THE EDITORS

‘Another World Altogether’?

The Knight's Tale and The Cape Times

Michiel Heyns

As it is now practiced and as I treat it, criticism is an academic thing, located for the most part far away from the questions that trouble the reader of a daily newspaper. Up to a certain point this is as it should be. But we have reached the stage at which specialization and professionalization, allied with cultural dogma, barely sublimated ethnocentrism and nationalism, as well as a surprisingly insistent quasi-religious quietism, have transported the professional and academic critic of literature – the most focused and intensely trained interpreter of texts produced by the culture – into another world altogether. In that relatively untroubled and secluded world there seems to be no contact with the world of events and societies, which modern history, intellectuals, and critics have in fact built. Instead contemporary criticism is an institution for publicly affirming the values of our, that is, European, dominant élite culture, and for privately setting loose the unrestrained interpretation of a universe defined in advance as the endless misreading of a misinterpretation. The result has been the regulated, not to say calculated, irrelevance of criticism, except as an adornment to what the powers of modern industrial society transact: the hegemony of militarism and a new cold war, the depoliticization of the citizenry, the overall compliance of the intellectual class to which critics belong.

Edward Said: ‘Secular Criticism’¹

Said’s indictment echoes a disquiet many literary scholars must feel about the place and function of their own discipline in that society whose dominant discourse(s) they have now for some time been energetically deconstructing, mainly, it would seem, for the benefit of other literary scholars. Said’s strictures are directed more specifically at the priorities of literary theory in North America, which has, according to him ‘for the most part isolated textuality from the circumstances, the events, the physical senses that made it possible and render it intelligible as the result of human work’(4). Here in South Africa, though literary theory has not necessarily escaped this alienation from its own human origins, the collaboration of academic criticism with ‘the powers of modern industrial society’ has more often been diagnosed in terms of the nature of the curriculum offered, as if certain works were intrinsically, by virtue of their subject matter or origin, more resistant to appropriation than those other, typically European, works traditionally part of an English curriculum – the

cultural capital, in an extreme form of the argument, of an entrenched minority re-investing that capital to shore up the ruins of their own as yet dominant culture against the forces of history – and, by no means incidentally, against other cultures, or cultures perceived as Other.² European thus comes to be equated with Eurocentric, which is to say effete and irrelevant.

Since any counter-argument is doomed to terms that are readily branded the values of the ‘dominant elite culture’, theoretical discussion of the issue can at best be inconclusive. This paper thus proposes a reading of two texts that will, I hope, show more comparatively, less in terms of values taken to be essential or timeless, or ‘superior’ in being ‘natural’, the kind of understanding of a cultural situation that literature makes possible, and that criticism can make available without escaping into ‘another world altogether.’ I am using Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale* as a test case of the *kind* of meaning European literature can achieve, not to imply that other literatures are incapable of this kind of understanding, but to suggest that European literature is not automatically relegated by its apparent remoteness from our own continent to that other world, that limbo of irrelevance to which Said assigns modern criticism. Chaucer’s tale lends itself to my purpose because it takes, as it were, irrelevance to such extremes: a knightly romance, which is to say a profoundly undemocratic work of the late fourteenth century, itself largely a translation of an earlier Italian version; a near-anachronism in its own time as an oral tale ‘at a time when oral tradition is on the verge of being replaced by a book culture’,³ told in an archaic language, and concerned with a code and way of life that even in Chaucer’s time were becoming obsolete – the whole nominally set in Classical Greece, albeit a Greece anachronistically resounding to the clanking of armour. In terms of technique *The Knight’s Tale* is a highly conventionalised work, relying for much of its meaning on the weight of stylised gesture and non-naturalistic representation. Chaucer’s tale thus offered itself as a challenging test case: what can such a work possibly have to offer the twentieth-century reader?

In an attempt to demonstrate, perhaps rather artificially, what I regard as the conterminous relation of literature and ‘the world of events and societies’, I shall read *The Knight’s Tale* against a recent newspaper, glossed, as it were, from a modern historical survey of mediaeval Europe and a sociological work on present-day South Africa.⁴ Different texts on a different day would of course have yielded a different application; the only part of the argument that is proffered in a generalising strain has to do with the function of literary convention: is it merely the reproduction of orthodox attitudes in familiar combination, tending to the reinforcement of culture-specific

values, or does it have the power to transcend its own origins? My own view, which it is the aim of this paper to illustrate, is that literary conventions are capable of revalidating themselves in a different context, as what is merely conventional becomes transparent, and the experience behind the convention re-emerges. A work can, through what we may call its generic memory, extend the range of its meaning: certain latent meanings are stored, as it were, in literary conventions, to be released in time. A work that is only conventional is dead, as Chaucer himself implied in allowing the 'drasty ryming' of his parodic romance of Sir Thopaz to be buried under the Host's contempt; but a work that tests its own conventions against a complex reality, in the process also subjects that reality to a structure that evaluates as it orders.

The Knight's Tale speaks to us not only because we happen to be living in an age that resembles in certain respects the violent world of knighthood; rather, it speaks of human attempts to come to terms with, contain, control that violence, and it measures the cost of that control in human terms. In this comparison, cultural difference, though certainly more evident than similarity, may serve to bring out resemblance. As Barbara Tuchman puts it in the preface to her study of 'the calamitous fourteenth century':

The interval of 600 years permits what is significant in human character to stand out. People of the Middle Ages existed under mental, moral, and physical circumstances so different from our own as to constitute almost a foreign civilization. As a result, qualities of conduct that we recognize as familiar amid these alien surroundings are revealed as permanent in human nature. (xvi)

Now 'permanent in human nature' is a large and contentious claim – perhaps 'what is significant in human character' is a safer formulation – but Tuchman usefully reminds us that our contact with the past is partly through its very difference from our time. The literature of the past could be seen as reading the present, not by preaching from a sanctified and disinfected realm of essential and timeless values, but through its immersion in its own time and confrontation of ours. If the twentieth century reads Chaucer in the light of its own concerns and anxieties, Chaucer no less reads the twentieth century, as any work vitally concerned with its own time must transfer that concern to times other than its own.

A distinction central to this essay is that between the questions posed more or less overtly *by* a work and those which we ask *about* a work, between the questions *articulated* by a work and those *occasioned* by it. It is an obvious sort of distinction, and yet it is sometimes left out of account in considerations of a work's 'meaning'

as if it were merely a function of the questions addressed by the work. *The Knight's Tale*, for instance, quite explicitly addresses certain philosophical questions; many of the work's most urgent concerns are summed up in Palamon's questioning of the justice of the universe:

Thanne seyde he, 'O crueel goddes that governe
 This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,
 And writen in the table of atthamaunt
 Youre parlement and youre eterne graunt,
 What is mankynde more unto you holde
 Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?
 For slayn is man right as another beest,
 And dwelleth eek in prison and arreest,
 And hath siknesse and greet adversitee,
 And ofte tymes giltelees, pardee.
 What governance is in this prescience,
 That giltelees tormenteth innocence?'

(1303–14)

At this level of questioning, the work takes its place, say, with *King Lear* as an enquiry into the Nature of Things, and at that level it retains, of course, its philosophical relevance; but it is not the kind of question that in the nature of things can be answered with any certainty – except perhaps by the theologians into whose care Palamon shrugs off the answers to his own questions: 'The answeere of this lete I to dyvynys,/But wel I woot that in this world greet pyne ys'(1323–4).

The other questions, the questions occasioned by the work, are less purely rhetorical: what interpretation of existence is implicit in the genre chosen? The knightly romance, after all, was not the only vehicle of expression at Chaucer's disposal, as he went on to prove almost ostentatiously in the immense stylistic virtuosity of the rest of *The Canterbury Tales*. What is the meaning of the convention of the knightly romance as opposed, say, to the meaning of the fabliau? How does that convention negotiate the social reality from which it is derived?

Our own conventions are to a large extent transparent to us, exactly because they are fully operative. But recognising so much more readily the conventionality of Chaucer's tale, we may, by translating those conventions into recognisable social behaviour, make our own conventions visible. To take only the most obvious example, we recognise in the highly stylised, formal quality of *The Knight's Tale* an attempt to make manifest an order that in the Knight's own world is highly elusive. A modern newspaper, on the other hand, seems to

render fairly directly the fragmented, chaotic nature of modern life; but that newspaper may also, on analysis, prove to employ its own conventions to structure and mediate its material. In however perfunctory and distracted a form, the newspaper also seeks to shape the experience that it reports to the expectations, preconceptions and understanding of its readers.

Much of this essay will be concerned with the symptoms of the tension between order and chaos, both in Chaucer's tale and in our society; and one of the first points that Chaucer helps us to make about the rage for order is that it is not universal. It is not shared, for instance, by the drunken Miller who interrupts proceedings so unceremoniously with his tale; and that tale itself, wonderfully ordered as it is, is a purposeful progression towards comic catastrophe – “‘Allas, now comth Nowelis flood!’ . . . And doun gooth al’ (*The Miller's Tale*, 3818, 3821). Order, Chaucer reminds us, is no more than a fragile construction whose collapse forms the basis both of tragedy and comedy, devastation and liberation; in a given political system it may be a highly desirable symptom of the happiness of its constituents, or it may be the coerced effect of the repression of dissent.

We can sense something of the common origins of tragedy and comedy by attending to the language still used in comic contexts. The *Cape Times* of 19 December heralds a production of *Shirley Valentine* with the headline ‘*Shirley* knocking ’em dead’ (CT 4), and the caption under the photograph describes the eponym as ‘ready to break out of her dreary domestic existence’. The metaphors, though presumably not chosen for that reason, convey some apprehension of the connection between the liberating catharsis of comedy and the disruptive convulsion of tragedy; and the desultory attention of the newspaper randomly juxtaposes the two. In the context of a violence-ridden society such as South Africa in 1991, the language of murder employed in the banal cliché of the entertainment world may seem offensive; whereas the converse, whereby the language of literary form is appropriated to non-literary reality, is less obtrusive: ‘The greatest tragedy in South Africa in 1991 was the loss of lives in the black community’ the mayor of Soweto is reported as saying (CT 6). The two reports are almost literally worlds apart; but unless we are exceptionally earnest, we tend to accept without protest the random collocations of the modern newspaper with its hermetically isolated Sections, Life as apportioned by the Sub-Editor. *Shirley Valentine's* ‘dreary domesticity’ must seem very enviable to the inhabitants of the fourteen huts that were burned down in Khayelitsha (CT 6), but we are not expected to connect the two orders of report, and most of us probably do not. The newspaper encourages a fragmentation of

response that in a different context we would dignify by a term such as multivalence; and that in the context of medieval studies we would accept as a valid principle of construction.⁵

This is not to justify the often insensitive juxtaposition of the serious and the banal in modern media, merely to note that the expectation of uniformity of tone, decorum, appropriateness has always been disappointed about as often as satisfied. Decorum was the kind of thing Chaucer could take seriously (say, in *The Knight's Tale*) exactly because he was so ready to make fun of it – say, in *The Miller's Tale*. So, as Arcite lies dying, he movingly voices the age-old perplexity in the face of death:

What is this world? what asketh men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Allone, withouten any compaignye.

(2777–79)

In stealing Arcite's most poignant phrase for his ribald Miller's account of the far-from-desolate situation of the 'hende' Nicholas ('A chambre hadde he in that hostelrye/Allone, withouten compaignye' – 3203–4), Chaucer is not satirising or trivialising Arcite's tragic vision, merely claiming a place for the comic machinations of a libidinous student next to the lamentations of a dying lover. This may be partly what Matthew Arnold meant in denying Chaucer that 'high seriousness' which to him was the essence of morality; but a profounder seriousness may resist such an elevation of a single aspect of culture to a touchstone, as restrictive and potentially repressive.⁶

The irony generated by Chaucer's juxtaposition of high seriousness with low humour in two adjacent tales, whereby one mode questions the other, is presumably totally intentional. But even within the apparently unified register of *The Knight's Tale*, juxtaposition produces a certain irony questioning those stable values that in some accounts are made central to the meaning of the tale. If, as Charles Muscatine says in his influential study, 'Order, which characterizes the structure of the poem, is also the heart of its meaning',⁷ then that meaning is more problematic, less unified than Muscatine implies. If, as Muscatine continues, it is Theseus, as 'representative of the highest chivalric conceptions of nobility' whose 'actions and speeches . . . are the normative ones in the poem' (181, 184), then he also represents the extremely compromised nature of such knightly virtues as he practises. Since the Knight was in essence a warrior, and his tale largely an account of warfare, we as twentieth-century readers naturally find much to disturb us in the exploits of Theseus, and may balk at the frankly heroic treatment accorded him in the Knight's

narrative. But I believe that our scepticism in the face of the heroic values is not an anachronistic imposition upon the tale, but is derived partly from the structure of the tale. Theseus is from the start an ambiguous figure, whose authority is inseparable from his ability to conquer:

Whilom, as olde stories tellen us,
 Ther was a duc that highte Theseus;
 Of Atthenes he was lord and governour,
 And in his tyme swich a conquerour,
 That gretter was ther noon under the sonne.

(859–63)

Now it is not strange that in a tale told by a professional soldier the prime value should be conquest, however much that conquest might be sublimated by the causes in whose name it is undertaken. The knightly romance itself is such a sublimating structure containing and regularising Theseus' exploits; and yet, it is difficult to escape the ironic notation of what 'his wysdom and his chivalrie' (865) entail, even in the medieval meaning of the latter term.⁸ When we first meet Theseus, returning from his conquest of the Amazons, it is to see him yielding to the entreaties of the women kneeling by the wayside to show 'Som drope of pitee thurgh thy gentilless' (920) and avenge the non-burial of their husbands. He duly shows his pitee, mercy and gentilless by riding straight off against Creon:

. . . With Creon that was of Thebes kyng,
 He faught, and slough him manly as a knyght
 In pleyn bataille, and put the folk to flyght;
 And by assaut he wan the citee after,
 And rente adoun bothe wall and sparre and rafter;
 And to the ladyes he restored agayn
 The bones of hir housbondes that were slayn . . .

(986–92)

The restoration is indeed an act of chivalry, even in the modern sense of the word; and we may grant that Theseus is only exercising the perennial privilege of the conqueror, to do 'with al the contree as him leste' (1004). But the restoration of order also involves, it would seem, the total destruction of Thebes, 'bothe wall and sparre and rafter'; and is followed by the labours of the victorious soldiers 'To ransake in the taas of bodyes deed,/Hem for to strepe of harneys and of wede' (1005–6). These are ordinary military realities; but the point is that Chaucer does not suppress such realities in the otherwise

stylised depiction of 'the grete honour' of 'Theseus, the noble conquerour' (997–8). And in focusing now on the fate of the two knights, 'liggyng by and bye', 'nat fully quike, ne fully dede' (1011, 1015), Chaucer ironically extends that '[s]ymmetry in character grouping, movement, time and place' (Muscatine 181) which has characterised the action of the poem so far, to encompass also these victims of Theseus' 'pitee'. This exploit establishes a pointed contrast between Theseus, 'with laurer crowned as a conquerour' (1027), and the two imprisoned knights 'in a tour, in angwissh and in wo' (1030).

The ironic disparity between these two manifestations of knightly fortune is to some extent bridged, to some extent reinforced by Palamon's vision of the beautiful Emily, walking in the garden outside the tower. Women have featured so far in this poem as the conquered and pacified enemy, and as the instigators of knightly valour; now through Emily's obeisance to May, Chaucer mobilises a different but related complex of values:

. . . Emelye, that fairer was to sene
 Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,
 And fressher than the May with floures newe –
 For with the rose colour stroof hir hewe,
 I noot which was the fyner of hem two –
 Er it were day, as was hir wone to do,
 She was arisen and al redy dight;
 For May wole have no slogardie a-nyght.

 Yclothed was she fressh, for to devyse;
 Hir yelow her was broyded in a tresse
 Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.
 And in the gardyn, at the sonne upriste,
 She walketh up and doun, and as hire liste
 She gadereth floures, party white and rede,
 To make a subtil gerland for hire hede;
 And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong.
 (1035–1042, 1049–1055)

In a world that is manifestly imperfect, certainly from Palamon's barred perspective, Emily represents all that the knights have been deprived of by their defeat; she has value, we might say, mainly because she is inaccessible. But we sense also that her value transcends the prison perspective; the conventional description draws on stereotypes too insistent to be restricted to this situation. To put it differently, if Emily signifies on the one hand two very different things to Palamon the prisoner and Theseus the free knight, on the

other hand she also figures as a symbol that transcends the difference in their conditions. She represents that perfection that is not of this world, and yet expressed in it, through the imagery that links her with the timeless processes of nature and the perfection of eternity, both flower and angel. As E. T. Donaldson has pointed out, this does not guarantee her a very vivid presence in the poem: she is, as far as real information goes, merely 'a pretty, long-haired blonde with a good complexion and an excellent singing voice'. Donaldson continues:

Of course the portrait lacks individuality. The whole Knight's Tale lacks individuality, for it is less concerned with real people than with the ideas and ideals by which people live in a real world, one which often seems devoid of purpose or significance. Emily is one of the ideas that make this world tolerable, and if she were given a personality, she would lose her symbolic significance as the goal toward which the better side of chivalry aspires. Within the tale she is scarcely permitted to act; she merely reacts to the incidents of the plot in a way which the knight evidently considers ideally feminine . . .

By this reading Emily is that reminder of beauty and glamour in the midst of chaos and horror that femininity has long been supposed to constitute, and that seems still to form part of 'the ideas and ideals by which people live'; as Donaldson implies, it is an ideal of femininity adapted to the needs, priorities and values of the knight. But stylised as the portrait of Emily is, it is quite as naturalistic as the modern equivalent. The *Cape Times* devotes a colour picture, captioned 'Royal night out', to Princess Diana and her children, on their way to 'a performance of "Joy to the World", a Christmas spectacular at the Royal Albert Hall' (CT 2). Now this is not self-evidently a news-worthy event; only a process of symbolic valorisation could justify such an expenditure of space on the unremarkable doings of a person remarkable only for having willingly undertaken for life the function of being photographed in public places doing unremarkable things. Emily at least could sing. But a symbolic meaning is of course not an absence of meaning, and to a commercially significant number of people Joy does mean sharing the Albert Hall with Princess Diana and a Christmas Spectacular. Whereas we may be reluctant to apply to the Princess of Wales Donaldson's characterisation of Emily as 'one of the ideas that make this world tolerable', that is probably not a bad description of the public function of princesses, as of film stars, football pools, and in the tradition of Zorba and Shirley Valentine, the Greek islands. And if we think our world self-evidently more tolerable than that of the imprisoned Palamon, a single page of the *Cape Times* reminds us of what a violent world it is for very many people: 'Stabbers to stand trial'; 'Inkatha man guilty of killing'; 'Secret trainees "Linked to killings"'; '3 Die as gunmen loot, burn in

Khayelitsha'; 'Girl hurt in rank shooting'; 'Disarmed, necklaced'; and 'SA "could have 30 A-bombs"' (all CT 6).

But if Emily, in Donaldson's avuncular words, 'becomes not only the embodiment of all pretty young girls in the Spring, but a proof that the Spring of pretty young girls is a permanent thing, and that May in their persons will always warm the masculine heart as May warms their hearts and sends them out among the flowers', she also moves the 'masculine heart' to rivalry and bloodshed, as the two cousins, sworn blood brothers, turn to bitter enmity for her sake. In other words, if a symbol is capable of inspiring love, it is capable of inspiring hatred; if it is worth dying for, it is worth killing for. The two knights meet in a combat that strangely combines the fierceness of enmity with the restraint of the code:

Ther nas no good day, ne no saluyng,
 But streight, withouten word or reheryng,
 Everich of hem heelp for to armen oother
 As freendly as he were his owene brother;
 And after that, with sharpe speres stronge
 They foynen ech at oother wonder longe.

(1649–54)

For the two knights, arming each other may be a mere practical necessity, not to be dispensed with as easily as the formality of 'good day' or 'saluyng'; but the Knight's simile ('As freendly as he were his owene brother') insists upon the human meaning of the convention even while it points the irony of two men arming each other in order to attack each other. Palamon and Arcite are, after all, in knightly terms, brothers (both Arcite and Palamon in their quarrel make the point that the other is his 'cosyn and . . . brother sworn' – 1161), and their gesture transcends the present enmity. The logical absurdity of a Geneva Convention, regulating standards of behaviour between nations dedicated to eradicating each other, has at least this validity that it tries to preserve a vestige of humanity, not to acknowledge what the fact of war suggests. But after Palamon and Arcite's recognition of common humanity, the chivalric code moves unconsciously, as it were, from the ritualised gestures of courtly behaviour to animality:

Thou myghtest weene that this Palamon
 In his fightyng were a wood leon,
 And as a cruel tigre was Arcite;
 As wilde bores gonne they to smyte,
 That frothen white as foom for ire wood.
 Up to the ancle foghte they in hir blood.

(1655–1660)

It is at least an open question whether, in the light of this outcome, it is most the absurdity of the brotherly gesture or its poignancy that we are struck by. We do note that the ideal of Love which is driving the two lovers seems very remote from the kind of action taken in its name; indeed, of the various constituents of the combat – the rivalry between the knights, the bitterness of the erstwhile friends, the practicalities of one-to-one fully-armed combat – the ostensible reason for it all, the dedication to Emily, is the least real. She is merely the unconscious occasion of the duel, as she was the unwitting focus of the passion of the two knights. Not to put too fine a point on it, Emily, the object of knightly regard and veneration, is ultimately a cause of war.

No modern man would take Emily seriously as the object of sexual desire; and yet our society has its equivalents to the strategically deployed sexuality of the infinitely desirable inaccessible ideal of female beauty. The invention of the Beauty Queen, the supermarket version of Emily, is as readily appropriated by our militaristic society as Emily was by hers. If Emily was ‘scarcely permitted to act’, the modern Emily acts within almost equally circumscribed limits. Jacklyn Cock quotes a newspaper description of one such Emily on the Border:

The smiling, fresh, beautiful Janine [Botha, Miss South Africa 1988] moved among Owaboland’s desolate, dusty camps, glaring heat and dreary camouflage . . . The willowy Miss South Africa moved gracefully among the troops with a smile for one, an autograph for another and gentle words of encouragement for the homesick and the lonely. Tanned young men gathered around the girl who reminded them of their own sweethearts and sisters back home, eager to talk to her and take her photograph . . . Like true royalty the beauty queen never once lost her composure.¹⁰

Sharing Emily’s ‘freshness’, Miss South Africa also carries her symbolic weight of youth and beauty in the midst of deprivation and misery. If not quite compared to an angel, the beauty queen nevertheless ‘moves gracefully’ among the camps and the troops instead of walking as a mere mortal might have done, and if not quite ‘true royalty’, she does share modern royalty’s only essential quality of ‘composure’. But if on the one hand the indomitably smiling Miss South Africa represents a creature of another essence, she also serves the ‘tanned young men’ (in their way as stereotyped as she is by the report) as a reminder ‘of their own sweethearts and sisters back home’; she is both symbol of the unattainable and idealisation of a distant actuality. Like the sweethearts and the sisters, Miss South Africa provides a usefully emotive rationale for fighting, and the whole event helps to sell the war to the Folks Back Home. Cock

quotes the Minister of Defence urging soldiers to 'Fight for your wives, children and future' and identifying the enemy as the 'enemy of freedom, democracy, Christianity, civilization and of human decency' (128). Wives, children, Miss South Africa, all become part of a complex of values mobilised to sanction the eradication of the enemy, a process in which the end is taken to justify any means. The ideals of 'freedom, democracy, Christianity, civilization and . . . human decency' are suspended while they are ostensibly being fought for:

One time we captured a terrorist and tied him onto the front of a Ratel. Then we went 'bundu-bashing'. We had captured him for interrogation – that was the interrogation. He didn't say anything. He died in the first day. We used to pull into villages for everybody to see, as a warning sign. After a few days we took him off. He just fell apart. It wasn't a pretty sight. (Informant 64, Cock 55)

But prettiness is not a priority in the defence of civilization and human decency; for that we have the willowy Miss South Africa. The disintegrating body of the 'terrorist' (a profoundly ironical usage in the light of the use that is made of his murdered body) and the graceful movements of the beauty queen are complementary images of a war that, like all wars from the Trojan War through the Crusades to Viet Nam, justifies itself through image manipulation. The ideal of 'freedom, democracy, Christianity, civilization and . . . human decency' when appropriated to group interests, is driven to reveal its deepest meaning in defending itself – through terror – against what it has categorised as terrorism.¹¹ The methods used by a system to defend itself tell us more about that system than any amount of rhetoric. 'Inkatha members who allegedly underwent secret Defence Force military intelligence training have been directly involved in violence, the *Weekly Mail* reports today', The *Cape Times* reports in turn (CT 6). An organisation dedicated amongst other things to the instruction of a part of the country's populace in methods to kill another part of the populace is clearly something other than a *defence* force in the usual sense of that word; and even *intelligence*, at the best of times under some strain in its military usage, is here stretched beyond all semantic limits.

Barbara Tuchman has persuasively described how the implementation of the chivalric ideal led in practice to a betrayal of its own rationale:

Chivalry, the dominant political idea of the ruling class, left as great a gap between ideal and practice as religion. The ideal was a vision of order maintained by the warrior class and formulated in the image of the Round

Table, nature's perfect shape. King Arthur's knights adventured for the right against dragons, enchanters, and wicked men, establishing order in a wild world. So their living counterparts were supposed, in theory, to serve as defenders of the Faith, upholders of justice, champions of the oppressed. In practice, they were themselves the oppressors, and by the 14th century the violence and lawlessness of men of the sword had become a major agency of disorder. When the gap between ideal and real becomes too wide, the system breaks down. (xxi-xxii)

'Violence and lawlessness' in defence of the 'dominant political idea of the ruling class' is, then, nothing new, nor is the phenomenon of the ruling class as itself 'a major agency of disorder'. *The Knight's Tale* and the *Cape Times* reflect in their different ways a society in which 'order' is posited upon the forcible imposition of moral disorder. In Chaucer's tale that breakdown is enacted in the simple account of the consequences of the application of the ideals of the ruling class. In modern South Africa the gap signals itself by the unintentional(?) irony of murder squads calling themselves the Civil Cooperation Bureau or of the Defence Force training agents of violence against citizens of its own country. Since we use words to order our perception of the world, the semantic disorientation wrought by systems of control in naming themselves is a powerful symptom of disorder. Palamon, imprisoned for no reason beyond being a Theban, is led to question not only the state of the universe, but also the meaning of the words we use to describe that universe: 'What governance is in this prescience,/That giltelees tormenteth innocence?' (1313-4). Both *governance* and *prescience* are rendered at best ironical, at worst meaningless, by that gap between ideal and real spanned by the couplet, with *tormenteth* serving as an ugly bridge between powerful subject and victimised object.¹²

But, as Tuchman says, 'When the gap between ideal and real becomes too wide, the system breaks down', as the South African system now shows many signs of doing. Thus on 19 December the headlines are dominated by what may be seen either as a symptom of that breakdown or as an attempt at reconstruction, the Convention for a Democratic South Africa. On this occasion the headlines announce a set-back: 'Codesa blow: Buthulezi refuses to attend talks.' Like all conventions, this one is by definition dependent upon significant agreement as to its meaning and purpose,¹³ and the latest blow, coming on top of the non-participation of several other political groupings, does not bode well for this fragile experiment in democracy – according to *City Press*, as quoted by the *Cape Times*, 'the most important political gathering since the founding of the Union of South Africa', intended 'to lay the foundations for a new

constitution': 'After all, constitutions are required because men are not angels' ('From the Black Press', CT 8).

Men are not angels – no, nor woman neither ('Women invite rape' complains a – female – reader in a letter to the Editor – CT 8), in spite of Emily's angelic voice and Miss South Africa's superhuman composure. But fallen human nature is not simply a metaphysically or even psychologically determined condition. Jacklyn Cock observes that her young informants recounting the atrocities committed by themselves and others like them are not conspicuously evil people: they 'have been socialized into conformity . . . and into the belief that some human beings . . . are non-human and outside the boundaries which define humane treatment' (56). In other words, certain categories of evil are matters of convention, of cultural definition, semantic naivety (such as the unconscious use of *terrorist* for the victim of one's own terror tactics) – or just plain unchecked opportunity. Barbara Tuchman, citing the career of a particularly sanguinary nobleman of the fourteenth century, observes that conduct may be as much a matter of social institution as of individual psychology:

What formed a man like Thomas de Marle was not necessarily aggressive genes or father-hatred, which can occur in any century, but a habit of violence that flourished because of a lack of any organ of effective restraint. (9)

But such a habit of violence may likewise flourish in any century, and for the same reason. In South Africa in the second half of 1991 we have witnessed belated attempts to invent and impose an 'organ of effective restraint', first in a Peace Accord, then more ambitiously in Codesa. But old habits die hard, the more so that at present the only available organ of effective restraint is itself so hopelessly compromised by its involvement in the violence it is supposed to restrain. An organ of restraint, when not based upon an inherent respect for life, all too easily degenerates into a mechanism of repression. Palamon's lament ascribes to the gods, in fact, a system of effective government by restraint, defective only in being unjust: 'O cruell goddes that governe/This world with byndyng of youre word eterne . . .'

On earth, of course, Theseus acts as 'organ of restraint', a function which is dramatised again in his interruption of the two knights ankle-deep in their own blood. Since Arcite has been banished and Palamon should be in prison, that is, since both have defied Theseus' restraining measures, Theseus's first instinct is to execute them on their own confession ('It nedeth noght to pyne yow with the corde' he adds considerably – 1746). Under entreaty from the ladies, however, he commutes the death sentence to a tournament in a year's time: the

impulse of violence and rivalry is to be diverted into a pageant, each knight to bring with him one hundred more. Theseus as 'representative of the highest chivalric conceptions of nobility' (Muscatine 183) stage-manages an event which will not only settle the disagreement between the knights but also become a tribute to the qualities upheld by the knightly class; the tournament, we are told, is held 'For love and for encrees of chivalrye' (2184). Theseus believes in a rational and ordered universe at the centre of which he is located, apportioning life and death in accordance with his enlightened principles. Even if, as Theseus at this point foresees, one of the knights is killed anyway (with in effect two hundred and two knights involved in the battle, the potential casualty list is in any case much longer), it will have been done in the proper manner. Theseus thus creates an 'organ of effective restraint', by convening a gathering that will under supervision enact the very violence that it is intended to contain by redefinition.

Chaucer, though, creates a universe in which the decrees of Theseus count for very little. Each knight prays to his ruling deity, Palamon asking Venus 'that I have my lady in myne armes' (247), Arcite asking Mars for victory (2420), and both gods promise their knights their requests:

And right anon swich strif ther is bigonne,
For thilke grauntyng, in the hevne above,
Bitwixe Venus, the goddesse of love,
And Mars, the stierne god armypotente,
That Juppiter was bisy it to stente . . .

(2438–2442)

Mercy, pity, along with all the other knightly virtues, become quite irrelevant to the outcome of the contest as Jupiter despairs and Saturn, the father of calamity, steps in. From his self-description it is clear that he is not an agent of order and harmony, that even settling the dispute is 'agayn his kynde' (2451), against his nature:

My cours that hath so wyde for to turne,
Hath moore power than woot any man.
Myn is the drenchyng in the see so wan;
Myn is the prison in the derke cote;
Myn is the stranglyng and hangyng by the throte,
The murmure and the cherles rebellyng,
The groynge, and the pryvee empoysonyng.

(2454–60)

Saturn, a kind of divine Civil Cooperation Bureau, undertakes to bring 'pees' (2474) between the squabbling gods, with no regard to the

feelings or merits of the humans involved. The spirit of things is simultaneously transposed to the heavens up high and revealed to be human, all too human in its gloating. As Brooke Bergan has said, 'There is no logic behind Saturn's malevolence, nor can it be appeased, for the gods in *The Knight's Tale* do not transcend human frailty' ('Surface and Secret', 9). Like Shakespeare's boyish gods, Chaucer's are at their most wantonly destructive when they are most human. Such restraint, then, as Chaucer depicts, is not only in human institutions, but also in divine bloody-mindedness. I am not proposing this as a serious theological point; but the ironical undercutting of Theseus' resolves makes a sharp point about the limits of human power: the squabble between the gods is symptomatic of a universe in which accord is not a universal principle. This makes the description of the god-like Theseus seem all the more ironical:

Duc Theseus was at a wyndow set,
 Arrayed right as he were a god in trone.
 The peple preesseth thiderward ful soone
 Hym for to seen, and doon heigh reverence,
 And eek to herkne his heste and his sentence.

(2528–32)

Under the circumstances, Theseus's array 'right as he were a god in trone' seems decidedly hubristic, though ostensibly this preamble is intended to give weight to the announcement that is to follow, demonstrating Theseus's clemency: nobody is to be killed after all. A herald reveals Theseus' will:

And whan he saugh the peple of noyse al stille,
 Tho shewed he the myghty dukes wille.
 'The lord hath of his heigh discrecioun
 Considered that it were destruccioun
 To gentil blood to fighten in the gyse
 Of mortal bataille now in this emprise.
 Wherfore, to shapen that they shal nat dye,
 He wol his firste purpos modifye.
 No man therfore, up peyne of los of lyf,
 No maner shot, ne polax, ne short knyf
 Into the lystes sende, or thider brynge;
 Ne short swerd, for to stoke with poynt bityng,
 No man ne drawe, ne bere it by his syde.

.....

Gooth now youre wey, this is the lordes will.
 The voys of peple touchede the hevene,
 So loude cride they with murie stevene,
 'God save swich a lord, that is so good,
 He wilneth no destruccion of blood!'

(2535–53, 2560–4)

Chaucer puts to creative use the confusion of deities resulting from the imposition of a classical frame of reference upon a medieval context. The 'God' of this city is of course Jupiter; but by medievalising, that is Christianising, the crowd and their piety, Chaucer creates a world in which the absolutes are thoroughly relative. The crowd posits a higher authority than Theseus; the narrative presents Theseus 'Arrayed right as he were a god in trone' – and events follow the will of Saturn, the malign outsider. Theseus' interdictions are no doubt evidence of a prudent humanity (setting two hundred choice knights on one another is indeed a 'destruccioun/To gentil blood') and of some confidence in his own authority in depriving the knights of their traditional weapons.¹⁴ But whether the point lies in the inadequacy of the precautions, as Terry Jones maintains,¹⁵ or perhaps in the selective concern for 'gentil' blood, churl's blood being not worth worrying about – in terms of the events of the tale, the main irony is that the precautions turn out to be so ineffectual, the 'lordes wille' so powerless against the strategy of Saturn. There is an implicit admission of helplessness, in any case, in Theseus' threat to the assembled knights not to use certain weapons 'up peyne of los of lyf': life, it would seem, can be preserved only by the threat of the death penalty. Despite Theseus' determination 'to shapen that they shal nat dye', and despite his confident decree that 'Arcite of Thebes shal have Emelye' (2658), Saturn, by one of those equivocations beloved of gods, arranges that once Arcite has been granted the victory that Mars promised him, he be removed to clear the stage for Palamon's claiming of *his* prize, Emily. Arcite dies of injuries sustained when he falls off a horse startled by an earthquake devised by Saturn.

We no longer analyse events in terms of the will of those gods or planetary influences which even in Chaucer's time were no more than convenient metaphors for the way things are, and no doubt rightly we seek the human cause for catastrophes that by that token we hope will be remediable or avoidable. And yet there may be some point in being reminded that for all the admirable endeavours to improve the human lot, there remains something unpredictable, uncontrollable, irrational in human affairs. Saturn's earthquake at Arcite's moment of victory strikes us as absurd; and yet the absurd, in the sense of the incalculable

persists. The *Cape Times* reminds us of the ‘killing of American hitchhiker Mr Edward Perlmutter, on the Outeniqua Trail’ (CT 3) and reports on the police investigations which are confidently establishing ‘links’ between various such killings; but nobody can really explain the confluence of circumstances that brought a young man to Africa there to confront him, apparently, with two psychopathic killers in the Knysna woods. We ascribe it to coincidence; Chaucer attributes ‘The careyn in the busk, with throte ycorve’ (2013) to the power of Mars, which to us is really only an anachronistic and naive reduction of human disaster to the workings of the gods. We have our own gods and our own mythologies, and at the trial of the murderers a psychologist may well explain why anybody should be driven to cutting somebody else’s throat in a forest; but whether the psychological structure seeking to contain chaos is very much more effective than the mythological remains an open question. Chaucer, in the wake of the Black Death that by the end of the century had reduced the population of Europe by nearly 50 percent (Tuchman, 119), was driven to account for it metaphorically by having Saturn gloat ‘My lookyng is the fader of pestilence’ (2469). Modern science has progressed so far that the *Cape Times* is in a position to tell us in its leader article that ‘HIV-2, an alarming new strain of the virus’ is sweeping the continent, and that ‘the Republic now has close to 200 000 HIV-infected people’. But until science has found a remedy for what the *Cape Times* calls ‘the new scourge’ (6), we are not very much better off for not believing in Saturn. Modern enlightenment prevents us from blaming the spread of the disease on a scapegoat, as the Jews were in many communities blamed for the Black Death and persecuted accordingly; but the *Cape Times* finds it prudent to point out that ‘Heterosexual contact now accounts for most of the newly-diagnosed Aids cases in South Africa’ (6), presumably to convince its readers that it is worth worrying about.

The hitherto inexplicable scourge of Aids is only the currently most devastating proof of human helplessness against a universe which contains also a virus. Both *The Knight’s Tale* and the *Cape Times* in their different ways reflect a reality that is intractable to human reason. In an attempt to render that reality manageable or intelligible, both employ what is in origin a literary convention, the narrative expectation of closure. Thinking in terms of ‘news stories’, we expect reports to bring their material to some sort of conclusion – and the newspaper generally obliges, usually by reporting ‘stories’ that have in effect run their course by the time they are reported (hence, partly, the distressing nature of a disease that has no apparent origin and no foreseeable termination). In a particularly arresting forced closure (‘Maxwell papers “shredded”’ (CT 7)), a dead tycoon’s daughter

attempts to bring to a premature and possibly illegal end a history in which \$700 million has disappeared from the pension fund of her father's newspaper; it is the equivalent of ripping out the last few pages of a book to reach the end without sitting through the messy bits. Less spectacularly, lesser failures run their course: 'Fundstrust is liquidated'; 'Man has son sequestered' and 'Glove firm "To seek court order today"' (all CT 2).

In short, whether for practical or aesthetic reasons, human beings need to see events brought to some sort of conclusion. Chaucer combines the practical with the aesthetic in making the eventual union of Palamon and Emily (which we remember to have been preordained by Venus), a matter of practical politics as much as love:

Thanne semed me ther was a parlement
 At Atthenes, upon certein pointz and caas;
 Among the whiche pointz yspoken was,
 To have with certein contrees alliaunce,
 And have fully of Thebans obeisaunce.
 For which this noble Theseus anon
 Leet senden after gentil Palamon,
 Unwist of hym what was the cause and why . . .

(2970–7)

Gentil Palamon, as far as we can tell, never does find out that he is being offered Emily's hand so that Athens may 'have fully of Thebans obeisaunce': the political motive is diplomatically omitted in the long Boethian speech in which Theseus sets out to prove that when the First Mover created all things 'Wel wiste he why, and what therof he mente' (2990), even if we do not always share his knowledge. Emily, having been in the course of the tale Theseus' hostage, the object of the love and rivalry of the two knights, and the prize in a knightly tournament, now becomes an instrument of policy, apparently as passively as she succumbed to all her other roles. The note of philosophical acceptance is not necessarily invalidated by our knowledge of Theseus' motives; but clearly political realities may appropriate both Boethian philosophy and romantic desire. If what emerges is a tough pragmatism rather than a particularly elevated political morality ('Thanne is it wysdom, as it thynketh me,/To maken vertue of necessitee' – 3041–2), the reader waiting for the end of the tale, like the pilgrim impatient for the next tale, is not likely to object too strongly to such a conclusion to a tale that has not pretended to a very cheerful view of human destiny. Emily and Palamon must marry as much to satisfy the narrative requirement of closure as to bring about a treaty between Athens and Thebes.

Closural thinking, though, affects our political expectations as much as our narrative tolerance. We wait for an ‘outcome’ to the Convention for a Democratic South Africa; in the meantime we talk of ‘transitional arrangements’ and ‘an interim government’ (CT 7): we are psychologically conditioned to expect a resolution. A political commentator talks of De Klerk having ‘closed the chapter on apartheid’ as if dealing with a novel, and, speaking of De Klerk and Mandela in their capacities as delegates to Codesa, says that ‘Together, in the process of forming a new system of democratic government, they must convey the conviction that they, and therefore their followers, will be part of the new order’ (CT 8): it is assumed that ‘process’ will yield a ‘new system’, a ‘new order’, as if a destination, a resolution, a termination is a necessary postulate. Such an assumption is a narrative expectation, not a historically-informed prediction. History teaches us that such resolutions are the exception rather than the rule; it is fiction that teaches us to expect resolution as our right. But fiction also teaches us that resolution where it does occur, is a convention, having no more and no less value than any other convention: a tentative working agreement, a hypothetical consensus, a coming together on the assumption of certain shared values and shared interests.

It is easy and probably wise to be sceptical about Theseus’ admonition to the grieving Palamon and Emelye:

I rede that we make of sorwes two
O parfit joye, lastynge everemo.

(3071–2)

Coming after a speech dedicated to the impermanence and necessary imperfection of all earthly things, the idea of one perfect and everlasting joy is at best pious wishful thinking, at worst cynical manipulation – but above all, of course, conventional, formulaic. It is the sort of thing one says on these occasions, as one talks of ‘Joy to the World’ at Christmas, or of Miss South Africa as ‘smiling’. Such reality as it has lies in the agreement to pretend that it has reality, and to proceed accordingly – ‘And thus with alle blisse and melodye/ Hath Palamon ywedded Emelye’ (3097–8). And if this resolution recalls Theseus’ triumphal entry at the beginning of the tale ‘with victorie and with melodye’ (872), with the subjugated Amazons Hippolyta and Emily in tow – in other words, if we remain free to see all resolutions as mere openings into an unknown new narrative, and if unbeknownst to us there is a drunken miller in the wings impatient to begin *his* tale – then this does yet not produce Said’s nightmare vision of ‘a universe defined in advance as the endless misreading of a misinterpretation.’ It produces instead a universe in which any claim

to universality is likely to be contested fiercely, even violently, and in which conventions act as mediators between different versions of the universe. Theseus, Palamon and Emily have three different perspectives on the marriage proposed by Theseus, but all three accept (as far as we can tell) the convention of a single purpose and a single 'perfect joy'.

Arcite, dying of his injuries, consoles himself that he has remained true to the knightly ideals –

That is to seyn, trouthe, honour, knyghthede,
Wysdom, humblesse, estaat, and heigh kynrede,
Fredom, and al that longeth to that art –

(2789–91)

If it is true, as Terry Jones maintains, that Chaucer's knight is an odd sort of person to be invoking these elevated ideals, that 'the campaigns in which the Knight has taken part . . . were more often appalling massacres, scenes of sadism and pillage' (2) – then that would render these words sharply ironical, but it would not make them totally meaningless: the betrayal of a value is not necessarily the same as its destruction. There may be something forlorn in Arcite's consolation, in a world where his aspirations have counted for very little; but we measure that desolation against the possible other case, which is to say that we recognise the potential meaning of his terms. Reflecting the essential irrationality of human affairs, *The Knight's Tale* yet mimics that meaning that escapes it; revealing the hubris that presumes to assume god-like powers, and showing order to be a fragile fiction, resolution to be a narrative convention, it yet retains the shape of the ideals underlying such hubris, and the dream of a rational and just society. Its distance from the events reported in a daily newspaper is not the remoteness of 'another world altogether'; it is the perspective of, in Barbara Tuchman's phrase, a distant mirror: far away, but not for that reason distorted. Speaking of the breakdown resulting from the 'gap between ideal and real', Tuchman says:

Legend and story have always reflected this; in the Arthurian romances the Round Table is shattered from within. The sword is returned to the lake, the effort begins anew. Violent, destructive, greedy, fallible as he may be, man retains his vision of order and resumes his search. (xxii)

As I have tried to show, that 'vision of order' is all too often undermined by the methods chosen by humans to realise it; but that, too, is an insight to which we are helped by literature.

NOTES

1. *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 25.
2. Said, paraphrasing Foucault, describes the process by which one culture claims ascendancy over others: 'the dialectic of self-fortification and self-confirmation by which culture achieves its hegemony over society and the State is based on a constantly practiced differentiation of itself from what it believes to be not itself. And this differentiation is frequently performed by setting the valorized culture over the Other.' (*The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 12)
3. Brooke Bergan, 'Surface and Secret in *The Knight's Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, 26, 1, 1991, 4.
4. Chaucer, *The Knight's Tale*; *The Cape Times*, Cape Town, 19 December 1991; Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: the Calamitous 14th Century* (1978; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); Jacklyn Cock, *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1991). All quotations from Chaucer are from F. N. Robinson's edition of *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958). References to all four works will be incorporated into the text.
5. Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, quoted by Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 167:

The basic form of Gothic art is juxtaposition. Whether the individual work is made up out of several comparatively independent parts or is not analyzable into such parts, whether it is a pictorial or a plastic, an epic or a dramatic representation, it is always the principle of expansion and not of concentration, of co-ordination and not of subordination, of the open sequence and not of the closed geometric form, by which it is dominated. The beholder is, as it were, led through the stages and stations of a journey, and the picture of reality which it reveals is like a panoramic survey, not a one-sided, unified representation, dominated by a single point of view.
6. See Edward Said's discussion of Arnold's definition of culture and its connection with the power of the State in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 9–12: 'To be for and in culture is [for Arnold] to be in and for a State in a compellingly loyal way'(11). Said sees Arnold's insistence on refinement as simultaneously an exclusion and a suppression of everything that is not itself.
7. *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, 181: 'The story is immediately concerned with those two noble activities, love and chivalry, but even more important is the general tenor of the noble life, the pomp and ceremony, the dignity and power, and particularly the repose and assurance with which the exponent of nobility invokes order.' For a recent critique of Muscatine's reading, see Brooke Bergan, 'Surface and Secret in *The Knight's Tale*'. Bergan maintains that 'An ironic and insidious humor . . . pervades the poem, neutralizing what should be its most powerfully emotional moments'(6) and 'what lies beneath the surface of the Knight's Tale is not merely disorder, . . . but a perversion of order'(11). See also Susan Crane, 'Medieval Romance and Feminine Difference in *The Knight's Tale*', in Thomas J. Heffernan, ed., *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 12, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1990), 47–63: '*The Knight's Tale* becomes . . . not just an antiquarian exercise but a subversively anachronistic exploration of accident and disorder in all or any time'(63).
8. See Terry Jones's discussion of the word chivalrie in *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1982), 223–4.
9. E. T. Donaldson, 'Four Women of Style' in *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), 49.
10. *The Sunday Times*, 4 December 1988, quoted by Cock, 126.
11. One of Jacklyn Cock's 'Informants', a black youth, says, 'The SADF is a terrorist institution, precisely because it has terrorized people over the years. MK was formed to defend the people (the oppressed masses, that is) against the terrorists' (228).
12. Denis Worrall, noting in an article in the *Cape Times* that "governance" (to use the World Bank's description) in Africa is seriously in question'(CT 8) unintentionally reminds us, through the coincidence of the World Bank's terminology with Palamon's, that governance has been seriously in question for a very long time.

13. Convention *n.* 1. a. a large formal assembly of a group with common interests . . .
4. any agreement, contract. 5. the most widely accepted or established view of what is thought to be proper behaviour, good taste, etc. 6. an acceptable rule, usage, etc. . . . *The Collins English Dictionary.*
14. Barbara Tuchman, 15 :
A man born to the noble estate clung to the sword as the sign of his identity, not only for the sake of tax-exemption but for self-image. 'Not one of us had a father who died at home,' insisted a knight in a 13th century *chanson de geste*; 'all have died in the battle of cold steel.'
Imagine trying to take away such a man's traditional weapon; imagine even trying to get such a man to a negotiating table whose purpose it is to abolish the battle of cold steel.
15. ' . . . the sort of tournament that Theseus is suggesting would have been regarded by Chaucer's contemporaries as little more than a licensed brawl, and his "modifications" would have been seen as farcical' (*Chaucer's Knight*, 201).

Some Thoughts on African Nationalism, Literary Education and the Post-Colonial University

Laurence Wright

The central intention of literature is to colonise minds. No piece of intellectual technology is potentially more democratic, or more subversive, than the book. Each book sets out to so invade the sensibility of readers that its propositions, its aesthetic, its particular infra-cultural rootedness are accepted as utterly convincing. And given that the physical artifact is trans-historical, with works from different cultures and periods coming to prominence and receding into obscurity all the time, the possibilities for cultural incoherence implicit in the mere fact of widespread literacy are staggering.

These possibilities are seldom realised, other than by individuals. Books do not have it all their own way. Their attempted invasion meets with an array of resistances, some fortuitous, others the product of socio-cultural conditioning. The illiterate are by definition immune to the challenges of literature (except as a source of anxiety or as a distant echo reconstituted by oral report), the pre-occupied have not the mental space. The 'bookish' minority has constructed complex screening devices which mostly admit for genuine consideration only those elements in literature which are comfortably compatible with their own perceived life-paths. More generally still, the zest with which nineteenth-century Europe and America tackled the exciting project of putting the world between covers for a mass readership is on the wane. In the western world, the popular media for tackling the issues of the day are predominantly auditory and visual, leaving 'heavy' journalism and the worthy task of teasing the last drop of linguistic and conceptual inventiveness out of literate technologies to a tiny 'high-brow' élite. For the mass of mankind, the value of literacy is, in the first instance, wholly instrumental. The search for self-definition and social discovery, for moral and cultural awareness and aesthetic delight can still be pursued through literature but such is the half-conscious, ludic, almost magnetic pull of new technology that visual image manipulation and the computing universe have become the learning frontiers of the moment.

The sketch given above suggests the first of three important contexts in which southern African universities must set about the

task of re-shaping literary education in this country. The second is the devastating legacy of apartheid education, a major upshot of which, as far as literary studies are concerned, is that few young people passing through our protracted school educational system emerge with more than a fleeting encounter with the literature of Africa in general, and South Africa in particular. This is widely recognised as a ridiculous state of affairs. We must also acknowledge that the situation came about in large measure as a result of deliberate intervention by political authority in the name of 'Christian National Education' and with the intention of stamping out or inhibiting the challenge of African Nationalism.

The third relevant context is the development of high-powered critical theory in Europe and America which in diverse ways is rapidly taking over the intellectual universe. Just as we are all too aware of living in a global economic system, so we live increasingly in a cosmopolitan intellectual system. The debates of Geneva and Johns Hopkins, of Manchester and Cambridge, of Paris and Vienna register ever more swiftly in universities round the world, including those of Africa.

Of the three dynamics sketched briefly above, the most obvious injustice to be righted is the relative neglect of African writing in school and university syllabi. South Africans must be given the opportunity to read and study the literature of their own country and of Africa. But here cognisance should be taken of the divergent cultural imperatives of African Nationalism. The process of syllabus reconstruction in South Africa tends to be construed in a framework of binary oppositions, the chief terms of which are centre and periphery, canon and margin, metropolis and colony, Europe and Africa. In post-colonial Africa of the 1960s and 1970s the main thrust of African cultural nationalism was to reverse these polarities in favour of the historically weaker term. In its strong version Africa was to be for Africans, the centre of the intellectual universe. The flavour of this claim may be gauged from a piece written by Wanyandey Songa in 1971, urging a more radical Africanisation of the university:

The colonially created university . . . was intended to academically colonise the mind of Africa.

An African government must encourage and make certain that African civilisation is the core of the entire curriculum and that other aspects of various civilisations, though necessary, are peripheral. (Songa, 5, 7.)

Songa's article marks the phase of socialist challenge in East Africa, rooted in Marxian dependency or underdevelopment theory, which underwrote the famous Nairobi literature debate and indeed placed

African literature at the core of the curriculum with European and other literatures on the periphery, perhaps culminating in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's much quoted book *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), which looks towards 'the international democratic and socialist community of tomorrow' (Ngugi, 103).

The trouble with this strong version of African cultural nationalism is that it falls foul of the other two dynamics outlined above: the democratic subversiveness of books and the philosophical subversiveness of critical theory. To hold literary studies powerfully within African horizons will demand (a) coercive political intervention all too reminiscent of 'Christian National Education' and (b) the ability to ignore the siren calls of critical theory pointing out that African discourses are always already fully implicated in the wider cosmopolitan discourse of the global academy. They remain wholly 'African' only if they are silent.

To illustrate the first possibility; when, in volume two of his autobiography, Es'kia Mphahlele came to review the Nairobi literature debate with an eye to the future of South African literary education, he proposed:

... that African literature should include all writing, imaginative and expository, that was created out of African experience. This would include in turn the Conrads, Joyce Careys, Huxleys, Blixens, Henleys, Lessings, the South African whites.

Then, in what I take to be a statement of the defining purpose of literature in education, he went on:

Students would in turn sort out what, in this literature, was an act of commitment to the African soil and an expression of a cultural identity shared by the majority of our indigenous peoples; and conversely, what was an imposition of European sensibility on African materials and human landscape. (Mphahlele, 41.)

Literature in education is to become an instrument of cultural reconstruction, a means to achieving a national identity and creating an ideological horizon around African creativity. It is a superficially attractive notion, but a problematic one. Mphahlele saw clearly the limitations of 'Negritude' and also, no doubt, those of Nkrumah's 'Consciencism', Kaunda's 'African humanism', Eyadema's 'Authenticity' (an offshoot of 'Mobutuism' in which cultural constructivism reached its nadir) and the other synthetic philosophies which post-colonial Africa has produced. Why burden literary education with a task it cannot fulfil? (Shakespeare, to cite a prime example, is supposedly used in Britain for just this kind of purpose, and often by

persons who neither enjoy his plays nor read them.) Books tend to multiply perspectives, diffuse cultural solidarity, fragment belief systems, institutionalise scepticism, provoke originality, support individualism and consolidate separate strands of criticism only fractionally opposed. Literary education insofar as it is effective, will naturally tend to dissolve exactly what the 'strong' cultural nationalist wishes to construct; unless, that is, an equally strong educational sub-text is provided as the 'hidden curriculum' within the pedagogical process. Hence the danger that African Nationalism may inadvertently replicate in a different way the educational barbarism perpetrated by Afrikaner Nationalism in the form of 'Christian National Education'.

Secondly, the very effort to reverse the polarities of metropolis and colony, centre and margin ends up confirming these categories because it takes them for granted. Because all 'African' literary discourse is always already implicated in a diversity of 'non-African' discourses, forms and technologies, the search for a conceptually imperative horizon of 'Africaness' is spurious and creates only category anxieties and strange territorial aggressions quite foreign to the spirit of Africa (if I may use the expression). Pursued in fields outside literature, like economics and development theory, this radical expression of African nationalism – though readily understandable as a reaction to colonial racism and exploitation – has proved counter-productive.

The liberal, 'open' or 'fusionist' version of African nationalism, which probably accords more fully with African social practice, provides a more attractive option; attractive because it can accommodate the subversiveness of literature without emasculating it, and because it 'fits' with the cosmopolitan vigour of contemporary intellectual production. Ali Mazrui's three-stage paradigm of African cultural nationalism, developed early in Africa's post-independent experience, is an important expression of this 'open' version: at first, Africa is concerned to demonstrate that it can master Western culture, then comes the call to repudiate the West in favour of recovering and reconstructing Africa's own cultural heritage. There follows, according to Mazrui, a third phase:

A third phase of cultural nationalism is the capacity to take pride in some aspects of African culture without feeling an urge to renounce Western culture at the same time. But when a cultural nationalist reaches this stage, he is in fact gradually ceasing to be a nationalist altogether in this cultural field. He is beginning to accept the proposition that there is such a thing as a global pool of mankind's cultural achievements from different lands. And such an attitude is not neatly nationalistic. (Mazrui, 108.)

In Mazrui's third phase, Africa is sufficiently sure of itself to draw on African, Western and other sources freely on merit, without apology. Intellectual interdependence is fully accepted.

The 'closed' or radical version of African cultural nationalism tends to stick at Mazrui's second stage, repudiating the West; it produces the neo-colonial university, constantly embattled against a cultural environment which cannot conform to the ideological identity it claims for itself. The post-colonial university, one which accepts its local, national *and* international duties and responsibilities, can only appear where Mazrui's third stage is not merely an ideal, but an actuality; for the post-colonial university is concerned overwhelmingly with cultural diversity, with interdisciplinarity, with negotiating boundary and category shifts of all sorts, with producing a versatile work-force able to raid the global store of knowledge in the search for workable solutions to local and national problems.

I was pleased recently to come across an elegant expression of much of what I have been labouring to say here about the post-colonial university and the challenges and opportunities of African Nationalism:

We must first, I think, accept that nationalism resurgent, or even nationalism militant, whether it is the nationalism of the victim or of the victor, such a nationalism has its limits. Nationalism is the philosophy of identity made into a collectively organized passion. For those of us just emerging from marginality and persecution, nationalism is a necessary thing: a long deferred and denied identity needs to come out into the open and take its place among other human identities. But that is only the first step. To make all or even most of education subservient to this goal is to limit human horizons without either intellectual or, I would argue, political warrant. To assume that the ends of education are best advanced by focusing principally on *our own* separateness, our own ethnic identity, culture, and traditions ironically places us where as subaltern, inferior, or lesser races we had been placed by nineteenth-century racial theory, unable to share in the general riches of human culture. To say that women should read mainly women's literature, that Blacks should study and perfect only Black techniques of understanding and interpretation, that Arabs and Muslims should return to the Holy Book for all knowledge and wisdom is the inverse of saying along with Carlyle and Gobineau that all the lesser races must retain their inferior status in the world.

A single over-mastering identity at the core of the academic enterprise, whether that identity be Western, African, or Asian, is a confinement, a deprivation. (17)

The writer is Edward Said. Whether, having been deprived for so long of the opportunity of generating a national identity, South Africa will have the courage and strategic wisdom to accept his advice is hard to judge. A lot is at stake for all South Africans.

Nevertheless, if I am asked for views on the role of European literature in a post-apartheid South Africa, my reply is that, first, we must ensure that African and South African literature has a substantial place in the curriculum both at school and in undergraduate courses. Second, we must persuade any old-style African Nationalists that specialists in non-African literatures are a valuable and necessary part of the identity of the post-colonial university (otherwise we can expect only a second rate account of everything other than African literature). Third, we must persuade specialists in non-African literatures to take an interest in African literatures: there is really no respectable excuse for the false inference that because one is paid for specialising in a non-African subject, one is paid for specialising in a non-African subject *only*. I fail to see how anyone who is interested in literature can be wholly incurious about the literature of the country in which he or she lives and works.

Given those conditions, and subject to the constraints of staffing and demand, there is no reason why departments of literature in a future South Africa should not, in addition to African and South African literature, offer courses in European literature, South American, North American, Caribbean, Australasian, Old Norse or, yes, English literature. Let academic market forces do their work. I do not believe in consciously using literature, or literary education, to create or prop up cultural identity. South Africans must be free to create their own identity, to go to those schools and universities which best meet their needs, to read those books which will give them the identity *they* want. The central intention of literature is to colonise minds. No piece of intellectual technology is potentially more democratic, or more subversive, than the book.

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On Laying Down The Lore

Peter Knox-Shaw

The imagination is less compliant than many commentators on cultural matters would like to believe. To speak of replacing a 'Europeanized culture' with a 'newly dominant Afrocentric culture', as writers at a recent conference at Wits are reported to have done,¹ is to assume that culture is the work of social engineers. That forlorn notion comes unsurprisingly from Europe where (as all but Europhobes are aware) it has at last run its catastrophic course. Ideologies can indeed be promoted and imposed by political means, but in the long run not even the censor – as our own history shows – has the power to check the flight of words. No matter what rubber stamps the pundits wield, the traffic of thought persists, and in an open society the liveliest ideas are the first to put down root.

To question what is meant by an 'Afrocentric' culture, as I intend to do here, is to note from the start that the concept is shot through with paradox. So slippery is the term in debate that it is best approached through a practical context, and a good place to begin is with the syllabus reforms made in response to cries for 'Africanization' at many English departments over the last decade. In some cases these reforms are further-reaching than actually appears from the curriculum. At one showcase institution, research is almost exclusively on South African topics, and though European texts still constitute the bulk of undergraduate work, they are set – thanks to a keen band of deconstructionists – at a galactic distance, from where, fast-receding, they are heard to emit bleeps of political incorrectitude. On such terms the classics serve, at best, as a foil to local talent. Those first apologists for a South African component in English courses who argued that local literature could never flourish without the attentions of academe,² might well be surprised to find creative writers in requisition today as top faculty brass. Though the cause was worthy, their argument was always a shaky one – witness the way writers elsewhere (Woolf, Eliot, Auden, Larkin spring to mind) have been happy to cock a snook at academic consecration. Great literatures have come and gone without the likes of English schools, and adulation of the living fills just one moment in lit. crit.'s short span.

Though real enough, the debt that literature owes to learning is of another kind. In the past universities functioned as the repositories of

ancient or exotic cultures. And so strong was the creative stimulus given by these essentially extraneous traditions, that the history of British writing (to take one case) demands to be understood as a series of overlapping cultural influences – whole periods and movements being marked by the ascendancy of some particular bond. The study of Greek, Latin and Hebrew, the acquiring of Italian, German and French, the translating of Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, Russian, and Cantonese – all these acted as soil and seed to the sprouting of new literary forms. And cross-fertilisation, even if less readily traced, still remains a chief principle of growth. Even the nuance and power of the language itself are the fruit of such assimilation.

Centres of the humanities have traditionally been outward looking. They have aimed at absorbing and analysing foreign cultures and languages; they have laboured to construct the past in all its otherness. That these goals were warped by parochialism, or perverted by a variety of material ends, goes without saying, but this is not to negate the ideal of disinterested search. How, indeed, can any body of knowledge begin to win assent, except by claiming to represent the truth? Recently universities have been sternly reminded (by both right and left) of the social context in which they exist, and are bound – as much by economy as by duty – to pull their weight. While there is force to these arguments, something goes seriously wrong when they are elevated into a definitive rationale for university study itself. How damaging, for example, as well as odd, that on a day set aside for the celebration of independence, a speaker should define academic freedom in a way that cancels free enquiry. Yet here is Dr Coovadia at the climax of his T.B. Davie address, *From Ivory Tower To A People's University*, clinching his message:

Academic Freedom is ultimately the right freely to reproduce, transmit and utilise knowledge which can regularly be applied for practical purposes in order to advance the cause of human freedom.³

Dr Coovadia's case can fairly be said to be the equivalent, at the tertiary level, of the slogan 'liberation before education', for his prescription (in the name of freedom) not only rules out fresh research but shackles all ideas to practical ends, more accurately – as appears from the rest of his talk – to a neo-Marxist ideology which he appoints as the proper means to social change.⁴

The pretext usually given by Afrocentrics bent on overhauling the traditional university is that the oppressive structures of our society call for institutions that are radical and boldly interventionist. Again, the fact that universities co-existed with apartheid (however strong their opposition) is taken as evidence of a collaboration, indelibly

permeating their entire outlook. This poisoning by association carries so great an emotive charge that even the bibliography for a European course can be queered by the image of a 'Europeans Only' sign. The linkage is irrational, nonetheless, and to be fought. What a bitter irony if the last triumph of apartheid turns out to be the crippling, by infection, of its most resented enemy. And as for effectiveness – where, in answer to apartheid, the new academic scheme has emerged, the resulting climate has proved as a rule profoundly illiberal, far more likely to vex than speed the processes of social change. No matter how well-intentioned, the maxim that universities exist for the welfare of the people has as much chance of doing harm as good. To prize knowledge in proportion to its utility is, in the first place, to insult the human spirit. But there is cause for caution on practical grounds alone, for the dividends of research are notoriously hard to predict, major breakthroughs often arising as by-products in unforeseeable ways. But even if the pragmatic premise were granted, the question stands of how well Africanization is suited to such aims.

Within the university the areas promising the richest social reward are the applied sciences, and in this context the meaning of Africanize is a relatively limited one. Though there are some who hold out for an indigenous mathematics, the truth is that the methods of science are international, and there is certainly nothing new about applying them to a local praxis. The challenge lies rather in maintaining standards that will enable the continuance of global exchange, and so ensure the maximum potency to research on topics specifically African. In any case, talk of radical overhaul has usually been directed at other targets, owing in part to the disquieting fact that the scientific disciplines in our universities have progressively lost their place at the centre of the stage. Where the total enrolment of students at arts faculties, between 1982 and 1989 grew by 31%, and at education faculties by 29%, the figure for science and engineering was 17%, while medicine in the same period underwent a decrease of 21%.⁵ The lack of growth in these fertile areas of study is further underlined by comparison with Europe. Degrees in science and engineering awarded in 1989 accounted in France and Germany, respectively, for 48% and 31% of all degrees, in South Africa in the same year for 13%.⁶ In this comparative shortfall, a genuinely pragmatic programme for higher education would find reason for alarm, but the attention of Afrocentrics has been riveted on other concerns.

The expansion of arts faculties was marked by the growth of a few key departments at the expense of smaller ones (English generally coming out top), and coincided with that vogue for highly politicized study in the humanities which took off from the writing of a few

post-structuralists.⁷ Even before the move to Africanize got under way, students in the grip of ‘Theory’ (already *passé* in Paris but at Yale given more facelifts than Michael Jackson) were leaving the university the poorer in knowledge of history and in curiosity about life beyond the campus walls. A sense of sagging standards (quite improperly ascribed to the need to meet the Third World) supplied a convenient pretext, in one department at least, for building up the post-graduate programme. Consequently, at a time when research in English studies was cut back drastically overseas, research students materialized in unprecedented numbers and were encouraged or coerced to work on indigenous topics. At the University of Cape Town post-graduates were told variously that research in the traditional fields was exhausted,⁸ or that the material necessary to such undertakings was unavailable in the country; and so, in one of those ‘rapid jumps’ prophesied by Dr Coovadia,⁹ English studies there took on a new direction almost overnight. It could be said to have been Africanized – on the face of it. But was the new order of a kind to satisfy the more searching criteria of Afrocentricity? – did it answer, for example, to that sense of an autochthonous culture which Edward Blyden spoke of more than a century back,¹⁰ or to that notion of African quiddity stressed by the Rev. James Johnson?¹¹ Quite evidently not. The students were equipped, so to speak, with spectacles of a deep tint and of conspicuously Parisian design. The books in their carrels came for the most part from America or Europe. Even their African texts (many of them published in alien lands) showed the tell-tale marks of minds trained overseas. But, in truth, every twentieth-century writer exists in an international context, for no contemporary work is free of debt to a range of cultural sources. All that retards this recognition is a nationalism – or a racial or group pride – such as that sustaining Afrocentricity. The xenophobia it breeds is a phenomenon to be reckoned with all the same, since, unchecked, it may prevent local writers benefiting, in the future, from the wide cultural access that they enjoyed in the past.

It is a symptom of the times, that a major novelist who sees fit to introduce a text with no less than three epigraphs from famous Europeans, should decree that a child interested in music had best throw away Mozart and exchange the piano for a set of tribal drums. Strangely enough, as the chronicles of literary reception show, just those talents which seem at first most cosmopolitan or even *outré*, frequently come to be regarded as the most valid. The artist who seeks to break through the strait-jacket of received conventions, has first – Houdini-like – to scrutinize them. Only after an extensive tour of European galleries, for example, was Jan Volschenk, that early indigenous talent, able to dismiss the tricks he had half-consciously

acquired and begin to paint the landscape as an African.¹² Too narrow a sense of the genuine voice – witness the reluctant acceptance by Australian critics of Patrick White – is the first defence of a stifling parochialism, and from that colonial blight our country has surely suffered enough already. There is no question that writers from every background will continue to absorb traditions that come from abroad. The question is what will be available to them, how deliberate and aware they will be in making their choice.

One of the chief social functions of the humanities formerly has been to provide a bridge to other literatures and societies. If the time has come in our own society for this function to devolve on other kinds of agency or institution, the more is the pity, for this role is one that a university is uniquely equipped to perform. And what *raison d'être* will remain for a department of English, say, in which lecturers of the traditional syllabus have been edged into a back seat? The teaching of language? Perhaps, but with the current lack of confidence among academics themselves as to whether standard English is the thing to teach, and with expertise scant in the highly developed techniques of second-language instruction, that case is far from made. And if insight into politics or the economic base of history is the aim, there are well-established disciplines catering to these concerns with greater finesse and rigour. Given the composite structure of our BA degrees there is every reason to keep the centres of separate subjects distinct: better to expand the number of credits on offer than broaden the scope of individual courses that occupy a fraction of each student's commitment. And South African literature? In view of the small size of the book market (reflecting, as it must, a national economic output no larger than that of a single, middle-ranking European city)¹³ it has shown great enterprise in a remarkable range of fields. Its value as a subject of study is undoubted and will continue to grow, but it should not be allowed to displace the study of other literatures, which are its natural nourishment. Whether its interests in the academy are best served by a self-appointed clerisy of writers is another matter.

The Europhobia responsible for so much intellectual dishonesty in our society has two chief sources. It stems, on the one hand, from an account of African history in which Europe figures solely as the oppressor, an account which typically draws a veil over endogenous slavery in Africa, or the success of the abolitionist campaign. The horrors of imperial exploitation make this response a wholly understandable one, especially when so many current historians, in the wake of Foucault, insist on treating any period as the expression of a single episteme. On the other hand, and less easy to follow, is the phobia that issues from a particular kind of crisis in colonial identity,

in which there appear, mysteriously blended together, guilt for the past, recoil from competition, and a deep fear of not really belonging. One of its signs, frequently serving as a symbol of culture *tout court*, is the craze for exclusively indigenous gardening. A giveaway! Gardeners, from the Queen of Sheba onwards, have not only admitted but delighted in exotics. Their expulsion points to the fact that it is the gardener who is not at home.

What gives creative writing particular importance in a society as riven with chasms as our own, is the power it has to abolish distance. But it is precisely this power that makes all writing potentially international. The imagination vaults over even internally erected barriers, and is not easily circumscribed. In classical mythology this mobility was celebrated in Pegasus who struck open the source of all poetry with his flying hooves. And a similar notion seems to be encoded in San rock art by the trance-buck (or *ales*) which is shown streaking through the air or sometimes has wings.¹⁴ In the past, when the main limitation on the flight of words was physical, cross-pollination supplied a favoured metaphor for literary influence. So Swift in *The Battle of the Books* presents the author who glories in self-sufficiency as a spider, fabricating cobweb and venom, while his eclectic writer figures as a bee, moving busily from plant to plant.¹⁵ The product of this labour is honey and wax which yield 'sweetness and light'; its by-product (ignored by Swift) further crosses, further hybrids. Now that words travel much faster than pollen, it is idle to pretend that literary works have the purity of wild flowers.

NOTES

1. See Maya Jaggi, 'Writing Beyond Repression?', *TLS*, 21 February 1992, 13–14.
2. For a review of the debate, and in particular of this argument within it, see Geoffrey Haresnape, 'The Battle for the Books: the Evolution of the Academic Criticism of South African Literature in English 1956–1976', *English Studies In Africa*, 31:1 (1988) 41–9, *passim*.
3. H.M. Coovadia, *From Ivory Tower To A People's University* (University of Cape Town, 1986), 17.
4. See Coovadia, 5, 11, 16.
5. See the section on tertiary education in *Race Relations Survey 1991/2* (Braamfontein, 1992), 220. The figures are from *Labour Statistics* (1986, 1987, 1990 and 1991); and *South African Statistics* (CSS, 1988).
6. *Race Relations Survey 223*; from Professor P. Smit, 'The University as a Unique Partner in Training' (Pretoria, 1991).
7. For a critical account of this movement at universities in the USA see Camille Paglia 'The Nursery-school Campus: The Corrupting of the Humanities in the US', *TLS*, 22 May 1992, 19.

8. This argument seems to go back a long way. In the course of his crusading plea for the teaching of South African texts, at a conference in 1956, Professor R. G. Howarth claimed gratuitously that research in European literatures had 'almost been exhausted'; even on his own understanding of research as bio/bibliographical this has been far from the case. See 'Indigenous Literature and its Place in University English Studies' in *Proceedings of a Conference of Writers, Publishers, Editors and University Teachers of English held at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 10-12 July 1957* (Johannesburg, 1957) 47.
9. Coovadia, 11.
10. See particularly Edward W. Blyden, 'The Aims and Methods of a Liberal Education for Africans', in *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London, 1888), 95-7. For some discussion of this view see Asavia Wandira, *The African University in Development* (Johannesburg, 1977), particularly the first chapter, and 39-41. Laurence Wright has recently drawn attention to the complexities of Blyden's position in 'Aspects of Shakespeare in Post-Colonial Africa', *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 4 (1990/1), 30-1.
11. See Peter I. Odumos, *Government and University in Developing Society* (University of Ife, 1973), passim.
12. For details of this journey of 1891 see Helene Steyn and Marie-Lou Roux, *Die Volschenks* (Cape Town, 1992), 2-8.
13. *Race Relations Survey* 1991-2, xlv.
14. See David Lewis-Williams and Thomas Dowson, *Images of Power* (Johannesburg, 1989) 72-3, and J. F. Thackeray 'On Concepts Expressed in Southern African Rock Art', *Antiquity* 64:242 (1990), 139-44.
15. Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub etc* ed. A. C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith (Oxford 1920), 232.

Dialogism as Literary Ethics

On Two Afrikaans Novels and a 'New South Africa'

Marianne de Jong

It would be preposterous for a non-writer to declare what the tasks and challenges facing South African literary writing should be. However, contemplating two well-received recently published Afrikaans novels, one might detect a new sense of 'tasks' and 'challenges' for which the mode of writing in both these novels might be symptomatic. These two novels are John Miles's *Kroniek uit die doofpot* (1991) and Jeanne Goosen's *Ons is nie almal so nie* (1990).

I detect in these two novels an impulse to draw on a different kind of reader – the ordinary wo/man, beyond academic, cultural and other literary power-mongering. Both novels are complicit with such an 'ordinary' reader, 'ordinary' since she or he is a member of the unidentified and unclassified masses. Her or his qualifications, sophistication, status, living area, income and even literacy are unknown.¹ This 'ordinary reader' is not 'the people' or 'the masses'. Neither of these two novels has been written in order to make concessions to anti-élitism or anti-Eurocentrism, to anti-postmodernism or to pro-accountability. To the contrary, formal means indicate this break away from South African literatures which divide, classify and hierarchise.² These techniques can be described as that which these novels, by two authors with very different *oeuvres*, have in common: a return to the story, to straightforward narration, to 'realism' and to the language of the ordinary speaker – common, spoken, non-'literary' Afrikaans. In this, both novels differ markedly not only from previous work by their authors, but also from present and recent modes of Afrikaans literary production as, for example, exemplified in the work of Wilma Stockenström, Andre P. Brink, Alexander Strachan, Etienne van Heerden or Koos Prinsloo.

To say that one detects in Goosen's and Miles's new work a sense of a 'task' or a 'challenge' is to say that the mode of writing has an ethical thrust. This ethical thrust is not discernible on the representational level of fiction. It is an ethics concerning itself with *how to write*. To explain this, I should like to draw upon Roland Barthes' notion of an ethics or a responsibility of form, as developed in *Critical Essays* in respect of Brechtian theatrical technique and in respect of Kafka, and

also under discussion in *Writing Degree Zero*. A writer's mode of writing, says Barthes, is a mode of human behaviour. This mode is a formal issue. It is also the only aspect of writing about which the author can exercise a free choice. Not natural language or natural style, but the formality of technical choices has an ethical dimension (Barthes, 1985: 20). By selecting certain techniques to realise her literary objective, the writer indicates the social field in which she wishes to situate her writing. These choices therefore express the writer's social and historical solidarity (1985:22).

If Barthes' 'responsibility of form' implies first of all a generalisable concern with *how to write*, its strict meaning hinges on semio-structuralist and late-semiotic theories of language which state, firstly, that language is the basic material of literary writing and, secondly, that language does not represent or refer to meaning or to 'the real', but rather constructs the latter inasmuch as it allows for the signification of something like a 'real' or a 'world'. Linguistic meaning is no proof that there is meaning 'out there': 'Language is neither an instrument nor a vehicle: it is a structure . . . the author is the only man . . . to lose his own structure and that of the world in the structure of language. Yet this language is . . . labored substance . . . reality is never anything but a pretext for this . . .' (1972:145) Kafka's truth is not Kafka's world . . . but the signs of this world . . . the writer can show only the *sign* without the *signified*: the world is a place endlessly open to signification . . .' (1972:135; Barthes' emphasis). Literature, dependant on language, cannot be transparent unto meaning in the 'real world'. It should not represent meaning but it should, instead, interrogate meaning.

Literary writing displays an ethics of form when it draws attention to the fact that it constructs meaning by technical means. Literature, by foregrounding the arbitrariness of the relation between signifier and signified, can unveil the arbitrariness of autonomised, ideologised social and institutional 'truths'. By drawing attention to its own constructedness and technical nature, literature reminds us of the fact that all meaning is constructed and arbitrary and thus historically, politically and culturally relativised. 'Truths' can be changed since they are man-made and they are man-made since the relationship between word and ('real') thing is unmotivated, to use another term of Barthes (1983:14).

The critique this ethics of form facilitates, is articulated poignantly in those avant-garde and experimentalist texts Barthes has analysed, texts which foreground their formal principles by structuring themselves around abstract linguistic and other figurations. This obviously is not the case in the two novels under discussion here. Both texts in fact seem to move in an opposite direction: the re-instatement of

meaningfulness in ordinary language, the transparency of the story, the vindication of reference to the 'real.' However, this might be a false impression. In Goosen's and Miles's texts there seems to be an acceptance that meaning – linguistic, social, political or literary – is dependant on language as spoken and on spoken language in its socio-cultural and political-historical specificity, this including delusions and illusions, vagueness and narrowness. As much as language is limited by its speakers and their interests and class determination, it is also neutral to these, 'democratically' facilitating and carrying any and all kinds of social conflicts-of-the-day.

Reading these novels, one is reminded of an incidental remark by the late Afrikaans poet and academic D.J. Opperman to the effect that all literary renewal is characterised by a return to spoken language and an exploitation of humour. This is especially obvious in *Ons is nie almal so nie*.³

The implicit theory of language underlying Goosen's and Miles's writing provokes a Bakhtinian description. The term 'ethics of form' would be applicable to the latest novels by Goosen and Miles if their writing indicated that spoken language, devoid of truth systems which might outweigh or correct socio-cultural deviations, devoid of essence, always dependant on a context to become 'language' and meaning, always dependant on a future to correct the relative truths of the present – that this language is the material of writing and that writers and writing cannot rise above it, except by a move which would be unethical since it would defy its own history. Bakhtin has defined this open-endedness of language-as-spoken, of the word as voice, with the term *dialogism*.

At the basis of Bakhtin's theory of discursive dialogism is a theory of the utterance which the following quotation could summarise:

Utterance . . . is constructed between two socially organised persons, and in the absence of a real addressee, an addressee is presupposed in the person, so to speak, of a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs . . . In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant . . . Aside from the fact that the word as sign is a borrowing on the speaker's part from the social stock of available signs, the very individual manipulation of this social sign in a concrete utterance is wholly determined by social relations.' (Voloshinov, 1973:85–86; author's emphasis)

The extent to which the dialogism of language is a condition of possibility of literary writing can be explained with two more quotations from Bakhtin: 'in fact we never pronounce a word, nor hear one, what we hear is either true or false, good or bad, important or

unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant. A word is always saturated with an ideological or partial content and meaning' (Shukman, 1983:41). It is this language, always already pre-interpreted, carrying with it unavoidable pre-meanings, which characterises language as spoken, in other words, the word as voice and as social entity: 'The ideological refraction of the word . . . in cognitive, ethical, political or religious terms . . . is a preliminary condition for the entry of the word into the structure and content of a work of literature' (1973:76).⁴

As Bakhtin readers know, this inherent dialogism of spoken language can be realised formally in literary writing by multi-voicedness. In the multi-voiced text the ordinary narrative mode is retained but without subjecting language in its dialogic diversity and non-essentialism to a single perspective, for example in the form of a focalising instance. The multi-voiced text is characterised by a withdrawal of the author 'behind' textual givens – such as fictional figures and their speech – which split up language into various conflicting idiolects, specificities of class, race or status, and other forms of diversity. Citation, parody and laughter are often quoted techniques of multi-voicedness.

The theory of language underlying Barthes' ethics of form amounts to a formalist, abstract objectification of language which Bakhtin has so explicitly rejected (Voloshinov, 1973: 67). The ethics of form underlying *Ons is nie almal so nie* and *Kroniek uit die doofpot* is the result of a Bakhtinian view of language which foregrounds speech and the utterance as the most basic unit of language and which accentuates the socio-historical, contextual being of language.

I should like to explain briefly why each of the two texts under discussion not only draws upon language in its dialogism and display this in textual multi-voicedness, but also why this signals the insight that as soon as the social, spoken nature of language is foregrounded, literary 'truth' becomes a matter of form and form becomes a social issue. In these two texts, this dilemma seems to constitute the problem of writing. According to Bakhtin, multi-voicedness constitutes the novelistic, these texts allow the conclusion that dialogism as such, and the language theory which it implies, underpins the very mode of writing. To a large extent the realism effect already noted above results from this particular exploitation of dialogism. If these two examples of new writing in Afrikaans mark a 'return to realism', to direct narration and to ordinary language, then a 'return' to social speech (as that aspect of language which writing can and, perhaps should acknowledge as its basic material) might be seen to motivate this.

The narrating voice and narrative focus in *Ons is nie almal so nie* is a young girl, not yet of school-going age, whose personal voice

intermingles with the voices of the social world on which she reflects by way of direct and indirect reporting. The figures making up this social world employ a shared sociolect which one could define as early 1950s suburban Afrikaans. However, this shared voice merely serves as a basis on which individual ideologies meet, clash, diverge and contradict one another. So, for example, Doris's speech clashes with Piet's or with the grandfather's, both of them voicing distinct political or religious worlds. Descriptions of social events, trips and conversations become demonstrations of the indivisibility of language and culture, or in Bakhtin's terms, of the extent to which the spoken language is overdetermined by what the group knows. For individualistic political beliefs, there is no individual language:

'Jy weet Doris,' sê uncle Tank, 'hier staan ek nou vandag voor jou, 'n man met twee hande, gewillig om te werk, *maar dink jy daar is in hierdie lewe iemand wat na 'n ander ou se storie wil luister?* Not a damn . . . Nou sit ons nog met hierdie goewerment ook,' sê uncle Tank. 'Maar ek sê vandag vir jou, mark my woorde, ek gee hulle nog net twee jaar kans . . . Jy kan nie so met mense werk nie, al is hulle kaffers! What a life for the poor bastards!' (Goosen, 1990:17; my emphasis)

'Mixed' Afrikaans characterises this novel's use of language. It is the novel's way of foregrounding spoken language.

In various ways the characters in the novel become the victims of language's inability to specify and individualize. Doris's inability to express her frustration changes her into a dreamer who escapes through popular romantic films, then through religion and finally through a charismatic 'happy clapper' culture. That the ideologised social nature of language is inescapable is dramatized in the novel's final paragraph in which Doris finally finds a 'personal' voice – the non-language of speaking in voices, an irrational, nondescript but elated and deeply spiritual ritual of sound. Gertie has to succumb to the religious idiolect. The last pages of the text conclude a narration of the individual's subjection to language as culture and ideology:

'Partykeer sit ek voor ons hekkie op die pavement. Ek wag tot die mense in die straat by my is en dan sê ek: "Ek was besete met duiwels." Hulle kyk my snaaks aan, begin lag en stap verder. Ek skree dan agterna: "Ek het my bekéé-er!"' (157)

Gertie's own childlike exploitation of her 'conversion' is juxtaposed with what the reader can deduce about the reaction of passers-by (that the child is half-crazy). The context of Gertie's 'conversion' is Doris's instinctive effort to escape the limits of a narrow-minded, ideologised reality which she cannot understand. This reality becomes the discourse Doris imposes on Gertie:

'Dis beter soos ons nou leef,' sê my ma. 'Dit is die weg van waarheid. Dit is die geluk waarna ek nog altyd gesoek het.' As ek bioscope toe wil gaan of êrens anders, sê my ma dit is wêreldse dinge, dit behoort aan die verlede. Eendag sal ek alles verstaan. Sy moet reg wees, want al die mense wat hier aankom met hulle Bybels en boekies waaruit hulle lees en bid, sê ook so. (157–158)

Textual multi-voicedness results from the consistency with which Gertie is being used as the only narrative perspective. This perspective becomes a social playground of discourse since Gertie's language imitates that of her cultural and ideological environment. The extent to which this writing becomes a parody of a the 'Afrikaans-ness' of Afrikaans, is clear in passages such as the following:

Daar was verskriklik baie mense daardie aand by die ATKV-saal vir die konsert. Die hele Hartenbos was seker daar. Die saal was baie vol en hulle moes nog stoele indra. Twee meisies en twee seuns met volkspeleklere aan het vir ons gewys waar ons moet sit. Die saal was opgedoen met vlae en bokant die gordyn van die verhoog was daar 'n groot poster. My ma het die woorde hardop gelees: 'Afrikaner verenig in stryd.' Oom Koos het langs my gesit. Hy was baie stil en daar was seker iets fout met sy maag, want die het kort-kort geskree. 'n Vet man met 'n verskriklike lang baard het op die verhoog gekom en die mense het begin hande klap. Die man het sy hand opgehou om stilte te kry en toe sê hy 'n klomp goed van kultuur en taal en die Here en die voorreg wat dit is vir Afrikaners om by so 'n heuglike geleentheid saam te wees. (70–71)

Alienated in the voice of the innocent imitator of the other's discourse, the sociolect parodies itself, constituting one of the major features of multi-voicedness in Goosen's novel. What one is invited to read here and in the previous extracts, is clearly not a 'realistic' description, but a social critique in the form of an implicit critique of language.

What characterises this display of language as sociolect is the way in which *Ons is nie almal so nie* parodies the language it employs, without humour ever becoming an authorial vantage point to which the writing is subjected. Often humour, laughter and the tendency to self-parody seem inherent to the very Afrikaans parodied and debunked in the novel. Gertie's proclamation 'ek is bekéé-er' is highly ironic, showing how this literary multi-voicedness manages to demonstrate the inescapable cultural pre-conditioning of what is idealistically known as 'meaning.' This self-parody is indicative of a high degree of dialogism. Bakhtin has stated that dialogism characteristically leads to discursive transgression (Patterson, 1985:133). It is this feature of multi-voicedness which allows Goosen's novel to be a critique of language as ideological socialisation without the writing itself leaving the boundaries of spoken Afrikaans and thus becoming a-historical and 'undemocratic'.

The dialogism of Goosen's writing has a third dimension. Spoken language is foregrounded in order to subvert the official language of literature, specifically of the Afrikaans literary canon. This subversion bears comparison with the Bakhtinian *carnavalesque* since Afrikaans as 'common' spoken medium not only has a strong cultural tradition of its own, crossing racial and classist boundaries, but also because this Afrikaans has never been granted official literary status. It was only allowed as a means to achieve humorous effects. In this denied and repressed dialogism Goosen's text confronts official Afrikaans literature – *Ons is nie almal so nie* is a spoken, socialised, non-individualistic and non-élitist accumulation of voices. This confrontation implies a certain 'ethics of form' since it reminds official literature that its condition of possibility – spoken language and spoken Afrikaans – is of a kind which in advance delegitimises claims literary writing might have to ideological purity or intellectual transparency and mastery. Neither literary idea nor literary style, nor form as mere imitated formalism can save a writer from being confronted by the socio-historical aspect of her mode of writing.

In Miles's 'polisieroman' the facts which a police inquest works with, and the truth of the crime it seeks to uncover, are being referred back to discourse as social institution and thus to their 'real' social, historical and contextual environment. Multi-voiced discourse makes this text realistic, but realism here amounts to the citation of discourses. This can be explained in terms of what Bakhtin has called the reconstruction of the 'images' of spoken language (1981:337). Social speech or novelistically cited discourses is the scene of the crime. The truth of guilt and the evasions of justice can be detected between the lines of the dialogism of these discourses. A telling example of this procedure is the documentary sample with which the novel is concluded:

1989-08-31

Dear Sir

Murder: Deceased John Moleko, Penelope Moleko:
Monday 1987/11/30 at Temba

An investigation is thoroughly conducted and there is no light leading to the detect of the suspect and subsequently the case docket is closed as undetected.

Yours faithfully,

Colonel YY
Bophuthatswana Police

(Miles, 1991, 358)

An obvious agent of multi-voicedness in Miles's novel is the objectification of authorial discourse or the discourse of 'die skrywer', to quote the text. The manner in which Tumelo John remains the most prominent focalising instance throughout the text (the voice of 'die skrywer' alternating with this voice) immediately places discourses by other fictional figures into a dialogic relationship with itself. This is a second technique furthering multi-voicedness. The simultaneously provoked and subverted conventions of the police novel constitute a third dialogic dimension. The lack of an answer in this novel becomes the truth which the convention promises to unveil. The unwillingness to find and punish the guilty is the novel's final statement about the vehemence with which corruption has infiltrated society. The insensitivity of society mirrors the deafness that Tumelo John has been made to suffer. If Tumelo John is 'doof', it is because society is a 'doofpot.' Although unintentional, the pun could be extended to include the function of discourse in this writing. That which is not heard properly, that which is ignored for immoral reasons is also that which regulates discourses between the voices in this book. Dialogically constituted by these discursive exchanges, the unsaid responds to the question 'Whodunnit?' Lying exposes the truth when novelistic and fictional discourses in Miles's book are being read as dialogic.

Dialogic overtones prevail in the interplay between the discourse of fact, pursued by the author as he works through documents, and the discourse of fiction written by the author. The term 'faction' summarises this specific dialogism. The facts have to become fictions before their factuality speaks:

Ek sal noodgedwonge moet verander, dink die skrywer. Die besonderhede wat ek nie kan uitvind nie, sal ek uitdink; ander se menings sal ek met my eie aanvul en my onkunde moet ek verberg agter die seepgladheid van 'n storie. Ek gaan oral inmeng dat my brousel so deurmekaar sal lyk soos die werklikheid self. (53–54)

Both 'fact' and 'story' achieve their respective meanings only in the context of their dialogic counterparts. Writing becomes the search for a truth hidden in documents. To 'find' this truth, 'factual' documents become discourses and fictional discourse has to be read as factional, with both fact and fiction written as 'images' (Bakhtin) of 'real' social discourse. This dialogic effect is underscored by the objectification of the discourse of 'die skrywer' who not only refers to himself in the third person, but reports on his research, his moral and practical problems and his writing in a neutral and self-reflective way. The author becomes part of the various forms of speech represented in the novel to the extent that the process of writing becomes part of the plot.

The most prominent characterisation technique used in respect of Tumelo John is indirect inner monologue, written in ordinary, simple and straightforward narrative language:

Die dag voor hy weer moet begin werk, staan hy vroegoggend agter op sy stukkie werf, bekyk die skade aan sy groentetuin. Dit kan net Tshidiso en sy nuwe speelmaats wees, veral die speelmaat met sy vier energieke pote. Hy sal ogiesdraad moet kry en hier toespans, dit help nie om te raas nie. As hy meen hy hoor geklap van motordeure voor die huis, stap hy om, versigtig dat sy gepeetste skoene nie vuilkom nie. (121)

If *Kroniek uit die doofpot* is the story of a 'gewone man', as the writer wants it to be (1991:272), then this discourse ably constructs the appropriate 'image'.

The dialogic interplay between the writer's discourse and the discourse of Tumelo John constitutes a fourth scenario for dialogism. This specific dialogic relation is concomitant with a certain responsibility – that of representation when representation is construction, as Barthes' semiotic theories imply. The following extract is indicative of the responsibility invoked by the dialogic interplay between 'die skrywer' and Tumelo John:

As ek 'n boek hiervan moet maak, dan is ek en hy saam daarin: die polisieman en die skrywer, die swarte en die witte, elk afgekamp in sy eie houbied, maar saam tussen die kake van 'n opvreetmasjien waar net die blindes uitsig het en vryheid van beweging. *Sy geskiedenis is my storie, sy verhaal: my beheptheid.* (16; my emphasis)

Like dialogism, 'interplay' in the sense used above refers to the doubling of discourse in terms of its implicit or explicit speech context. Such a dialogic doubling is apparent in the extent to which Tumelo John's speech can hardly be read without co-reading 'die skrywer', SAP colleagues, the documents surrounding the case and quoted in the text, and other discourses. Discourse in this way does not re-present 'the way in which people speak in reality' (as in a naive realist interpretation) but contextuality. As in *Ons is nie almal so nie*, it is the inner dialogism of the mode of writing which creates the effect of realism in *Kroniek uit die doofpot*. Realism is the effect, not of a mimesis of reality, but of certain codes employed by the writing. Barthes' exposition of the 'unrealistic' nature of realism is a guideline:

Yet, what is the *real*? We never know it except in the form of effects (physical world), functions (social world) or fantasies (cultural world); in short the real is never anything but an inference . . . realism is, at its very

inception, subject to the responsibility of a choice . . . literature is never anything but language, its being is in language; now language is already, anterior to any literary treatment, a system of meaning.'

From this Barthes then concludes:

in relation to objects themselves, literature is fundamentally, constitutively unrealistic; literature is unreality itself; or more exactly, far from being an analogical copy of reality, *literature is on the contrary the very consciousness of the unreality of language* . . . the most 'realistic' work will not be the one which 'paints' reality, but which, using the world as content . . . will explore as profoundly as possible the *unreal reality* of language. (Barthes, 1972:159–160; Barthes' emphases)

Bakhtin's theory of language accounts for a similar 'unreality of language' in showing that the utterance is not identical with its presumed truth or referent, the latter deriving only from a speech context. Extracts from both texts show that Goosen and Miles use speech in this Bakhtinian non-essentialistic and non-representative sense, the apparent 'reality' or realism of cited discourses erasing the identity presuppositions which accompany speech. A final example: the following page of discourse, tempting as it is in its apparent representative realism, is an example of the contextuality of speech:

'Wel, Mavis, jy sal iets moet doen, want daai arme kind wag nou al weke lank vir die aap. Jy kan nie so met haar maak nie. Sy het haar hart op die aap gesit. Sy wou glad vir hom 'n Krismisboks gekoop het.'

'Shame, Doris, ek het ook nie gedink sy sal dit so kop toe vat nie.'

'Jy ken nie kinders nie.'

'Ek het ook 'n kind . . .!'

'Ja, maar dit is anders, ek meen Caroline . . .'

'Wat weet jy van Caroline af? Wat weet jy wat gaan in haar binneste aan?' Ant Mavis begin huil.

'Ek het dit nie so bedoel nie, Mavis. Jy vat my nou verkeerd op.'

'Nou moenie vir my sê ek ken nie 'n kind se hart nie.'

'Ag, Mavis.'

'Hoe dink jy voel 'n moeder as hulle haar kind die dag in 'n institution sit?'

'Kry 'n drienk, Mavis. Ek is verskriklik jammer, ek wou jou nie seermaak nie. Al wat ek wou sê, is Gertie se hart is gebreek oor die aap en jy kan haar nie nou drop nie.'

'Daar is een Here wat my hoor, Doris. Ek sal my skoene deurstap om vir haar 'n aap te soek. Vir Gertie. Ek het self 'n kind vandag en al is dit anders, is ek in my hart nog 'n moeder. Niemand moet my daarvan beskuldig dat ek nie vir 'n kind omgee nie.'

(Goosen, 1990:117)

The reader knows that the narrating voice, Gertie, is reporting a promise made to her but broken. The intrinsic incongruity of speech

and its meaning is not represented but dialogically displayed since Gertie's indirect speech (the report) juxtaposes that which is being reported with the 'truth' of verbal fallibility readable between the lines. This fictional incident metaphorises the contradiction of language as culture and language as truth in the novel as a whole.

If Goosen's novel markedly makes its own Afrikaans-ness into an object of the writing, then Miles's novel maintains a more subdued awareness of the same phenomenon. That the Afrikaans used in *Kroniek uit die doofpot* is contextualised, referring readers to Afrikaans as a social reality, is evident *inter alia* in the cited, typifying discourses of policemen, white and black. The dialogic effect is accentuated when one considers that the situation this novel seeks to investigate fictionally concerns people whose mother tongue and inner speech is Sesotho. This dialogically doubles the Afrikaans which is the text's tongue. The writer's Afrikaans is also the Afrikaans of Tumelo John's seniors, investigation officers and pursuers. The guilt of the one reflects on the attempt at a probing construction of the other. Material, socially embedded language is classless, open to all possible voices. To exclude oneself from that because one writes 'on' the discourses of others, would mean denying a complicity which is a fact of history and a fact of socio-cultural reality. Extracts quoted above have already indicated that 'die skrywer' admits to such a complicity. Could such a responsibility in respect of the admission of (unwanted) complicity explain why this text was written in Afrikaans in the first place? As was apparent in Goosen's novel, this writing does not elevate itself above the discourses and the language(s) it uses.

To summarise: in *Kroniek uit die doofpot* to write means to constantly recontextualise so-called facts, to constantly defer the truth these facts might lead one to in a Derridean, deconstructionist sense. Not a culprit but a speech context becomes the sign of guilt, and discourse becomes the symptom of society's sickness. Dialogism exposes the illness and the lie infesting discourse, as in the following chilling statistical citation:

Oudiometriese Verslag

John Moleko	hospitaalnommer 0183075
<i>Suiwertoonoudigram</i>	
Linkeroor	Regteroor
kruisies, lae afwaartse pyle	hoë stipellyne, nulle
eindhakies	beginhakies
Gehoordrempelpeil in dB	
Persentasie gehoorverlies (ISO) Regs:	
0% Links: 100% Binouraal: 20%	

The 'truth' of discourse is not an object or a referent, but the alien word made readable between the lines of discourses, the implied, provoked but endlessly deferred alien word of an all-pervading social corruption. Truth is erased and novelistic citing of discourse is this erasure. A similarly deconstructive effect is achieved in the concluding paragraph of *Ons is nie almal so nie* where pure voice (in the Derridean sense) erases discourse in a bid to transcend the limitations of discourse:

Haar gesig het begin skyn en dan het ek geweet dis die Heilige Gees wat in haar ingekom het. Sy maak dan haar mond oop en begin die mooi woorde sê wat ek nou al uit my kop uit ken. Die hele gemeente bly stil en luister na die ronde, helder klanke uit die mond van my ma: *'Halo Christu Ku Marri Sen Bielef Tar Ty Salem Jawé Christu! Christu!! Rama Koerr Ja, O, Christu! Christu!!'*

(159: text's emphasis)

Deconstructive effects in both examples point to the non-identity of speech and the meaning presumed to be intended in it. In Bakhtin's theory of language the historical, social and ideological irreducibility of speech explains such deconstructive effects.

Tumelo John's 'ordinary' discourse, the discourse of one of 'die Molekos' (1991:218), dialogises other voices in an ironic juxtaposition of innocence and corruptibility, anxiety and bullying, honesty and deliberate evasiveness so that the unspoken appears as the erased 'truth', as in the following example:

Dié keer is die honde by. Hy weet dit nog voor hy ingaan.

Brigadier Botha sit agter sy lessenaar. Hy doen niks as die honde Tumelo John besnuffel nie (minagtend, asof hy 'n brakkie is).

'Oubaas!' Dit laat albei oombliklik reageer: weerskante van Botha steek hulle koppe nou bokant die lessenaar uit, diep plooië oor die voorkop.

'Ek verstaan jy het nie by kaptein Engelbrecht gerapporteer nie.'

'Ja, Brigadier.'

Stilte.

'Brigadier, hierdie ding het my diep seergemaak. Eintlik is dit nie die besering wat pla . . .'

'Jy antwoord my nie, Sersant. Moenie my tyd mors nie. Ek het jou opdrag gegee om by die kaptein te rapporteer en hy het nie. Wat moet ek daarvan maak? Is ek reg as ek dink jou gedrag ongedissiplineerd is?'

'Ja, Brigadier, maar . . .'

'Ek het 'n pes aan enige gesloer, dis in niemand se belang nie.'

'Goed, Brigadier.'

Die twee honde sit nog steeds asof hulle aan 'n hondeskou-kompetisie deelneem.

'Hierdie ding moet tot 'n punt kom, en gou. Hoekom het jy in 'n verklaring by die Temba-polisistasie niks gesê van die dienspistool wat jy op kolonel Van Niekerk gerig het nie?'

'Brigadier, maar ek moes myself verdedig, hy't my nie net geslaan nie, geskop ook, hy wou my doodmaak, ons was alleen, wat kon ek doen?'

'Dankie, ons vorder. Jou verklaring is dus onvolledig.'

Die een hond laat sak sy kop om onder die tafel deur te loer na Tumelo John se sandale.

'Ek het 'n verklaring opgestel wat nader aan die waarheid is. Jy dwing my eenvoudig om hierdie ding te doen.' Hy wys na die papier en pen wat Tumelo John nou eers aan sy kant van die lessenaar sien.

'Ek is bevrees, in belang van die kollege-dissipline sal jy dit moet teken.'

'Brigadier, ek was by die prokureur. Hy sê my saak is goed.'

Vol ongeloof word daar na hom gekyk.

'Nou toe nou! Dan's dit waar! Wáár kom jy miskien vandaan? Hóé dink jy sal hierdie plek lyk as manne ni die behoorlike kanale volg . . . links en regs op eie houtjie dinge doen? Sersant, jy verbaas my, iemand met 'n skoon rekord. Dis al rede hoekom ek so geduldig is. Maar geduld kan opraak. Teken die verklaring. Dan is daar geen klad op niemand se naam nie.'

'Brigadier, soos ek hier staan, is ek 'n siek man. Kyk hoe lyk ek, die vuilgoed,' (instinktief wys hy na die kant van sy kop, om misverstand te voorkom) 'wil nie ophou loop nie...Brigadier, dit sal nie 'n man wees wat daardie papier teken nie, dit sal nie ék wees nie, laat ek dit dan saam met my vat.'

Botha maak keelskoon en asof dit vir hulle 'n teken is, kom albei diere weer op aandag.

(1991:136–137)

Tumelo John's innocent verbalisation of his own situation contrasts sharply with the sociolects of certain types of white (and black) policemen of the SAP. The difference in understanding and interpretation, in implicit value systems, which is part of the constituting irony of this inverted police novel, is a difference in language. It concerns not a difference in what is said, but the difference of the unsaid, the implied which is not understood, the difference arising from remaining silent about something, of lying, often from a basis of power. It is a difference arising from guessing what the other would understand of your speech and would answer to it, and then shaping what you have to say accordingly. Language thus becomes indivisibly part of the crime which sections of this society are guilty of.

To detect in this mode of writing a deconstructive impulse is no mere theoretical opportunism. The non-identity of utterance and meaning is a precondition of the lying which *Kroniek in die doofpot* investigates and of the hopelessly over-ideologised nature of language *Ons is nie almal so nie* follows on foot. Inasmuch as this non-identity also conditions the mode of writing, one might with regard to both novels be drawn to conclude on an ethics of form. These two new Afrikaans novels seem to pursue an ethics which takes

cognisance of the Bakhtinian conclusion that 'my' word is not my word and that nobody else's word can be trusted. A history of ideological violence and abuses of language's claim to truth make the Afrikaans of these novels exemplary because of this facet of language's inner dialogism. The carnival as analysed by Bakhtin (1965) gives vent to such a scepticism of the common man, showing that realism does not refer to the real but to (other people's) interpretation of it. What accompanies the responsibility of writing in Goosen and Miles could then be called an aesthetics of communicative scepticism.

Few South Africans would contest that the arbitrariness of utterance in respect of truths supposedly conveyed characterises a society caught in the grip not only of a series of States of Emergency but also of the lies apartheid was condemned to construct to keep itself going. Police Murder Squads being but one ignominious example. Goldstone Commissions, rumours of forthcoming 'Nüremberg' trials, testimony given, contested, withheld or even accidentally erased, remind society of this inherent fallibility of discourse. In an apparent solidarity with such a socio-historical moment, Goosen's and Miles's writings are 'responsible'. Creating a new literary culture – autonomous *and* communal, public *and* 'skelm', finally audible but not loud – might be the task literary writing is beginning to set itself in South Africa at the moment.

NOTES

1. The title of this article does not suggest conscious or causal links between the two novels selected here and the events initiated on 2 February 1990 with President de Klerk's address in parliament. Goosen's text was completed and forwarded to the publishers by January 1990 and Miles had already started writing his novel. What is suggested by the second half of the title, is a meaningful co-incidence which requires interpretation.
2. Critics of post-structuralist and formalist approaches to literature base their rejection on a supposed binary opposition between referentiality, accountability and accessibility on the one hand and the formality of literary writing on the other. See Chapman, M., 'The writing of politics and the politics of writing. On reading Dovey on reading Lacan on reading Coetzee on reading. . . (?)' *Journal of Literary Studies* 4:3 (Sept. 1988), 327–341, Vaughan, M., 'Marxism and J.M. Coetzee's Writing', *Journal of Literary Studies* 5:2 (June 1989), 218–223.
3. This remark was made in 1975 during an Honours class at the University of Stellenbosch.
4. See also: 'a particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world . . . It is precisely as ideologemes that discourse becomes the object of representation in the novel' (Bakhtin, 1981: 133).

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In a Province

Van Der Post's Response to *Turbott Wolfe*

J.A. Kearney

Laurens van der Post's first novel, *In a Province*,¹ was published in 1934, eight years after *Turbott Wolfe*.² Yet in his introduction to the 1965 edition of Plomer's novel³ he makes no mention of his own, although its concerns are similar in a number of respects. The relationship between Van der Post's novel and the aspects of *Turbott Wolfe* that he singles out for praise in his Introduction, is my subject. Was it modesty that led to a total silence about his own novel thirty-one years later? Or a sense of inappropriateness because of the occasion of celebrating the republication of Plomer's work? Was he perhaps uneasy about his motives for writing *In a Province* when he came to pay tribute to Plomer's achievement? These are the questions that I shall try to answer.

First I propose to highlight what Van der Post regards with such favour. To him and some of his generation, he claims, *Turbott Wolfe* was a 'book of revelation' suddenly making visible 'aspects of reality hitherto invisible' (139). Plomer took on 'for the first time in our literature', 'the whole of South African life' (148); and indeed, Van der Post does not believe his friend 'ever saw farther or more deeply than he did then' (159). Admitting the occasional presence of signs of the author's hurt feelings rather than his writing skill in *Turbott Wolfe*, Van der Post nevertheless deems it an 'exceptionally unbiased, rounded, and unsentimental view of reality' (157), one which has 'changed the course of our imagination in South Africa' (162). Hostile critics of the work are accordingly compared to Van der Post's childhood memories of captured baboons who would smash mirrors in the conviction that a dirty trick was being played on them.

The particular feature of *Turbott Wolfe* that seems to have been of over-riding importance for Van der Post, is what he sees as its Jungian-type preoccupation with racism as the 'denial of [man's] own other self' (154). For whites, the blacks are the image of what is natural but rejected in themselves (155). Since one of the highly predictable patterns of behaviour in South Africa is therefore that blacks are denied white love (161), Van der Post is particularly gratified by a work in which this sad situation is overturned, allowing the 'idiom and beauty of another race to be discovered' (157).

A subsidiary element of interest in Plomer's novel (at least in terms of the space allowed it in Van der Post's Introduction) is what he refers to as Plomer's prophetic sense of the 'immense potential of Russian influence in Africa' (160).⁴ This aspect is indeed allowed no more than a few sentences at the end of a long paragraph. Yet I wish to suggest that the predominant interest in Communism in the Van der Post novel is the main clue to understanding its relationship to *Turbott Wolfe*.

Before I can go further with my comparison of the novels however, I need to look at relevant aspects of South African political history in the period that intervened between *Turbott Wolfe* and the writing of *In a Province*.⁵ The state of blacks was characterised chiefly by the harshest effects of the economic depression of the Twenties; their poverty was especially rampant in the rural areas. In terms of black political awareness, the teachings of the American negro leader, Marcus Garvey (Africa for the Africans), were becoming more influential, especially in the light of the increasingly racist and nationalistic tendencies of Barry Harzog's government. There was widespread antagonism on the part of black political groups to his proposed 'Native Bills' of 1926: (1) to abolish the African vote; (2) to expand the African advisory council; and (3) to set aside additional land for reserves. Not surprisingly, the largest black trade union, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), switched its emphasis from unionist tactics to militant nationalism.

In 1926 there were 43 branches of the ICU and at this stage meetings were opened and closed with the Communist anthem. African membership of the CPSA⁶ had grown from 200 to 1600, the bulk in fact of the total membership of 1750. So powerful and dominating a movement must the CPSA have seemed, that in December 1926 the ICU decided that none of its officers, 'shall be a member of the Communist Party'.⁷ Three Communist Party members on the ICU council James La Guma, E.J. Khaile and John Gomas 'refused to resign from either organisation and were summarily expelled [from the ICU]'.⁸ Nevertheless, as Helen Bradford points out, despite this break, 'Communists continued to provide the ICU with organisational and ideological inputs and some senior ICU officials still considered themselves socialists'.⁹

In the following year numerous farm strikes and farmer's reprisals resulted in tens of thousands of Africans responding to calls for mobilisation. In fact by the end of 1927 there were more than a 100 ICU branches with a claimed membership of more than 100,000. So threatening did these groups become that in 1928 farmers not only harassed ICU members wherever possible, but formed an Anti-ICU League. The next organisation to begin a programme of mobilising rural Africans was the Communist party, following the plan for a

'Workers' and Peasants' Republic' that had been formulated at the Sixth International (1928). This was to be achieved, at least partly, through participation in embryonic nationalist movements like the ANC which supported the 'native' republic policy. (Some CPSA members, incidentally, found it difficult or impossible to accept this policy. But it is also interesting to note that the CPSA actually held joint protest meetings with the ICU in Cape Town.)

In 1929 when Herzog's National Party finally won its long-sought overall majority, the ANC also began organising in the Western Cape rural areas. The venture was not surprising as, under its Garveyite President, James Thaele, this wing of the ANC had become virtually synonymous with the ICU. The most dramatic result of the new ANC drive was a violent clash in Robertson (Western Cape) between ANC supporters and white opponents, in which more than 1 000 whites attacked a crowd of 200 ANC supporters, leading to several injuries. When Durban dockworkers boycotted the beerhalls in the same year, an angry white mob surrounded the ICU headquarters and wrecked union property; in *this* case 7 people were killed and 84 injured.)

Such clashes had two prominent effects:

- (1) appealing for a united front against repressive legislation and police raids, the CPSA arranged the first successful merging of working class and national radicals in the liberation movement. This League of African Rights planned anti-pass demonstrations on 16 December 1929 which were held under the joint auspices of the League, the ICU and the CPSA, but not the ANC.
- (2) the Riotous Assemblies Act Amendment, a severe follow-up to the earlier state response to African unrest embodied in the Natives Administration Act of 1927. This Amendment, thought by the Communists to mean the practical illegalisation of their party, gave the Minister for Justice powers to prohibit meetings and to banish persons from specified areas. Its aim was to prevent all opportunities for criticism of impending legislation against the African masses.

The new Act led to a rapidly increased level of state repression and, in particular, great turmoil in the ANC because of its CPSA links. In 1930 the ANC Executive actually resigned in protest against the close ties of the President, Josiah Gumede, with the CPSA. Gumede, who had attended the important Anti-Imperialism Conference in Brussels in 1927, and also visited Moscow for the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in the same year, emphasised that, though not a Communist himself, in his view the 'only friends of oppressed people are the Communists'.¹⁰ Thus he had urged the ICU to co-operate and reinstate the expelled communists. Kennon Thaele, brother of James,

was also expelled from the ANC for Communist leanings. (His first name may have struck a chord with Van der Post, as he uses it for the main black character of *In a Province*, a victim of Communist propaganda.) These expelled Western Cape members formed their own independent ANC which, together with their Communist allies, frequently demanded universal free education, full franchise rights and the return of land. A pass-burning campaign, launched by the CPSA (the League having meanwhile disbanded) was to have begun on 16 December 1930 but, because of the government's ban in terms of the Riotous Assemblies Act Amendment, and because the ANC and ICU refused to participate, the Communists conducted the campaign alone. Durban had the most successful demonstration in terms of numbers of passes burnt (5 000), but the defiant procession ended in a violent clash between policemen and marchers in which the black CP leader, and 3 other Africans were killed.

Another piece of information of possible importance for this study is that Max Gordon, a Trotskyite, was, according to Paul Rich in a recent paper,¹¹ actively involved in the Western Cape in the early 1930s, organising Trade Unions before moving to the Witwatersrand. More specific information about Max Gordon's Cape activities, in particular whether his involvement included the ICU (despite its 1926 stand against officials with Communist membership), I have not yet been able to track down. This is partly because Helen Bradford's book on the ICU has 1930 as its cut-off point, and also because Baruch Hirson concentrates on Gordon's Johannesburg involvement with TU organisations from 1935 to 1942.¹² Frederic Carpenter, whose book is the first full-length study of Van der Post, reports the novelist's recollection that in the depression era most of his friends were Communists.¹³ Whether Gordon was amongst this circle of friends, or whether another person altogether is the original of Burgess, the Communist Trade Union organiser in the novel, remains to be determined.¹⁴

It has also proved difficult to find relevant information after 1930 itself but perhaps there are two explanations: (1) the CPSA, ANC and ICU were all in decline between 1930 and 1935, largely, I presume, on account of ruthless state manoeuvres; and (2) although *In a Province* was published only in 1934, it seems to be responding to events of the late 1920s and the year 1930 itself. Between 1928 and mid 1929 Van der Post had been living in London. In 1930 he joined his friend Desmond Young as assistant leader writer of the *Cape Times*, a job that he maintained for 14 months till he returned to England. *In a Province* was actually written in 1933 during a period of temporary seclusion in France. Certainly there seems to be no incident between 1930 and 1933 which is as close to the culminating incident of *In a Province* as the Robertson event. Prior to that clash there was clearly

much to alarm whites, 'whether it was Garveyite or Communist calls for an African republic; or the millennial expectations of religious groups in rural areas; or whether it was the organisational expansion of the ICU'.¹⁵

It is now possible to turn to the novels themselves. Plomer's modernist, anti-realist approach, one which the novelist himself emphasises,¹⁶ has already received much attention so I do not need to dwell on it here. Gray sees the sabotaging of realism, the most reliable form of Plomer's society, as part of his satire of that society,¹⁷ while Lockett in her later article notes the close parallels between the form and the protagonist's consciousness, especially the 'disjunctions between appearance and reality' to be found in it.¹⁸ Furthermore Plomer seems to have been satisfied with an ironic exposure of the type of liberalism represented by Wolfe without offering, as Stephen Watson notes, an 'alternative intellectual mode'.¹⁹ Van der Post's own comment on Wolfe suggests an implicit recognition of this feature of the novel:

He can recognise what is sterile and destructive in his civilised values, he can be stirred by the beauty of Africa, yet he is just as incapable of rejecting the one as committing himself to the other. (158)

I shall have more to say later about the implications of Wolfe and Van der Post in relation to the concept of the 'beauty of Africa'; here I wish merely to note that embedded in Van der Post's eulogising of Plomer's novel is the germ of the critique that emerges in *In a Province*, if one extends the above comment from character to novelist.

Except for descriptions of the protagonist's dream (Book II, Chapter IV) and his state of delirium (Book II, Chapter V), *In a Province* employs the conventions of realism. My impression is that the choice of medium is intended as a deliberate contrast to *Turbott Wolfe*, almost as if Van der Post found it necessary to build a sense of stability and reliability into the fibre of the novel, as a way of offsetting the precarious, angst-filled state of the protagonist, and the tense volatility of his society.

At this stage it might be best to give a brief plot summary for the sake of those who do not yet know the novel. Book 1 begins with Van Bredepoel, the protagonist's, serious illness (whether spiritual or emotional, we cannot be sure at this stage of the novel), and the necessity for him to be sent to recuperate in the country. The rest of the book involves a return to the past to describe the farm childhood and youth of Van Bredepoel with his aunt and uncle, and to initiate his relationship with Kenon Badiakgotla who has also left his home to work in Port Benjamin (Cape Town). This first Book culminates in

Kenon's unfair trial and imprisonment after being the only one of a group caught in a brothel, and Van Bredepoel's futile subsequent attempt to assist him. Book II begins after Kenon's return to his tribe, the Bambuxosa. Remembering that the change in Kenon was attributed to the influence of agitators, Van Bredepoel attends an address by a so-called Doctor given in one of the town squares, under the auspices of what is called the African Workers' Union. When a racist incident on a bus brings Van Bredepoel into contact with Burgess, a young Communist who happens to be the secretary of this Union, opportunities arise for debate about the merits of Communism. The riot that occurs when the Doctor is assassinated at a later public meeting, not only intensifies the already divergent political views of Burgess and Van Bredepoel, but causes the protagonist to have a nervous breakdown. Book III begins where the prelude to Book I ended, with Van Bredepoel's convalescence in Paulstad (a country town near his original farm home). Here by chance he meets Kenon, now a drug-addicted revolutionary, and determines to help him wholeheartedly in whatever way he can. Here too, however, he once again meets Burgess, who has come to Paulstad to address a black political rally on a significant historical date November 6th (presumably a fictional substitute for December 16). Burgess will not accede to Van Bredepoel's pleas to avoid this gathering because of the extreme likelihood of racial violence (as a result of machinations by the local CID major). In the confrontation between black protesters led by Kenon, and fascist whites, which Van Bredepoel can do nothing to prevent, Kenon and the heroic chief of the local police are killed, while Burgess is seriously wounded. When Van Bredepoel later tries to help Burgess escape lynching, Van Bredepoel himself is killed in an ambush by a white commando.

With the level of mass violence that Van der Post represents as capable of erupting easily in the country, it is understandable that, for him, the finding of a solution is more imperative than it was for Plomer. One might indeed see the use of realism as an all-embracing analogy for the sense of serenity and stability captured in the seventeenth-century painting by De Groot in Van Bredepoel's farm homestead:

There in that picture, Van Bredepoel thought, was everything the life around him lacked: faith, security, calm, contentment. He was convinced that the picture did not owe these qualities to the painter, who had been, as Johan's aunt was so fond of pointing out, a wild disorderly fellow. (122)

Whereas Plomer's satire could afford to be open-ended, the upheaval of Van der Post's society must have made him feel that it was not enough to expose a false form of liberalism or merely to hint at a more

adequate one (as Lockett suggests is the case in Plomer's novel).²⁰ Carpenter comments that *In a Province* deals 'not only with the racial problems of South Africa, but also with the destructive nature of the Communist exploitation of those problems', and shows 'how difficult it is for any South African, who disagreed strongly with the segregationist policies of the government, to avoid the seductions of communism'.²¹ Fear of the Burgess type of solution based on collective political action seems to have been the factor which prompted Van der Post beyond resistance to Marxism to an explicitly affirmative standpoint which would involve the re-vindication of an authentic liberal position. That the outcome for the liberal protagonist should turn out to be tragic, would not, in terms of Van der Post's presumed strategy, undermine Van Bredepoel's viewpoint but make it more persuasively realistic and more emotionally compelling.

Friston, the new missionary in *Turbott Wolfe* who turns out to be a Bolshevik agent, is a kind of 'double' of Wolfe. His frenzied self-questioning:

'Friston? Who's Friston? Which Friston are you talking to? Mr Friston, you mean. And which Mr Friston, I ask you? because I want to know. Do you mean the Reverend Rupert Friston, who wears out his knees in ineffectual prayer? Or do you mean Friston that is possessed with a devil?' (87)

and his later admission, 'It is very inconvenient when you don't know who you are, or whether you are one person or two' (95), are surely intended to alert the reader to the idea of a double, and to Wolfe's lack of awareness of how divided his consciousness is. Friston's crazed outburst in which he informs Wolfe:

'Your god's Fear. So is mine. But wait till you see 'HORROR', my child, written on the sun.' (88)

is, I assume, one of the crucial passages whereby Plomer indicates to the reader how much we are to mistrust Wolfe's overt and often complacent judgements. Of course Wolfe's conclusion that Friston must be a 'raving lunatic' (88) reveals how far he is from self-insight in response to these haunting and perplexing messages. The fear of which Friston speaks is nevertheless there, and is the presumed cause of Wolfe's departure, sense of failure, and terminal illness, which I take to be symbolic representations of Plomer's sardonic view of the state and typical role of liberal consciousness in South Africa.

In Van der Post's novel it seems at first that Burgess is intended to have a similar role as Van Bredepoel's double, his more effectual self; and also as his saviour, the one who is to rescue him from his state of

extreme existential doubt (a condition on which the epigraph to Book II focuses).²² Their agitated conversation immediately after the riot in Port Benjamin suggests vividly what Burgess might do for the young Afrikaner:

[Burgess] ‘Your way of living distresses me a great deal. I’ve never known anyone with such good instincts as yours, or do as little about them as you do. No sooner do you have a good impulse than you allow some doubt to cancel it out . . . [Van Bredepoel] ‘You’re quite sure that something is wrong with the world and that you can make it better, so you can go straight ahead. But I, you see, I don’t quite know what I have to do with it all. I can’t see myself in relation to it all. I feel such an anachronism, anyway . . .’ (159)

In the discussion between these two men before the Paulstad protest meeting, Van der Post begins to weigh the scales more obviously against Burgess when he makes him use predictable Marxist rhetoric:

‘Don’t you think you’re taking bloodshed too seriously? Don’t you think you take the life of the individual too seriously? Don’t you think that the interests of the whole are far more important than the interests of the units? Surely it’s a simple question of social mathematics, and nothing more.’ (221)

Burgess’s virtual repetition, at this stage, of his original perception of Van Bredepoel, ‘All your life you’ve been sitting on your little liberal fence, with your fears on either side’ (223), is not given the weight, in terms of the shaping of the scene as a whole, of Van Bredepoel’s unusually firm and measured judgement:

‘I think you’re terribly wrong. You’re playing with forces you neither understand nor can ultimately control. You’ve no right to play with things that are potentially out of your control, even in the name of truth and justice. I refuse to help you even as a spectator; I won’t add one more cell to that mass-mind you’ll have before you tomorrow.’ (224)

With the force of the Epigraph to Book III hanging over our heads,²³ we are left in no doubt about which side of the fence *we* should keep on, or move to. Thus, when we come to the final confrontation between Burgess and Van Bredepoel after the Paulstad riot, the voice of what is truth for Van der Post emerges clearly through Van Bredepoel in his lengthy attack on the idea of blaming the ‘system’ for social injustice (242–243). The doom-laden imagery of the hours that precede the political meeting, and the appalling consequences of Burgess’s decision to go ahead with it, should have induced us to be

fully receptive to Van Bredepoel's simple brand of liberalism in his subsequent reflections:

'I'm going to begin by minding my own step. Each one must take heed for himself, and the system will in the end take heed for itself. If the system perpetuates a colour-prejudice, we can counteract it by refusing to admit a colour-prejudice in our own lives . . .' (246)

Van Bredepoel's noble self-sacrifice giving his life to save Burgess provides an appropriately emotive plot support for Van Bredepoel's ultimate sense of commitment, while the narrator's final comment, in which his compassion extends beyond Van Bredepoel and Kenon, to include Burgess as well, is a skilful way of ensuring that we feel converted to magnanimity rather than doctrinaire narrowness. 'Torn between these opposites [i.e. of Communism and evil]' – as Carpenter puts it, in full acceptance of Van der Post's point of view²⁴ – Van Bredepoel doesn't suffer a final collapse into psychic illness like Turbott Wolfe, but dies in actively practising what seems to him and his author the only valid option. Moreover his death, the closing paragraphs of the novel suggest, has a redemptive possibility. While people 'like Burgess still sow out of their love of the oppressed the seeds of a terrible hate', those like Van Bredepoel and Kenon ('poor unhappy children of life') are urged to take courage as if relationships like theirs are, through some mysterious and only dimly hinted-at process, seeds of a spirit of love in the future.²⁵ If we reflect on the presentation of the African Workers' Union and the climactic events of the novel, we find that a certain distortion of historical circumstances has occurred. Jackie Withers, a Natal Honours student who wrote a study of Van der Post's novels as a whole, thought him careless with detail in allowing the black worker, Daniel, to be subordinate to Burgess in the Union office.²⁶ However, as my earlier contextual information reveals, although the up-front ICU emphasised its unwillingness to be regarded as a Communist agency, in practice the organisation was very closely involved with individual Communists, and also shared a common platform on several important occasions.²⁷

We cannot, in any case, be sure that the fictional union is based directly on the ICU, though the importance of the African Workers' Union in terms of public meetings and rural activity suggests that this is probably the case. What is clear, however, is the strong likelihood of white Marxists having prominent roles within the organisation of particular trade unions, even if not the ICU; and Van der Post's fictional account may well conflate his knowledge of several unions. On a larger scale one can argue that he has conflated the activities of the ANC, ICU and CPSA in his portrayal of the Paulstad riot

circumstances. Since the actual overall situation was clearly one of great complexity, the distortions and inaccuracies may well not be deliberate, but, plausibly, the genuine interpretation of a reasonably well-informed journalist who lacked access at the time to the multiplicity of facts and the overview now available to us.

While Turbott Wolfe seems to be, and feels he is, superior to most of the other whites in his community, he turns out to be only more subtly racist. This is shown partly in his responses to Nhliziyombi (of whom more later); and partly also in his condescension and insensitivity towards his assistant, Caleb. (His answers to Caleb's questions in their final conversation are little short of callous.) Van Bredepoel, on the other hand, is beset mostly by circumstances in his dealings with Kenon. Though Van Bredepoel is a man of many doubts, those that involve Kenon are related to ways of helping him; at no stage do the white's attitudes reveal the sort of doubleness that Friston helps to unmask in Wolfe. Furthermore, Van Bredepoel's attitude is seen as a genuine alternative, in the author's eyes, to that of both Burgess and racist whites (who are prominent in Van der Post's handling of his protagonist's hostel experience in Port Benjamin, as well as later in Paulstad at the Hotel, and at the Club). While Van Bredepoel is tragically unable to save Kenon from corruption and exploitation, the significant consideration for Van der Post is that Van Bredepoel has crossed the racial barrier:

[Van Bredepoel's relation with Kenon] had been deep enough to destroy the traditional barrier between white and black. For whereas through the mind of white Port Benjamin runs a bleak and deserted corridor which separates European from black and coloured people, a secret lock seemed to have been sprung in the walls of Van Bredepoel's mind . . . (108)

While Van Bredepoel sits brooding over what has become for him the dire necessity of persuading Burgess against the African Workers' Union meeting in Paulstad, he happens to notice a black family passing by. The way in which he perceives them:

They walked slowly along the road which led to Masakama's Drift, and that luminous mist of dust which gathered round them seemed to him a symbol of all the mystery and attraction that unknown Africa held for him. (219)

echoes several of his earlier responses to Kenon the sense of wonder, for example, at the young man's dancing (43), and at how, even in his ordinary movements, his life burns 'so vividly, so spontaneously, so unshadowed by doubt and illness' (59). The novel demonstrates how

this attractive spontaneity (which Van Bredepoel envies) is corrupted and destroyed by the whites' civilisation, a process which a single white person like Van Bredepoel is unable to counteract. As Withers points out in her study, the kind of romanticisation involved in this stress on Black mystical otherness brings Van der Post perilously close to an endorsement of government repressive policy.²⁸ For the negative side of the spontaneity stereotype that Van der Post employs in such passages is his belief in the lack of rational thought or logic in black people, and their consequent vulnerability to the calculated influence of a systematised rational programme such as Communism. The corruptibility of African innocence in Van der Post's work is, thus, in practice, scarcely distinguishable from the racist propagandist image of the blacks' capacity for swift reversion to savagery.²⁹

Thus, while Van der Post celebrates what he sees as Plomer's prior, daring recognition of the mystical beauty of Africa and its people, he must have felt that his friend lacked a sense of realism in contemplating the exposure of Black intuitive sensibility to certain aspects of Western intellect. In particular, the reverence for blacks which *Turbott Wolfe* is meant to inspire (according to Van der Post) would be inadequate to cope with the increasing, insidious Communist menace of the late Twenties. What Van der Post appears *not* to register is the irony in Wolfe's idealistic conception of Nhliziyombi; such mysticism is shown to be a dangerous self-deception. The exaggerated and abstracting quality of Wolfe's initial rhapsody over Nhliziyombi should alert us to Plomer's irony:

She was an ambadress of all that beauty (it might be called holiness), that intensity of the old wonderful unknown primitive African life outside history, outside time, outside science. (31)

It is also true, of course, as the critic, Michael Herbert points out in his response to Gordimer's earlier treatment of such passages, that *Turbott Wolfe* is 'at least aware of his own predicament'³⁰ as indicated by the following disclosure:

My eye was training itself to admire to excess the over-developed marvellous animal grace of each Lembu individual. I was becoming ecstatic over the bright-eyed ingenuousness of every child; over the patriarchal grace of each old man, over the youthful grace of every young one; over the aged women, large-eyed tender women who were mothers, warm-handed tender daughters who were lovers. I was losing my balance. (20)

What Herbert unfortunately fails to mention is that this passage occurs *before* Wolfe's encounter with Nhliziyombi, and therefore seems intended to emphasise the extent to which Wolfe does lose balance.

It is also significant, I think, that in Van der Post's introduction to

Turbott Wolfe, he ignores ironies in the presentation of Mabel van der Horst. Wolfe's overblown description of Mabel as 'a goddess of the future, going out to suffer' (105), and his caustic suggestions to Caleb that the Young Africa Society is a 'monstrous farce', a 'device of Miss van der Horst's to justify her marriage to Zachary' (109), naturally help to sustain our sense of Wolfe's ambivalence towards the issue of miscegenation. Yet the sardonic tone also works to prevent a reader from sharing fully in the kind of excitement Van der Post shows over Mabel as the one positive, non-defeatist element in the novel. Interestingly enough, although Meneer Broecksma, farm tutor to Van Bredepoel, offers him the following advice:

'. . . every white man who *does* sleep with a black woman commits a social act of the greatest value.' (33)

the possibility of such experience for Van Bredepoel is never even hinted at again, and Kenon's brothel initiation despite Broecksma's indiscriminate and sexist frame of reference can scarcely be considered in the light of encouragement.

My argument, then, is that Van der Post, under the pressure of the greatly intensified racial and political tension of South African society after the publication of *Turbott Wolfe*, probably felt himself to be fulfilling in a more pragmatic and realistic way what he thought Plomer's mission had been. The novel which he celebrates in 'The Turbott Wolfe Affair' is not so much Plomer's as a highly selective reconstruction that conceals or blurs (whether consciously or otherwise) the reasons which prompted him to make his own first novel a kind of critique of Plomer's.

NOTES

1. Page references are to the Penguin edition of 1984.
2. Page references are to the Donker edition of 1980, edited by Stephen Gray. This edition includes Van der Post's introduction to the 1965 edition and other background pieces to which I refer in this paper.
3. Page references to this Introduction ('The *Turbott Wolfe* Affair') are taken from the 1980 Donker edition of the novel (see 2. above).
4. David Ward, who discusses both *Turbott Wolfe* and *In a Province* in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively of his *Chronicles of Darkness*, points out Van Der Post's disingenuousness in making such a claim since, as journalist, he must have known 'well enough the way in which Government and Press had exploited the 'Bolshevik menace' (Ward 1989:34) ever since the South African Communist Party had been founded in July 1921.

5. For this part of the paper I have collated information from several texts which I list below. These are not referred to specifically in the Notes unless a direct quotation is used.

Bradford, Helen. 1988. *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924–1930*.

Bundy, Colin. 'Land and Liberation: Popular Rural Protest and the National Liberation movements in South Africa, 1920–1960' (in *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*; see Marks & Trappido below).

Hill, Robert A. & Pirio, Gregory A. "'Africa for the Africans'": the Garvey Movement in South Africa, 1920–1940' (in *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*; see Marks & Trappido below).

Hirson, Baruch. 1989. *Yours for the Union: Class and Community Struggle in South Africa, 1930–1947*.

Marks, Shula & Trappido, Stanley (eds). 1987. *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*.

Saunders, Christopher (ed.). 1988. *The Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa*.

Simons, Jack & Ray. 1983. *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1890–1950*.
6. CPISA: Official title of the Communist Party in South Africa until banned in 1951 when it reconstituted itself underground as the South African Communist Party.
7. Simons 1983:354.
8. Simons 1983:354.
9. Bradford 1988:114. See also 306, n.76. Ward, who refers only to the expulsion of C.P. members from the ICU, leaves the impression that Communist influence on the Union was thus ended (Ward 1989:39).
10. Simons 1983:392. D. Ward (also quoting from Simons [p.353]) refers to a similar point in Gumedé's actual speech delivered at the Anti-Imperialism Conference (Ward 1989:39)
11. Rich, Paul. 1990. 'Laurens van der Post, The Noble Savage and the Romantic image of Africa'. Paper given at the Conference on 'Literature in Another South Africa'. Oxford. 13.
12. Hirson 1989: especially 41–48. See also two brief mentions in Simons (1983:511 and 533).
13. Carpenter, Frederic. 1969. *Laurens van der Post*. 43.
14. Ward states confidently that S. P. Bunting, a CPISA leader who stood for Tembula in the 1929 parliamentary election, is the basis of Burgess in the novel; and that 'Bunting's campaign in Tembula [disguised as Paulstad], provides much of the material for the central episode in *In a Province* (Ward 1989:40). The most plausible aspect of Ward's claim, as against Rich's, is the link between Ward's Burgess prototype and the violent circumstances which mirror in several ways the climactic event of the novel. However, as Bunting (as far as I know) was not the secretary of a black trade union, it is surely safer to suppose that Burgess is based on several influential young Communist figures of the time, and may thus involve aspects of Gordon, Bunting, and perhaps others.
15. Saunders, C. (ed.) 1988:327.
16. Plomer, *Double Lives*, 186–188. Quoted by Cecily Lockett in her article, 'Turbott Wolfe: A Failed Novel or a Failure of Criticism?'. In *UNISA English Studies* 25(1): 29.
17. Gray, Stephen. 1980. 'Turbott Wolfe in Context'. In *Turbott Wolfe*, ed. S. Gray, 197.
18. Lockett 1987:33.
19. Watson, Stephen. 1980. 'The Liberal Ideology and Some English South African Novelists'. MA Thesis. University of Cape Town. 182.
20. Lockett 1987:33.
21. Carpenter 1969: pp. 41 and 43 respectively. It is interesting to note that neither of the initial reviews of Van der Post's novel (*Cape Times* and *Argus*, March 1934) make any reference whatever to its dominant concern with Communism, though much attention is drawn to the predicament/tragedy of Kenon, and the novel is in both cases favourably received.
22. For the convenience of readers I offer the following translation of the Epigraph: For the first time in ten thousand years, totally and without a trace of knowledge left, man

- is a problem to himself. For he no longer knows what he is and at the same time he knows that he does not know. [Translated by G. Spencer-Noël, Department of French, University of Natal, Durban]
23. Similarly I offer the following translation of the Epigraph to Book III: I hate all violent change, for in the process as much good is destroyed as is won. I hate both those who carry it out as well as those who are the cause of it. (Goethe) [Translated by E. de Kadt, Department of German, University of Natal, Durban]
 24. Carpenter 1969:109.
 25. Though Ward does not consider the implications of Van Bredepoel's death, he makes the same basic contrast between the protagonists of the two novels: 'Turbott Wolfe runs away from his conflicts to die in England, but Van Bredepoel recovers from his sickness to attempt to face up to the problem' (Ward 1989:44). (Ward's final comment on *In a Province* indicates, strangely, that he reads the closing appeal of the novel as if the words are Van Bredepoel's rather than the narrator's).
 26. Jackie Withers. 1989. 'Laurens van der Post Jungian Visionary or Platteland History Teacher? History and Fiction in Three Novels: *In a Province*, *The Hunter and the Whale*, *A Far-off Place*', Honours Special Study. Department of English: University of Natal, Durban. 12.
 27. Bradford 1988:114.
 28. J. Withers 1989: especially 7–14.
 29. Ward points out, similarly, that Van Bredepoel's 'affection is as condescending as it is tender' and that 'the career of Kenon is one which fits in very well indeed with paternalistic white assumptions about blacks' (Ward 1989:42).
 30. Herbert, Michael. 'Turbott Wolfe and the Critics'. In *Turbott Wolfe*, ed. S. Gray. 177.

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Nature and History in William Plomer's African Poetry

A Re-reading for a Future South Africa

Elizabeth Thompson

In predicting an 'African' future for South Africa William Plomer was ahead of his time. Instead of following a temptation among many of our early writers to regard nature as unifying, mystic, a way of healing and history as contingent, messy, true only to the moment, Plomer needed 'nature' as a metaphor outside of history (as a way, in Africa, of avoiding the mess of human circumstances). At the same time, his penetrating view and conscience vied with his symbolist inclination. Increasingly, nature in his poetry was transformed into human shapes in the flow of history. In the current situation, it is apt that we look again at one of our most intelligent, complex poets whose poems, though written mainly in the 1920s and 1930s, retain the edge of immediacy. I shall focus on four poems from different times in Plomer's career: 'The Scorpion', 'The Devil Dancers', 'Tugela River' and 'A Taste of the Fruit'.

When we take these four poems together as a 'narrative' of alienation and commitment, Plomer's use of human and non-human nature as metaphors of both absence and presence lends his poetry the interest of autobiography, in which the white person of sensitive 'European' imagination engages in a continual interrogation of his own connection to Africa. 'The Scorpion', 'The Devil Dancers', and the later 'Tugela River' all reveal tensions between the historical reality of people in South Africa and the temptation of poetry to shift its discourse into the ideologically 'safer' terrain of the 'primitive'. The tensions were probably those experienced by Plomer himself.

One of the most difficult steps for white South African writers has been to identify the actual causes and forces of a violent society, for this must involve self-questioning, concerning not only 'colonisers who will' (the repressive 'hunter' figures), but also 'colonisers who won't' (the guilt-stricken humanists). As a poet of avowed liberal sympathies, Plomer had the intelligence in his novel *Turbott Wolfe*, (1926) to realise that liberal principles of non-racialism may not easily survive the test of actual individual experience in South Africa. His novelistic tactic was to create the persona 'Wolfe', whose egoism and self-absorption could prepare us for his failure to follow his own

convictions through to their obvious conclusion regarding a colour-free society, in which whites would not in any leading role shape history. One of Wolfe's (and Plomer's) evasions is to designate black opposition as a 'hidden force' – somehow natural, metaphysical or symbolic, but not human and organisational. The much anthologised 'The Scorpion', published in 1932 after Plomer had left South Africa, similarly tends to find, in nature and symbol defences against the hard questions of history: why is South Africa a violent society? Instead, the poem presents violence as inherent in the natural order of things:

Limpopo and Tugela churned
 In flood for brown and angry miles
 Melons, maize, domestic thatch,
 The trunks of trees and crocodiles;

The swollen estuaries were thick
 With flotsam, in the sun one saw
 The corpse of a young negress bruised
 By rocks, and rolling on the shore,

That was the Africa we knew,
 Where, wandering alone,
 We saw, heraldic in the heat
 A scorpion on a stone.

(1984:72)

However, despite his attempts to 'unify' his response into a single symbol (the scorpion as the sting of Africa), Plomer's detailed observations tend to prevent his own psychological reaction from being neatly summarised by the poem's final stanza, or indeed by its metaphor of nature. Both attachment and horror are evident in Plomer's focus on the young negress. The cumulative descriptive power of lolling breasts, bleeding eyes, the beads and bells around her neck, suggests the poet's almost hypnotic attention to the single life reduced to a piece of flotsam. And the fact that the poet uses the personal pronoun in the final stanza lends weight to his own actual presence in a landscape that would have been far simpler to define as a mere matter of geography.

Nonetheless, Plomer's reaction is undeniably ambiguous, as he wants to be both in and out of history. What I am suggesting is that the 'gaps' and silences tell us more about the complex working of his historical consciousness than we are likely to have confirmed only by

an expression of authorial intent. It is his difficult engagement in actuality, rather than his 'evasions' through the use of metaphor, that are reinforced in 'The Devil Dancers', which appeared in 1936. Initially, the poem seems to confirm a view recently enunciated by Jeremy Cronin¹ (1984:64–78) and J.M. Coetzee² (1988:163–177) that the white sensibility has seen monsters instead of people in Africa. But Plomer's use of a self-ironising colonial mouth-piece, problematises the tourist's version of Africa as an exotic postcard of tribal life and ritual, and prepares us for the poet's serious attempt to investigate reason and action beneath the surface image of the 'devil dance':

In shantung suits we whites are cool,
Glasses and helmets censoring the glare;
Fever has made our anxious faces pale,
We stoop a little from the load we bear;
Grouped in the shadow of the compound wall
We get our cameras ready, sitting pensive;
Keeping our distance and our dignity
We talk and smile though slightly apprehensive.

(1984:87)

By satirical references to the 'white man's burden', by stereotyping the colonials in their subtropical clothing, and by utilising a disruptive rhythm and deflationary feminine rhymes, Plomer undercuts the image of the European master-presence. Hiding from the glare (reality) of the immediate environment and keeping open the quick escape by aeroplane, the colonial personage in the poem can hardly be granted credence as a reliable witness. Thus the reader is subtly shifted by the poem from accepting as authoritative any references to devils and monster:

The fretful pipes and thinly-crying strings,
The mounting expectation of the drums
Excite the nerves, and stretch the muscles taut
Against the climax – but it never comes.

(Plomer, 1985:88)

We are not surprised when the climax 'never comes', for that would have been the sensational expectation of white fears. As Njabulo Ndebele (1989:23–36) might remind us the dance is a spectacle,³ but the dancers – as mine-workers – will return to their ordinary selves, where their real grievances of exploitation and anger enter the larger narrative of history. If the tourists see only the exotic, then the

'authorial' colonial consciousness reveals its own struggle, in the course of the poem, to break out of a language of explanatory symbols into a process of self-interrogation. In the final lines, the sanctioned 'Renaissance' conceit of the metamorphosis of the body into the spirit is located in the specificity of African action and retribution:

Within the mask the face, and moulded
 (As mask to face) within the face the ghost,
 As in its chrysalis-case the foetus folded
 Of leaf-light butterfly. What matters most

When it comes out and we admire its wings
 Is to remember where its life began:
 Let us take care – that flake of flame may be
 A butterfly whose bite can kill a man.

(1984:88)

We encounter the poet's pain of human awareness and responsibility struggling to emerge from the overlay of the 'poetic transfiguration'. There is no fearful anticipation, finally, of a black devil rising from nowhere to wreak a kind of irrational, inexplicable (mob) vengeance on the white person. Rather, the poet speaks the closing commentary in calm, logical, almost inevitable statements. Behind the mask are human, socialised beings; their actions against the colonial order are explicably part of historical causation. The elaborate 'poeticity' through which Plomer's insight becomes clear says something not only about his attempts to set up a dialectic between 'poetry' and 'history', but of his attempts to humanise and socialise the sense data of his surroundings. His progressiveness can be measured in contrast with a poem like Douglas Livingstone's 'Under Capricorn', which also utilises images of monsters and devils, but which attempts to turn human intrusion into animal shapes. The fact that Livingstone does not succeed in 'unpeopling' his landscape perhaps says something about his alertness to the impossibility of evading history. Nonetheless, his is a reactive view; Plomer wants to bequeath himself to a social dimension of African experience, and Wilhelm's observation that he translates 'terrible hallucinatory vistas into an inner world, that inner Africa, something older than civilisation, which he could never abide',⁴ (1976:24) can be seen as the poet's psychological response so long as we do not separate psychological from social motivation. Plomer's aim is not to stratify Africa into timeless myth: it is to demystify Africa of such hallucinatory images, and return life to normality and society.

'History' clearly becomes the motivating factor in the later poem

'Tugela River', written after Plomer's only return to South Africa in 1956 to attend a writers' conference. Again the division between 'nature' and 'society' is not a simple one for the poet. Written against the first decade of apartheid legislation and in the shadow of the Treason Trial, Plomer almost removes the motif of the river from its derivations in the natural environment and (as Mongane Wally Serote would do in his 1975 epic *No Baby Must Weep*) imbues the inevitability of nature with the certainty of revolutionary activity. Yet the ideological and literary disjunctures – which sometimes suggest a pastiche of different intentions – indicate the struggle of the liberal, humane Plomer to jettison individual value, contemplation, and moderation for the apocalyptic solution:

If after thirty years, in winter calm
 Tugela gliding as before might seem
 Merely an unnavigable stream
 Idling for ever in the gold
 Dry atmosphere, remember this:
 Patience erodes.

Here where we stand
 Through the rich grass of summer there will pour
 A press and pride of senseless force,
 Roar like a mob, a tidal wave
 Shaking its mane, overturning rocks
 Fulfil the promise of catastrophe.

(1984:125)

In almost parodying Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', Plomer wants to do a kind of violence to the assumptions of Romanticism, in which entire worlds are reshaped in the imagination of the finely expressive poetic consciousness. In 'Tugela River', by contrast, the diction and rhythms move outwards into the surrounding terrain. The idea of poetry as a process of interrogation, debate and participation demands the long poem, which can accommodate various shifts from rhetorical address to prose-like understanding, and this is allowed to suggest moments of greater focus amid the passage of time. In picturing an old woman who turns out to be a tree in the landscape (for in Africa . . . 'Things are often not what they seem . . . /Fear takes on form,/ Delusions seem to have/The density of facts'), Plomer introduces the idea of a necessary 'European' shift of perception in relation to Africa: if the imaginative procedure derives from Romanticism, it is the social programme that is given the emphasis.

As we move through the poem, the art of transformation continues

to serve the historical vision: the Zulu youth 'dying of inanition in the sun' is contextualised within a militaristic heritage, and in referring to the *Mfecane* Plomer establishes a dialectic between Zulu defeat and Zulu power ('Like battles fought, and lost –/No battles fought and won!'). Yet even at this point of suggesting African power, Plomer's own historical limitation is evident – his exemplum remains tribal, ethnic. In Johannesburg at the time, the Congress Alliance was the target of state oppression: its commitment was explicitly anti-tribal, anti-militaristic, its leaders ranged from Africans to whites, and Luthuli, Mandela and Sisulu spoke Plomer's own language of liberalism, humanism, rationality and compassion. In short, Plomer is unable to introduce contemporary human beings into his poetic evocation of revolution, and we may note his difficulties in words such as 'senseless force', 'roar like a mob', 'rage' (the language of colonial fear checks the poet's own revolutionary intonations). Finally, the vision of the future is 'poetic' rather than 'historical':

When patience breaks, the sinews act,
Rage generates energy without end:
Tugela River, in the time of drums
And shouting of the war-dance flood
Will break a trance, as revolutions do,
Will promise order, and a future time
Of honey, beer, and milk.

(1984:125)

Symbol seeks to efface the very process of revolutionary change. Or, should symbol be read in this case as a strategic rhetoric of history? When Nadine Gordimer in *The Conservationist* (1974) seeks to portray historical transfer, she escapes the narrative of daily struggle to evoke symbols of storms washing in from the Mozambique channel. Perhaps Plomer was only signalling, in 'Tugela River', the real difficulty of the white person's role in a climate of revolutionary possibility. But Serote, who is unambiguously committed to sudden transfers of power, also has recourse in his long poems to symbols of solidarity rather than to the analysis of historical change. In consideration, 'Tugela River' remains a fascinating instance not only of an ideological problematic, but of a literary problematic. Throughout, it oscillates between its status as poetic artefact and its status as historical record. During his short stay in South Africa, in 1956, Plomer himself experienced strong, angry and perhaps even confused feelings about the South African situation.

The culmination of Plomer's South African involvement as a poet had, perhaps, occurred some years prior to the 1970s (when Serote

was inspired to write *No Baby Must Weep*). Responding to the suicides in 1965, of two South African writers, Nat Nakasa and Ingrid Jonker 'A Taste of the Fruit' strikes a powerful and compassionate note. Plomer skilfully interweaves the lyrical speaking voice and the insistent oral force of repetitions, such as 'He is not there . . . She is not there'. Confirming the focus on valuable human lives wasted in a climate of apartheid and intolerance, the metaphor of the fruit binds the two dead writers to all of caring humanity. Amid the inhumanity of Verwoerdian apartheid in the 1960s, Plomer sheds the 'extra skin'⁵ which he once said writers might be tempted to grow in the face of terrible suffering – the extra skin which he had perhaps placed about himself during his short, traumatic visit in 1956. From the distance of England he was able to see again, the full human tragedy of South Africa. In 'A Taste of the Fruit' 'history' in the form of socialised lives, actions reactions, dreams, dissatisfactions and suffering touches the transforming and idealising power of the poet.

Plomer's significance for us today is that his sense of historical consciousness ensured that he struggled, creatively, to articulate a humanising response to South Africa. This involved humanising his own literary imagination in its continual return to points of reference in this country. If his poetry avoids any simple connection between the 'poetic' and the 'historical', this testifies to its authentic witness. The African poems, especially, never cease to interrogate the difficult and challenging responsibility of the poet in society.

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5. Wilhelm, Peter 1976. 'The Single Dreamer: the African Poetry of William Plomer'. *Poetry South Africa: Selected Papers from Poetry 74*. Johannesburg: AD Donker.
6. Plomer, William 1975. *The Autobiography of William Plomer*. London: AD Donker. On page 379 Plomer speaks of the poet needing protection from the complex violence of the world.

The Sculptor and the Citizen

Complimenting/Complementing Andries Botha*

Michael Chapman

My field is not sculpture nor, more generally, the visual arts. It is literature and, before venturing on the topic of this paper, I felt compelled – like a diligent student – to check the dictionary to see how tradition has defined sculpture. It was originally the process, or art, of carving or engraving a hard material so as to produce designs or figures in relief, or in the round. In modern usage, there is the fashioning of plastic substance and casting in metal. Size seems to have been a criterion, for the dictionary specifically refers to the production of figures of magnitude. In its several qualifications and modifications, the definition was somewhat reassuring. It suggested, at least, not eternal truths and practices but sets of conventions, and we are reminded that in its continuing adaptations sculpture has utilised materials ranging from the grass fibres, clay and wood of ancient life to the metals of modern technology. It has moreover always been small as well as large.

The literary critic in me began shifting my paradigm – as we like to say in the parlance of theory – from idealism, authority, genius, autonomous works, universalism – the terminology of the Western classical/Renaissance tradition – to relativism, deferred meaning, the work as text in cultural-ideological configurations, the power not only of the artist but of the interpreter: in short, the terminology of the various post-structuralisms (deconstruction, versions of neo-Marxism, reception aesthetics) that over the last twenty years have rejuvenated and/or problematised the study of culture including literature and art. Taking refuge here in a world of language – any sense, or nonsense, we make of a piece of sculpture is reliant on the critical language we use – I should like to pay a peculiarly ‘post-structural’ tribute to Andries Botha, winner of prestigious awards, including the 1991 Young Artists Award, and currently acknowledged by several critics as perhaps South Africa’s most exciting practising sculptor. My object is not simply to praise Botha’s individual achievement: an achievement that – to the post-structuralist – does not, in any event, exist independently from the

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making and re-making of the artefacts in the practice of criticism. Rather, I want to investigate the implications of Botha's 'élite' approach – I use the term in the sense of his being a 'schooled' artist – in a contentious political environment, where most people have neither access to the resources of art education nor expensive materials. In paying a compliment to Botha, therefore, I shall also be complementing his work in a discourse about the efficacy of the art work in society.

In providing the focus of the enquiry, Botha is a more formidable figure than many of his colleagues, for he has consistently shown a deep concern to step beyond his own training and understand sculpture as a form of ethical intervention in the surrounding socio-political life. He thus offers me the opportunity to incorporate a broader issue: what societal contract might the sculptor in South Africa strike with the citizen? Or, if the sculptor refuses contractual obligation, what conditions might the citizen place upon the sculptor? This could sound the antithesis of the post-structuralist. The apparent contradiction, however, is deliberately invoked, and serves to remind me that I share with Botha a sense of having been conditioned, to a degree, in my responses to art and criticism by the dark decade of the state of emergency, when we were required to look hard and long at our South African reality, to scrutinise phrases such as the 'freedom of the artist', to embody forms with substantial content, to be relevant, to try to be responsible. In holding Botha to account, I am doing the same to myself. Despite Albie Sachs's invitation to declare a moratorium on the 'tendentious' and explore the richness of our humanity (Sachs, 1990), my assumption is that even if we drop the probably impossible demand for a theory and practice able to unify the private and the public, we should not as responsible beings try to elevate the virtues of self-creation above those of human solidarity. Accordingly, the claims we make for truth are not separable from our considerations of social progress; neither are concepts of freedom separable from those of justice. It is necessary, initially, to locate Andries Botha in the climate of the 1980s.

Before the beginning of the state of emergency in 1985, Andrew Verster defended the Edoardo Villa statue in a Durban public place against what he implied was the ignorance of philistines by appealing to its classical quietism (Verster, 1983). In a period of disquiet, he said echoing a long tradition, we need to be reminded of timeless, eternal values, our common humanity. This timelessness was identified in Villa's iconography of mother and child. The critic who regards value as less an ideal, more a provision, however, might reply that no one is denying our humanity, but having pointed to our biological resemblances, our capacities to experience hurt, jealousy or whatever,

there is little more to say unless we push humanity against history and ask which mothers had the opportunity to nurture their young, which of the young – in South Africa in 1983 – had the opportunities to be children. By the mid 1980s several sculptors had begun to cut their materials according to the contingencies of the time. At the End Conscription Campaign's Art for Peace Exhibition (Cape Town), for example, Gavin Younge's welded-steel construction, 'Tea for Two', signalled in metaphor its criticism of increased military preparedness. At the 1988 Cape Triennial Exhibition mixed styles, paradox, parody – a kind of post-modernism shorn of excess by the immediate realities of detentions and killings – produced, among other works, Peter Schutz's enigmatic and disturbing carved-wood wall sculpture 'Night Dialogue', and Andries Botha's rubber, metal, wattle and brass 'Dromedaris Donder en Ander Dom Dinge', in which Van Riebeeck's ship – one of the 'dom' things – signified the beginnings of European colonisation on the southern tip of Africa. (The pieces in combination show threatening implements invading the local people in their environment.)

The 'relevance' of Botha's work has been discussed since by Elizabeth Rankin, Adam Small, Marilyn Martin and Carol Becker (Catalogue, 1991). We read of his 'political position' – the pull between Afrikaans roots and English liberalism, his disillusionment with white South Africa in the face of Black Consciousness as reflected in his juxtapositions of materials (the metals of the industrial world and the wattle of traditional Zulu activity), in his disjunctures of images (biblical journeyings and floods, Afrikaner myth and history, symbols of African antiquity, and so on). Here, the 'product' gives way to processes of construction (i.e., the frozen moment is situated in political time), the artist disavows romantic genius by using assistants, and pieces are arranged in multi-composition thus breaking the impression of solitariness while encouraging ambiguities of relationship and (among interpreters) a dialogue of active 'literary' engagement with the content. Adam Small recognises the limits of Botha's commitment to Western 'post-modern' style when he sees not the parody of all origins of centre, but a tortured attempt to work through despair to hope, and Carol Becker using the language of post-structuralism modified by the Marxist belief that evasions, slippages, deferrals of action need at some point to be called to social account, describes Botha as a paradigmatic transgressor: an Afrikaner profoundly concerned with the obliteration of race distinctions, a male artist focused on issues of gender and androgyny, a spiritual artist committed to the social/political/collective and public arenas, an intellectual driven by intuition, a maker of beautiful objects outraged by preciousness and commodification, a South African engaged in the

daily struggles of this country, trying to live as a citizen of the world (Catalogue, 1991:24).

These compliments – I think – are deserved. In looking at Botha's work one recognises a style that is authentically 'South African' in its hybrid use of a Western/African miscellany of materials, arrangements, images, perceptions, ideas. Yet to end at the compliment does not go sufficiently far, and actually delimits the robustness of Botha's works in their potential to *speak back* to a complicated South African situation. We are required too soon to revere the work as a completed 'product' rather than to think about it as a text-in-process. In fact, Botha himself alerts us to gaps, incompleteness, when he remarks that he rarely conceptualises his works fully before the making starts, and that answers emerge in the intuitive interaction between giving visible form to concepts and finding viable technical solutions (Catalogue, 1991:9). To which the critic who values notions of 'autonomy' will reply that Botha sculpts better than he knows and that the full genius is *there*, in the work, awaiting description. In contrast, the post-structuralist will continue to force the codes of sense-making into, and on to, the never completed text. In using Botha as a case study of the sculptor's role in our society, I want to test his works not as entities, but in structural relationship to other kinds of cultural expression. My interest is in the ways his sculptures expand, or diminish, in their obligations to the citizen, or to justice, when put into a thoroughly intertextual situation. I want to accept their intended home in the gallery, however, and instead of having them compete with say a praise poem to Mandela at a political rally, I shall place my examples of cultural expression – necessarily restricted – on the exhibition plinth next to Botha's 'Dromedaris Donder . . .'. My products, or processes, are drawn from the commodity, from traditional African culture, and from popular culture.

First, is there any value in comparing 'Dromedaris Donder . . .' with the commodity of the motor vehicle wrenched from its utility and re-contextualised in the aura of the art gallery? There is of course nothing very startling about this: Duchamp's urinal obviously comes to mind. Is the sculpture any *use* to us in a modern, technological world? For *use*, not simply beauty, is a necessary element of any social contract between sculptor and citizen, and the art critics I quoted earlier certainly did not disregard the value of usefulness in justifying Botha's relevance to social concerns. The motor vehicle clearly has a use; is it, however, attached to any moral schema? On its plinth, anyhow, its aesthetic features are enhanced for leisurely contemplation, and we could say that its concept, its idea, of use is embodied in aesthetic lines designed originally by someone (perhaps with the legitimate assistance of a computer) and, like the original

photo-image, reproduced in copies of the prototype. In an age of mechanical reproduction, Walter Benjamin would argue, the needs of the masses push against the élitism of the aura. But, paradoxically, commodity culture has its own élitism of price. With function following form, or the other way round, the motor vehicle prides itself from strict utility to evoke feelings of envy, jealousy, pleasure, even fantasy (how many of us will ever own the Mercedes Benz we dream of driving?). The vehicle actually *extends* the aesthetic sense: it is innovative in its use of materials including metal, rubber, plastic and cloth, its specifications appeal to the modern fascination of fact, and 'strangeness' accrues with age.

Should any citizens stand in this hypothetical gallery in several thousand years time and compare 'Dromedaris Donder . . .' and 'Mercedes Benz', what would they make of our designs, our art, our culture, our texts of significance? Were they to avoid recovering the original, informing context – as some critics in the arts are prone to do – they would probably judge the Mercedes Benz according to their own current preferences, and – if they were in a classical age – find its clean, rational lines superior to the eclecticism of 'Dromedaris'. Were they in a modernist phase the juxtapositions of 'Dromedaris' would strike closer accord. Were they in an age of disaster, struggle, insecurity, injustice, their responses would probably be mixed, but all would be instructive to us ensconced nearby in the eternal art-symbol of the sarcophagus. Those finding value in 'Mercedes Benz' might point to its apparent confidence: amid dislocation it seems to know its path forward into the future. By comparison, the ambiguities of 'Dromedaris' could be interpreted not as 'complexity' but 'confusion': disarray in its use of symbols from different planes of experience. At this point the historian might have to shed some light on the period under review. 'Dromedaris' – our imaginary historian recalls – was produced by a white South African at a time when the old order of colonial-apartheid was dying and the new was struggling to be born. The artist looks back in dismissal of his own discredited past while remaining inevitably attached to the very symbols he is seeking to deconstruct. This historian, who has revolutionary sympathies, continues: the future in South Africa (as it was then called) looked bleak, even for progressive white intellectual-artists, and devils, monsters, dehumanised figures in metal rather than naturalistic human representations characterised the conventions of the art schools. The oppressed who were hardly part of the institutions, however, thirsted for a future. She is interrupted at this point by a colleague who, like her, has been schooled in the Africanist tradition, but who is struggling to resuscitate a course in Marxism, and who reminds her to penetrate beneath the form to 'cognitions' of

reality where 'Dromedaris', in its 'contradictions', reveals the ideological difficulties of anchoring the European inheritance to the African milieu. 'Mercedes Benz', in contrast, was 'transparent': as an import, it forced upon a poor populace the costs and technology-drive of advanced European capitalism. It cosseted the rich and the powerful but – despite its appearing in an ANC cavalcade – had little to do with milk or bread. It pretended to include people in its space: in crashing down cliffs and allowing its drivers seemingly miraculous escapes, however, it pandered in such 'happenings' to the worst excesses of the bourgeois dream as it increased its status as possession. It was – this materialist-analyst concludes – regressive art at its most bloated. 'Dromedaris' élitism – we admit to its evidence of higher-level expertise – at least retained a critical edge. To which the Africanist historian, a little impatient with another European import – this time the rhetoric of class analysis – retorts: who could afford the large structure of 'Dromedaris'? Does it not display a fundamental paradox that escaped its own critical intent: in trying to diminish the authority of icons and myths, it sets itself up in its size and materiality as another structure of dominance.

This entire argument – it may be objected – is based on a false premise: common sense tells us that 'Mercedes Benz' is not an art work. But to conclude, philosophically, that it is not would involve us in intricate argument such as that employed by Arthur C. Danto in his attempt to prove that any old object (a urinal, a Mercedes Benz, a Zulu headrest) can never be an art work whatever the ingenuity of our recontextualisations (Danto, 1988). You are probably familiar with his tale, set somewhere in Africa, about the Basket tribe and the Pot tribe who were separated from each other by inhospitable natural terrain and who, respectively, revered baskets and used pots, and revered pots and used baskets. Because the baskets of the Basket tribe had been imbued originally with the spirit of belief, they would remain art when deposited in some European museum, and the pots would have to remain the crafted artefacts (not art) they had always been. The opposite would apply to the Pot tribe's pots and baskets. Danto's point is that original intention has a fundamental role in the definitions of art, or craft. The value of his tale is to remind us to try to recover the intention; the limitation is a lurking essentialism which severely circumscribes the field of reception, so that little enquiry is permitted between the past significance of a work and its present meaning. In contrast, the reactions imagined here to 'Dromedaris' and 'Mercedes Benz' accentuate a key element in any social contract between the sculptor and the citizen: that of empowering the citizen by encouraging questions and debate. By analogy, do our artists at this time have any need for commodity art? Is Andy Warhol's 'Brillo Box'

really universal, or is it limited by its Americanness? Do we need post-modernism? Before deciding we should consider its ambiguous derivations: partly from the superfluity of capitalism, partly from the need to criticise, or debunk, any authoritative structure including the grand, aching texts of the modernist. The critical component here would seem to be important. But then how do we commit ourselves not only to inventive negation, but to a future in which Africa deserves to attain a greater measure of intellectual and imaginative freedom from the Western codes, manners, priorities and policies that continue to dominate our institutions.

Let me turn to Africa in its ancient past and pose another question: do any small pieces of sculpture win awards on our national exhibitions? On the other side of Botha's large metal and wattle entanglement, I see several traditional objects from southern Africa: a snuff pot, a medicine pot, a walking stick, a headrest. According to Danto only those originally expressive of a purpose and content beyond strict utility can ever qualify as art. But the critic seeking contractual obligations between art and society is unlikely to accept the argument, and instead allow a sense of ethical consequence to overrule the philosophical logic. In South Africa today the Africanist would argue persuasively for the removal of the traditional object from ethnography, and for its re-location in the world of art. This happened earlier in the year at the Art and Ambiguity Exhibition in Johannesburg, and few viewers appeared to have had difficulty in believing they were looking at a rich artistic source. Is any valid comparison possible, however, between an ancient snuff-box and a Botha sculpture?

Perhaps not in obvious ways. The effect of opposites, however, can be illuminating. Instead of declaring themselves to you across the room, the snuff box, headrest and walking stick pull you close with their smallness until you seem to shrink to their size, from which perspective you begin to appreciate their honesty of materials and integrity of design. Despite Danto it is difficult to be sure where utility ended or art began. What is interesting is to turn from the small object to the large 'Dromedaris' combination and ask not only what modernism (with its re-patterning of high cultural reference) or post-modernism (with its ironising of the icon) has bequeathed us in South Africa, but what in our pursuit of Western tradition and evolution we have lost sight of in our own backyard. In a society of poor conditions, for example, rock, clay, wood or mud could present the sculptor with greater challenges of ethical form than metal, brass or plastic, and it is worth pausing with some humility before a small Zulu headrest as a mark of consonance between the sculpted object and ordinary life. (Here, incidentally, we might want to favour the

plain surface; embellishment possibly signalled royal power.) As part of these considerations, Botha's sculpture could be allowed to re-arrange itself, almost imperceptibly, in the focal scale so that the metals – suggesting three hundred years of European conquest – are held in awkward illusions of dominance, and the thatching of organic materials gives solidity to ideas of bindings in community. In the spaces between the multiple combination, a dialogue may be initiated between Botha of the art school and Botha of the rural-craft centre.

Where connections to the African earth appear to be most difficult for the white sculptor are in those very aspects which, in my view, lend sculpture by black artists its greatest strength: in the sociability of human representation. The situation is not unlike that in a great deal of our poetry, where white authors have often preferred empty landscapes or monsters to interchange with any sense of an African community. When Adam Small talks of Botha's humanism, he means Botha's concern not with forms for their own sake, but with serious issues: his working away from apartheid, his search for a caring social life. Yet any just future in South Africa requires that we recover respect for the recognisable human feature. This could sound naive; an antidote to the large sculpture of modernist or post-modernist creation, however, is to turn to that category of art most difficult to define: the popular. This intrusive, persistent form in Africa has been called, unfortunately, transitional, which could suggest the primitive wood-carver straining towards the educated idiom. Instead, I shall retain the more amorphous term, popular: an art, or craft (the divisions are blurred) reasonably accessible to large numbers of people and – as some forms are more popular than others – ranging from carvings for tourists to the figurines of the Phutuma Seokas and Noria Mabasas. The fact that Seoka after having been 'discovered' by art galleries, proceeded to hire assistants to increase his output is not really a scandal, not even a point to cause us bother. For we are talking of art which, when popular, shows disregard – sometimes delightful disregard – for the preciousness of the Western convention of rarity. Popular art is by its purpose and nature opportunistic, city-wise; it is 'unlearned', rough-edged; it mingles disparate influences and borrowings from the veld and the factory, from the separatist church and the comic book; it is sometimes progressive, sometimes conservative for in speaking of self-definition and identity it indicates the lack of interest by those in politics, education or art schools for the truly poor of this country. In ignoring – or, more likely, not even knowing – the concern of canonised art with forms in space, Seoka focuses all of the experience on the single human being, whose smallness in clay belies the sculpting of a cocky, city-confident personality. The statement is blunt: I am here, in Africa; see me! for I will outlast your laws, your structures, your institutions.

What I want to focus on are the faces, as we consider linking the popular figurine in a line of tradition stretching back – if we are willing to see it – to the Lydenburg Heads as the ur-text and, forward and backward in combinations of the ‘traditional’, ‘élite’ and ‘popular’, to works such as Dinah Molefe’s pottery figure of a traditional Zulu woman, Samuel Makoanyana’s clay, paint and wood figures entitled ‘C. Masopha’ and ‘Woman Carrying Pot’, Johannes Maswanganyi’s ‘Sangoma’, Nelson Makhuba’s ‘Dancing Couple’ or, ‘finer’ in execution, Michael Zondi’s head of a young woman, and portrait of a dying man. All of these works – there are many others – show that Africa has never had an empty landscape; neither has its sociability really entertained savages. In the depiction of the human form, particularly the face, these artists perhaps have real advantages over so many of their white counterparts. Politically and culturally, they have not lived in colonial, spiritual exile half rejecting Africa, half hankering after the metropolitan scene. More importantly, perhaps, they have not been burdened by a classical Greek inheritance which in giving representational form to the governing idea that reason moved and shaped the world, established a tradition of the human form that, while slightly idealised, could virtually be taken in art as portraits of actual men and women, even when the ostensible subject was the gods. The expressive power is diminished in the mimesis Socrates and Aristotle regarded as their ‘essence’, and Picasso had to retrieve the African artefact from the ethnographer to help him re-envision artistic possibilities of resemblance. His approach – since typified as modernist – gave us distortion. The African tradition gives us the embodiment of an ontology based not on the imitation of reason, but on the expression of vital forces intimately connecting the physical and the metaphysical. A squat body, an elongated chin, a curled lip are not distortions since resemblance is not a criterion. Rather, the task of the sculptor was – or is – to find the form that makes the dynamic life powers objective or visible in using the relevant body parts and facial features as natural metaphors. The unique contribution of African sculpture is to give sensuous expression to our powers in ways we humans can know them. To understand the consequences of this for an art of human representation is to enter Africa morally, philosophically, aesthetically. Yet it is at this point of sharing – between artist and citizen – that the élite Western work is characterised by an absence: a gap of incomprehension. It is this difficulty that Andries Botha is possibly seeking to surmount as he struggles away from the distortions of Western modernity to expressive content rooted in his African experience. In complementing his work, then, I am also complimenting him on his achievement.

Sculptors have a responsibility in South Africa. So do the institutions that house their teaching and practice. I said there were no monsters in South Africa. But I cannot stand in J. G. Strydom Square in Pretoria and look at the massive bust of the former prime minister after whom the square is named without associating these particular chunks of sculpted material with brutality and authoritarianism. As South Africa painfully transforms itself into the modernising African country it must become to enter the larger world and, we hope, to progress and prosper, new leaders will call upon sculptors to help them satisfy the yearning for commemoration, glory, vanity, immortality. New images – for the public service, for business – will be required in re-decorated foyers. How will sculptors connect their principles as artists of integrity with the demands of both the powerful patron and the humble citizen? And will institutions play their role in developing and training the critical intelligence? My own contribution in this paper has been to try to keep alive a tension – necessary, I think – between a hermeneutics of suspicion (a readiness to read the art work as a deferral of reverence) and the need to rehabilitate new identities, priorities, practices and aesthetic possibilities for a just society in South Africa. In this, it is important to seek not simply diversity – which can be an excuse for ignoring imbalances of power – but a dialectical enquiry about progress in the intersections of the large sculpture and the small, the traditional, the popular and the élite. Whatever the differences of skill, scale and insight, it seemed particularly important to examine seriously the humanism that ties Botha's 'Dromedaris Donder . . .' simultaneously to a Zulu snuff-box and a character in a face, brightly painted on wood or clay, in a make-shift studio-stall alongside some dusty rural road. The contract of the sculptor and the citizen must be humanising, democratising in its obligations.

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The Empire Paints Back

Reflections on the Colonisation of Vision

D.M. Leigh

This essay sets out to investigate how a way of seeing can be colonised in the sense of being taken possession of and governed by another way of seeing; to investigate how images can act as settlers and space constructs as administrative systems in territory that was once the possession of some totally different sort of vision. It looks at the impact of Western, or more precisely, European vision, on the rest of the world and on southern Africa in particular. In so doing it inevitably involves itself in the vexed question of the role played by Eurocentrism in the practice and critical evaluation of the visual arts in South Africa.

That we learn to see is a fact that many people often find difficult to come to terms with, and that we learn to see in different ways depending on our cultural background, environment, education and many other factors, even more difficult. There is a reluctance to accept this because human eyes work the same way all over the world and always have done. But then, of course, we do not see with the eyes, we see through them. We see with our mind set which is determined by a complex array of influences. No two people, no matter how many influences acting upon their respective visions they may have had in common, can see in exactly the same way because we also see with our emotions. How great then can the differences be between people from totally different cultural backgrounds? Great enough for there to have been people from primitive societies for whom photographs, initially anyway, were unreadable as images.¹ According to Western popular legend the 'camera cannot lie', how then is it conceivable that some people cannot see the truth when it is presented in this incontrovertible way? The answer is a simple one: they had never learnt to see objects represented in terms of the chance effects of the light, and its consequent shadow, that happened to be falling on them at the time the photograph was taken. They never learnt to do this because they never felt the need.

Ancient Egyptian art history tells us that for over three thousand years that civilisation felt no such need because its artistic production was concerned with creating an eternal presence for things and not with their transitory appearance. I am quite sure that even an extremely visually educated and responsive Egyptian draughting

scribe would have had initial difficulty in seeing through his elaborate, highly formal visual conventions and interpreting the haphazard imagery in a photograph.

The difficulty of learning to see in another way should not however be exaggerated. The human mind is very adaptable and can quickly learn what it needs to know. It seems that the people who could not initially 'read' photographs soon learnt to do so once they had become familiar with this way of presenting visual information.² E.H. Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* quotes from the childhood reminiscences (expressed idiomatically) of a Japanese artist who grew up in Europe:

About the perspective, I have some story of my own father. When I got a book of the drawing lessons at my grammar school there was a drawing of a square box in the correct perspective. My father saw it and said, 'What? This box is surely not square, it seems to me very much crooked.' About nine years later he was looking at the same book and he called me and said, 'How strange it is! You know I used to think this square box looked crooked, but now I see this is perfectly right.'³

The perceptual psychologist Gustav Jahoda has concluded that, 'Where people are unaccustomed to dealing with 2D (representations), they may experience difficulties at the outset as shown by Deręgowski, Muldrow and Muldrow (1972)' (who conducted a psychological study among a remote Ethiopian tribe who had no familiarity with images of any sort) 'but there is also evidence that a relatively modest amount of informal training can bring about very rapid improvement (Forge 1970).'⁴

Encountering and interpreting just one photograph must have the potential to change the vision forever of someone who has always seen images expressed in terms of flat shapes unaffected by light and shadow. Could one photograph have changed the course of ancient Egyptian art? It is unlikely. There must be a need for some new way of seeing or else it remains merely a curiosity, as Western painting could only be regarded by Chinese artists of the Manchu court at a time when the spread of European influences was being discouraged by imperial edict.⁵

The case of the photograph is an interesting one to pursue: The camera could only have been invented in the Western world. It could only have been a product of European vision because no other culture had ever required an instrument that could record objects and actions in terms of the chance degree and angle of light falling on them. No other culture would immediately have recognised the products of such an instrument as providing images that had anything to do with reality or truth. The only exception would have been the Hellenistic Greeks

who developed *skiagraphia*, the art of shading, and the Romans to whom they passed it on. But then they laid the foundations for European vision so they are not really an exception at all.

One could go further and say that if Italy had not produced a Leonardo it is very unlikely that the camera would have been invented. Echoing Alberti, Leonardo said, 'The crowning achievement of a painter is to make a flat surface show convex bodies projecting from its surface.'⁶ In other words that painting is best which most conveys the clearly realised illusion of three-dimensional objects in space subjected to light. That painting which most convinces us that we are looking at the natural world as we think we see it. And how is this to be achieved? By two principal means: What the renaissance called the science of perspective and the careful, Leonardo would have said 'scientific', observation of how light falls on objects in order to give them the maximum illusion of three-dimensionality. In order to achieve this Leonardo invented his *sfumato*, smokiness, the very soft merging of light into shadow by means of extraordinarily gently shaded values or tones. In this way Leonardo invented the camera – of course, speaking strictly, invented the *need* for the camera. It was he, more than anyone else, who taught Europe to see in the terms in which the camera operates. The pictorial convention that presents dark colours as shadow was a convention peculiar to Western painting. In all other art traditions dark colours are simply that – dark colours in the colour range that have nothing to do with the complexities of the effects of light on forms in space. There are no more effective ways of conveying an illusion of space and three-dimensionality than those explored by Leonardo and the influence of his radical vision was enormous in Europe and was to reverberate throughout the entire world. According to psychological and physiological findings, scientific or linear perspective does correspond with how we see, or perhaps better to say that the eye will happily and easily collaborate with it in order to be deceived by its illusions.⁷

What Leonardo's explorations amounted to was an investigation of the ambiguities of appearance. His researches into perception revealed to him that the eye is subject to every sort of deception, but, nevertheless, good Aristotelian that he was, he insisted that it was the sense least subject to error. By depicting things exactly as he saw them, with a clear understanding of the ambiguities they are subject to, the artist will arrive at the truth. Armed with scientific understanding and method the way is through the web of illusions to a truth that can finally be proved mathematically, since, Leonardo tells us, 'No human inquiry can become true knowledge until it has been proved mathematically'.⁸ For Leonardo it is the ability, based upon observation to perceive and reveal truth, that enabled him to say, 'Painting is

philosophy"⁹ and in the 15th century philosophy was held to be the 'queen of the sciences'.

The desire to create images that have the illusion of being realities belongs to the Western art tradition alone and can be traced to the roots of European art in ancient Greek art. The legend of Apelles who painted grapes so life-like that birds attempted to peck at them is well-known. Greek art moved away from the conceptual and symbolic path that is, to a greater or lesser extent, common to all other art traditions and set out to express itself through physical appearance. In this way the narrative intent of Greek art could be played out by convincing figures in believable surroundings. The revival of the methods employed by the Greeks and Romans in their picture-making provided powerful impetus to Italian artists of the 15th century who saw their study, development and application of these methods as a scientific venture. So accurate is the linear perspective in Masaccio's *Trinity in Santa Maria Novella* (1427) that an exact plan can be plotted of the illusionistic chapel in which the scene is set. What is involved here is a theoretical mastery over space which has very practical applications. Not only does linear perspective give the artist the ability to create a convincing illusion but it also leads to a comprehension of real space and how objects are situated in it on the part of both artist and viewer. This understanding inevitably leads to control over space. If one deconstructs just about any 15th century Italian painting it will be understood to depict individual men and women confidently at ease in human-created urban or human moulded rural environments. They have the power to operate as individuals, playing their part in the narrative that is depicted, within the rational space constructed for them by linear perspective. They are projected into the surrounding world according to how the artist wished to dispose them. Now such a rendering of space carries with it a new self-concept since the viewer stands and looks into the world presented to him by the picture and comprehends where the figures in it are placed in relation to the viewer, to each other, and to their surrounding world which is, like a view through a window, an extension of the viewer's world. Very interestingly in this regard Edmund Carpenter has the following to say about the impact of European vision on traditional Inuit art:

A serious study of Canadian Eskimo souvenir art would tell us much about the modern Eskimo. It would note that art is now a thing, an object, no longer an act, a ritual: that most pieces are now characterized by a base, a favoured point of view, three-dimensional perspective, etc., all of which reflect growing individualism, an aggressive self-concept that seeks to possess and control the external world, in contrast to the traditional, aboriginal techniques of multiple perspective, visual puns, three dimensional x-ray or openwork sculpture, etc., which reflect a less assertive, less individualistic self-concept.¹⁰

The great European voyages of discovery which began towards the end of the 15th century were not unrelated to the intense research through the century that had gone into the depiction of space, and the break with the old two-dimensional view of the world. Raphael's *The School of Athens* (1509–1511) is a tribute to all that research in its rendering of the Western world's great thinkers gathered together under the aegis of Plato and Aristotle, at their ease, commanding the lofty space of the Bramantian halls in which they are gathered. Nor is it a coincidence that so many of the great voyagers, beginning with Columbus, were Italians, since Italy was the forcing house of that research. It has been recently proposed with regard to the Renaissance

... that shared aspirations can be discerned behind the geographical ambitions of those explorers who regarded the surface of the earth as a space for conquest and behind the representational endeavours of those authors and artists who disclosed 'real' people in 'real' space and 'real' time.¹¹

The link can however be drawn even closer. With reference to the fifth centenary of Columbus's voyage it has been pointed out that the fifteenth century was crucial in initiating profound changes in geography and cartography:

A key ingredient was that a transition took place in the way people viewed the world, from the circumscribed cage of the known inhabited world to the notion of the finite whole earth. The transition began with the concepts of the universality and inter-connectedness of knowledge, neo-Platonic ideas that the circle of thinkers that included Leon Battista Alberti, Paolo Toscanelli and Nicolas of Cusa was to share. For geography this meant a movement away from local topological concepts toward those of a finite, spatially referenced spherical earth, a *tabula rasa* on which the achievements of exploration could be cumulatively inscribed.¹²

Alberti was, of course, the great theoretician of 15th century Italian art who significantly advanced and, by means of his writings, spread the 'science' of linear perspective. Toscanelli was a close friend of Brunelleschi and probably a collaborator with him in the discovery of the vanishing point upon which linear perspective is based. In addition to perspective his interest lay with cartography and geography. In 1474 in response to some inquiries from the Portuguese Court regarding sailing routes to the Far East he wrote suggesting sailing westwards into the Atlantic and supplied a map. A few years later both letter and map came into the hands of Columbus to whom Toscanelli subsequently wrote urging him to undertake the voyage.¹³ It is not

far-fetched to claim that linear perspective ultimately put Western man on the moon because it supplied the initial rational scaffolding for a space construct that enables engineers to grasp the dynamic three-dimensionality of space and to project objects through it to a specific position in the cosmos at a specific time.¹⁴

It would be unfortunate if the impression was conveyed that 15th century Italian art was purely a scientific venture dedicated solely to an objective rendering of the world as far as this is possible. Such a contention would be far from the truth since it was also concerned with the metaphysical aspects of Christian belief and with poetic expression. Nevertheless the accurate depiction of the physical world by means of scientific method was a significant part of its endeavours and one that was to enter the tradition of Western art. It was one too that was to exert a powerful influence on the societies that exploration brought Europeans into contact with. In the 18th century Western painting was much admired by Japanese scholars and artists for its scientific accuracy based upon perspective and shading. Indeed they tended to value this quality above all others. In that century the artist Shiba Kokan wrote, 'The way to depict Fuji accurately is by means of Dutch painting.'¹⁵ At this time Japanese painting was influenced by the classical Chinese tradition and Michael Sullivan has pointed out that Japanese artists falling under the sway of Western art felt the need to break with that tradition:

These artists, as Kokan's little treatise shows, had come to realise that the conventional forms of traditional Far Eastern art, however much enlivened by the calligraphic movement of the brush, did not reflect reality. The Chinese literary style was feeding, not upon nature, but upon itself.¹⁶

The realism of Western art was seen as having great potential to spread knowledge and education. Sounding like an echo of Diderot and the Encyclopaedists Kokan wrote, 'Western oil painting is an instrument in the service of the nation.' Another writer enamoured with the benefits of Western art had this to say:

European paintings are executed with great skill, with the intention of having them resemble exactly the objects portrayed so that they will serve some useful function. There are rules of painting that enable one to achieve this effect. The Europeans observe the division of sunlight into light and shade, and also what are called the rules of perspective.¹⁷

In China itself at an earlier date the impact of Western art had been much the same. In the late Ming period enlightened intellectuals saw it as an agent for fruitful change. Under the Manchus, however, in sympathy with the prevailing anti-Western attitude, purists took to

playing down the virtues of Western art and extolling traditional Chinese ones.¹⁸ Chinese painting had always concerned itself with the poetic expression of the 'spirit of things' by means of calligraphic brushmarks. Hence then the following assessment of Western painting by a court painter:

The Westerners are skilled in geometry, and consequently there is not the slightest mistake in their way of rendering light and shade and distance (near and far). In their paintings all the figures, buildings, and trees cast shadows, and their brush and colours are entirely different from those of Chinese painters. Their views (scenery) stretch out from broad (in the foreground) to narrow (in the background) and are defined (mathematically measured). When they paint houses on a wall people are tempted to walk into them. Students of painting may well take over one or two points from them to make their own paintings more attractive to the eye. But these painters have no brush-manner whatsoever; although they possess skill, they are simply artisans and cannot consequently be classified as painters.¹⁹

This perception of Western painting is a skewed one since Chinese mandarin class, painter-scholars at the court of the Manchus saw no Western works of any great artistic merit. They may well have thought much more highly of Rembrandt's drawings or Watteau's paintings. In any event: 'The influence of Western art, if it did not peter out altogether, trickled like sand down to the lower levels of the professional and the craftsman painters, where it stayed until modern times.'²⁰

In the 18th century China could still take refuge in its traditions but in the 19th, although not conquered by European powers, she suffered one humiliation after another at their hands. As a consequence China was reluctantly forced, in self-defence, to take the path that Japan, with wholesale acceptance, had already taken, of adopting Western science and technology. Inevitably European vision began to assert itself since there was now a need to see the world in Western terms. In the 20th century the influence of Western art enjoyed a great revival, leading, under Chairman Mao, to the adoption of Socialist Realism as an official style. As in the U.S.S.R. this was a formalised version of 19th century Western Bourgeois Realism or *Pompier* style as the Impressionists called it. The only real difference being that the brass helmets of classical heroes were replaced with workers' caps. This was a far cry from the Confucian concept of the gentleman amateur whose brush moves in sympathy with the spirit of nature. And irony was certainly heaped upon irony when sculptors from the People's Republic of North Korea were brought half way across the world to execute the monumental figures for Harare's Heroes' Acre in true

Marxist style, as if contamination by Western capitalist art could be avoided in this round about sort of way.

All in all the exchanges between Western and Far Eastern art were fruitful and relatively even-handed until recent times. The case of the Japanese woodcut print provides a good example. The naturalism of Western art met with a lively response in Japan which found an outworking in woodblock prints. They were a popular art form depicting scenes from everyday life in contrast to high art created under Chinese influence. The prints found their way to Europe where they were avidly collected by artists of the Impressionist school who were also devoted to depicting the ordinary and contemporary world. The fusion of Eastern and Western elements in the woodblock prints struck a note that the Impressionists were looking for, particularly with regard to novel viewing angles which resulted from the Japanese fascination with perspective.²¹

During the 20th century, however, the scales have tipped very heavily in favour of European vision which has come to dominate all forms of popular visual expression all over the world. For all practical purposes the world communicates visually in Western terms, by means primarily of photography, and if drawn or painted, by means of perspective and shaded tone. This way of seeing has come to dominate because it is the way employed by science, engineering, technology, advertising and the mass media to visualise, convey information or entertain. Anyone who wants to be a part of the modern world has to see with European vision. In a scientific, rational and materialistic age it works and empowers those who are its heirs or who adopt it. European vision has become International vision and an art student in Tokyo now probably finds him or herself starting from just about the same visual standpoint as one in New York.

At this point it would be worthwhile to make a distinction between Western art and European vision. At one time, in the 17th, 18th and on into the 19th centuries, one could argue they may well have been synonymous, by which I mean that most people would have seen things as they were depicted in works of art. Since the 15th century paintings and prints had been educating people to see in terms of perspective and shading and these became the common coin of European vision and have remained so until the present. In the 19th century, however, Western art, in its more innovative aspects, broke with this tradition, much to the consternation of most viewers. This break was strongly influenced by the different ways of seeing that non-Western art forms had presented European artists with. Initially the influence was principally from the Far East but in the early 20th century African art made itself felt and later pre-Columbian and many other varied forms of visual expression. Western art through this

century has opened itself to every sort of influence from every part of the world, resulting currently in a bewildering pluralism of artistic expression in which no style or movement dominates. In the process it has lost most of its audience, which remains wedded to traditional ways of seeing, which are popularly reinforced in the Western world by the same means as they are in the rest of the world. Standard European vision was once primarily conveyed by works of art but this is no longer the case, it now has far more democratic and ubiquitous agents in its service.

The history of the impact and eventual domination of European vision in the Far East is one that has been played out, in broad outline, over most of the rest of the non-European world. While that impact on the Far East was, to begin with anyway, a benign one, the contrary was true in Mexico and South America. Writing on the effect of Spanish colonisation on pre-Columbian art George Kubler says, 'In the sixteenth century the rush to European conventions of representation and building, by colonists and Indians alike, precluded any real continuation of native traditions in art and architecture.'²² He goes on to point out that the suppression of Indian beliefs and social systems ensured the transformation of their indigenous vision and art forms:

Works of art are symbolic expressions. They evoke a reality without being that reality. Buildings, statues, paintings and tools all suggest so powerfully a specific time, place and attitude, that they are among our most tangible and permanent manifestations of culture. 'Enemy' works of art are destroyed during cultural conflicts. The triumph of one culture over another is usually marked by the virtual cessation of the art of the vanquished, and its replacement by the art of the conqueror. When the offending objects and monuments finally cease to correspond to any living behavior, they become symbolically inert. They then are 'safe' to play with in recombinations emptied of previous vital meanings, as in tourist souvenirs, antiquarian reconstructions, or archaizing revivals.²³

The complicity of the conquered in the assimilation of the new way of seeing and in learning to use it to make works of art is a factor that should not be underestimated. Kubler says

. . . it was inevitable that the flat manner of Indian painting, fenced about by straight lines and abrupt curves, with color in ungraded local tones, should disappear in favor of the far greater descriptive power of European drawing and coloring. The appearances of solid bodies could only be shown schematically in the Indian conventions and the Indians themselves eagerly learned the new European system of perspective construction by line and graduated color relations.²⁴

The natural curiosity of creative people in part accounts for this, they are generally interested in and open to other ways of seeing and

making. Dürer was appreciatively fascinated by the works of art from the Americas in pre-Columbian form that he saw.²⁵ There is no indication that they influenced his own work, but why should we not expect Aztec or Inca artists to show the same lively interest. But perhaps a more compelling reason for mastering the new vision was the matter of survival; such mastery could lead to employment, in short to empowerment of a sort in a new society dominated by the Spanish conquerors and their vision.

Having given an outline of how much of the rest of the world has been influenced by European vision this article must now attempt an assessment of that influence in southern Africa, as it initially promised to do. The idea that the indigenous peoples of southern Africa, apart from the San, produced no art at all seems to have been a commonly held one by Europeans until well into the 20th century.²⁶ The idea probably arose because figurative imagery was rare and what was produced was unlikely to have been seen by Europeans. In the average European mind images and art were inextricably bound together until very recent times. Even now, at a popular level, this is still the case. It is known that the Tsonga and Venda carved male and female initiation figures before contact with Europeans.²⁷ Surviving examples are, like all African figures, symbolic rather than naturalistic, their carvers having set out more to create a presence than to imitate appearances. Tsonga and other groups also incorporated human and animal figurative elements in headrests, snuff boxes, staffs and other everyday artifacts, but whether or not these pre-dated the advent of Europeans is a moot point. It seems that even the earliest of carved figures and walking-stick figures attributed to Zulu carvers were made for a European and not a traditional market.²⁸ Taking a broad view the indications are that if one identified art with images one would have been very unimpressed by the artistic expression of the indigenous peoples of southern Africa. Nowadays a far more liberal attitude prevails and finely crafted artifacts are admitted to the fold. Carved headrests, bowls and utensils are not only valued for ethnographic reasons but also as works of art in their own right and increasingly are finding places in art museums. The art in these objects is to be found in their abstract shapes and decoration.

In the light of this it was with great interest that I listened to a black speaker from the floor at a recent symposium on art competitions appealing for a different category for black artists. The principal argument he advanced was that blacks were not interested in and did not understand 'abstract' art, and traditionally expressed themselves in naturalistic images. Obviously his was not an informed opinion but it does give an indication of how deeply the traditional European view of what constitutes art has entered into prevailing black attitudes. In

contrast I remember a conversation I had some years ago with an illiterate and unsophisticated, elderly, Ndebele woman in a fairly remote area of the Eastern Transvaal. She was a washerwoman but also an artist of some note in the district for her house wall decorations. I asked her if she liked a large, landscape painting hanging on the wall. It was a depiction of a river shining bright in an evening afterglow, flowing through a simply and massively rendered landscape of dark hills. To my eyes the imagery was quite unambiguous. She said she liked it very much and that it represented a crocodile. I remonstrated with her and suggested that she stand further back. She complied and said, 'You're right, I can see it clearly now, it's a snake.' Here we had one way of seeing meeting another: A vision that operated in terms of meaningful pattern and symbol interpreting poetic illusionism. Obviously her eyes were insisting that the shapes that were intended to be read as an illusion of forms receding into space, lay purely on the picture surface like patterns on an Ndebele house wall. Between her perception and the speaker's at the symposium lay a great gulf and hers was the traditional one.

The impact of European vision on southern Africa can be seen in the study of carved wooden figures. In response to European taste, expressed in the form of a demand for souvenirs, the Tsonga initiation figure-type became more concerned with appearance and identifying detail. They also became sanitised in their lack of genital display as their original purpose fell away and the need not to cause offence asserted itself.²⁹ Figures produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Natal/Zululand go even further in their anecdotal detailing of tribal stereotypes and were obviously produced for a small but growing tourist trade.³⁰ The drift away from the formal, abstract and symbolic towards the naturalistic has continued until the present when it is indeed the favoured form of expression amongst the greater proportion of black artists. A fascination with perspective is apparent in the work of many black artists. It is often obsessive in the drawings of black teenagers. Western artists or artists trained in a Western tradition have very little use or respect for the science of perspective these days. It receives scant if any attention in teaching programmes. Its benefits for certain practical purposes are taken for granted and its historical role is acknowledged, but few artists working now from a Western or International viewpoint have need of it to achieve their ends. For many black artists, accomplished and still burgeoning, it is what it was in 15th century Italy, a form of visual empowerment, a means to understand and depict volumes in space. This, after all, is no small thing in a world that places such great stress, in all practical ways, on a rational understanding of space.

What has happened in South Africa is a microcosm of what has

happened over nearly all the world: The collapse and transformation of indigenous ways of seeing and the forms of artistic expression they gave rise to in the face of European vision. It is sad to reflect on how much has perished in the process. It can of course be argued that all this is natural, that Western art and European vision are themselves in a perpetual state of development – that one may as well lament the passing of the medieval way of seeing – that the perception of ‘traditional’ ways of seeing and forms of art as being in some limbo quite unaffected by any influences and consequent change is a false one. What is lamentable, however, is that the changes have been so drastic and that one way of seeing is now popularly dominant and plurality has practically disappeared world-wide. That this way of seeing is primarily a materialistic one is also a cause for concern. That it is so is probably inevitable in a world dominated by scientific and technological standards.

It is true that contemporary Western art is pluralistic and could claim to be omnivisioned but its past stress on naturalism has resulted in a legacy that has proved a materialistic one. Western art’s great contribution has probably been the harmony it has struck between the material and the metaphysical, but the compromise has been more in favour of the material than it has been in any other art tradition. Over hundreds of years it has contained within it the tendency to say, ‘This is what it looks like, this is the truth.’ Constable spoke of himself as a ‘natural scientist’ whose pictures were ‘his experiments’.³¹ While it would not be accurate to speak of contemporary Western art as dominating the world, since it is so hybrid a thing, indebted to so many outside influences, I think it is true to say that European vision is paramount and that it is certainly true to say that the Western concept of art rules unchallenged. It is a concept that sees art as, ‘. . . a thing, an object, no longer an act, a ritual.’³² The very idea of the work of art, a useless object for any practical purposes, as something worthy of contemplation and veneration, hanging, apart from ordinary life, in an art museum is almost peculiarly a Western one. I say almost because the Chinese and Japanese collected art in this way, but even they would not have taken the artifacts and masks of primitive societies out of their contexts, called them masterpieces of sculpture, and placed them in their collections. It is the Western concept of ‘aesthetic form’ that makes this possible and it is now a generally accepted one, resulting in countries all round the world rifling through their pasts to find works of ‘aesthetic form’ to put in national collections. It is a concept too that fuels the international art market.

In the light of all this to say that the works of black artists like Gerard Sekoto and of the township school generally, ‘show only a superficial adoption of the Western art tradition’³³ is nonsense. In

support of this contention the author argues that underlying such works is an 'intuitive' and 'expressionistic' approach that links them to African tradition. I find this argument both spurious and patronising. It suggests that traditionally African artists worked without thought or convention and in complete freedom to express their innermost feelings. Nothing could be further from the truth. Traditional African art is highly formal, one could say intellectual, in concept, and governed largely by stereotypes that have met with community approval. Its purpose was to produce objects that had very specific practical roles to fulfill. I think there is a danger here that some black artists may be trapped in a European concept of 'expressionism', because they have been convinced that this sort of art derives from their traditions. If Eurocentrism is a problem for South African artists, and this is an arguable point, it is as great a problem for black artists as it is for white. The common currency of modern vision has far more impact on young whites than that presented by any art tradition and the same would now be true for almost all young blacks.

The Empire writes back, it also paints back, but the concept of art that governs that painting, the vision that imbues it and the forms that it takes are all very largely European. In conclusion a curious and sad little tale about Henry Moore who was a great admirer of Inuit carvings. The Canadian artist who encouraged the Inuit to produce these carvings in a way that would give them appeal on Western markets was himself a sculptor and a great admirer, in fact a near-imitator, of Henry Moore.³⁴

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Yeats, Jung and the Integration of Archetypes

Nicholas Meihuizen

In focusing on the type of psychological integration, or 'individuation', proposed by Jung,¹ and relating this integration to Yeats, I broach the problem of the role of European literature in South Africa in a fairly idiosyncratic manner. Although in the face of current political and economic pressures in this country it might seem evasive to link the question of the role of literature to an apparently rarefied theory of archetypes, an archetypal emphasis (whatever our final verdict regarding the actual efficacy of Jung's analytic psychology) helps reaffirm the importance of an internalized, mythopoeic dimension in the creation and study of literature. This dimension has been somewhat obscured since the advent in recent decades of pervasive historicist and linguistically oriented approaches. I centre on Yeats because his ideas come so close to Jung's, and thus provide us with very clear examples. I hope from this basis to convey some sense of the wide-ranging richness of the material inherent in such an approach, before concluding the article by briefly relating this material to a specifically South African context.

Individuation involves the integration of the conscious and unconscious minds through the agency of various archetypes, or figures and patterns which constitute the collective unconscious. The archetypes most pertinent to Yeats are the 'shadow', or embodiment of the instinctual, intuitive region of the psyche, often grotesque or terrifying in nature, the 'anima', a female figure embodying the feminine component of the psyche, and the 'mandala', or sacred circle, an image representing psychological wholeness.² It appears to me that an archetypal drama involving shadow, anima and mandala is clearly in evidence in Yeats; the drama reflects Yeats's absorption in his own quest for integration, or, in his terms, Unity of Being. This article examines in particular the archetype of wholeness, the mandala, in Yeats's early thought, and the poet's subsequent preliminary attempt at formulating a theory of integration in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. The theory stems, it seems to me, from the mandala pattern, but certainly includes shadow and anima figures as well.

II

Relating individuation to traditional Christian symbols, Jung notes:

The God-image in man was not destroyed by the Fall but was only damaged and corrupted . . . and can be restored through God's grace. The scope of the integration is suggested by the . . . descent of Christ's soul to hell, its work of redemption embracing even the dead. The psychological equivalent of this is the integration of the collective unconscious which forms an essential part of the individuation process . . . The God-image in man that was damaged by the first sin can be 'reformed' . . . The totality images which the unconscious produces in the course of an individuation process are similar 'reformations' of an *a priori* archetype (the mandala).³

Thus the integration of 'heaven' (Christ) and 'hell' (His descent, a confrontation with the shadow), is measured in terms of the mandala archetype, which symbolizes a restoration of the God-image in man. The God-image is the 'higher spiritual man': 'like Adam before the Fall, Christ is an embodiment of the God-image, whose totality is specially emphasized by St. Augustine'.⁴ According to Jung elsewhere, mandalas 'serve to produce an inner order . . . They express the idea of a safe refuge, of inner reconciliation and wholeness'.⁵

Jung also refers to certain 'formal elements of mandala symbolism':

1. *Circular, spherical, or egg-shaped formation.*
2. The circle is elaborated into a *flower* (rose, lotus) or a *wheel*.
3. A centre expressed by a *sun, star, or cross*, usually with four, eight, or twelve rays.
4. The circles, spheres, and cruciform figures are often represented in *rotation*. . .
5. The circle is represented by a *snake* coiled about a centre, either ring-shaped (uroboros) or spiral (Orphic egg).
6. *Squaring of the circle*, taking the form of a circle in a square or vice versa.
7. *Castle, city, and courtyard (temenos)* motifs, quadratic or circular.⁶

The combination of God-image and circle is peculiarly relevant to Yeats when he attempts to express the wholeness of existence. In this connection a passage from 'A General Introduction for My Work' (written in 1937) is exemplary. Here he links his notion of Unity of Being with *A Vision*, which contains, of course, perhaps the best known literary mandalas of all time, the illustrations of Yeats's

'system'. The circles, spheres, and spirals, reflecting the personalities and historical cycles of *A Vision*, exemplify a coherent structure, itself an analogue for the totality of human life:

. . . my Christ . . . is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake's 'Imagination', what the Upanishads have named 'Self': nor is this unity distant and therefore intellectually understandable, but immanent, differing from man to man and age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness, 'eye of newt, and toe of frog'.

Subconscious preoccupation with this theme brought me *A Vision*, its harsh geometry an incomplete interpretation.⁷

Thus there is an explicit link between Unity of Being (perceived as a God-image, Christ) and the formulation of Yeats's great system. We also note the element of 'pain and ugliness' present in it, a reference to a shadow aspect of life, which must be integrated into any image of wholeness. Further, Yeats indicates that the state of Unity of Being has a 'geometrical' analogue, based upon the circle, or mandala. But I would argue that although the mandalas of his system appear at a point of fulfilment in the poet's life – due to his marriage, the extraordinary revelation of the system, and a new strength in his poetry – his interest in the shape and utilization of it prefigure the sense of integration he must have experienced at this point. Indeed, Yeats's 'subconscious preoccupation' with the theme of Unity of Being can be detected in the circle imagery of his early thought.

III

Long before the appearance of his system, Yeats was deeply fascinated by the mandala image of the rose, which bears an explicit relation to Jungian symbolism, as indicated above. This early Yeatsian mandala is clearly seen on the front and back covers of Yeats's *Poems*, of 1904, possibly drawn by Althea Gyles.⁸ The circle is combined in a classic mandala manner with a quaternity symbol, the cross. (For Jung, the quaternity is a symbol of wholeness, of balanced opposites.)⁹ Thus on the front cover, rose is superimposed on cross. The rose itself is portrayed in a tetradic manner, the petals, indeed, forming a cross within the rose. On the back cover a tetradic rose appears within two larger circles. The rose emits sixteen rays, multiples of four. Both the rays and their number also have a Jungian significance.¹⁰ Regarding the rose in general terms, Jung observes, ' . . . a rose [is] the Western equivalent of the lotus. In India the lotus-flower (*padma*) is interpreted by the Tantrists as the womb. We

know this symbol from the numerous pictures of the Buddha (and other Indian deities) in the lotus-flower. It corresponds to the 'Golden Flower' of Chinese alchemy, the rose of the Rosicrucians, and the mystic rose in Dante's *Paradiso*. Rose and lotus are usually arranged in groups of four petals, indicating the squaring of the circle or the united opposites'.¹¹ Jung's observations closely parallel Yeats's, as we will see.

If we are seriously to consider as evidence the symbols on the covers of Yeats's volumes, it is important to remember that, judging from his relationship with Sturge Moore, Yeats worked in close co-operation with his cover artists,¹² and seems to have contributed in some measure to the cover designs for his volumes. But this consideration aside, relevant poems within the volumes, of course, determined the cover designs. They too, in the present instance, introduce (apart from the rose image itself) Jungian elements. Thus circle is combined with quaternity symbol in 'To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time'.¹³ And reconciliation of opposites is indicated in 'The Rose of Peace'.¹⁴

Yeats was very aware of the symbolic importance of the rose image. His studies with the Golden Dawn, for example, included detailed explanations of the significance of all the elements of the rose.¹⁵ And Yeats's own explanatory notes to his early poems tell of his wide acquaintance with this symbol:

The Rose has been for many centuries a symbol of spiritual love and supreme beauty. The lotus was in some Eastern countries imagined blossoming upon the Tree of Life, as the Flower of Life . . . Because the Rose . . . is the western Flower of Life, I have imagined it growing upon the Tree of Life. I once stood beside a man in Ireland when he saw it growing there in a vision . . . He saw the Garden of Eden walled about, and on top of a high mountain, as in certain mediaeval diagrams . . . He came to a tall, dark tree, with little bitter fruits, and was shown a kind of stair or ladder going up through the tree, and told to go up; and near the top of the tree, a beautiful woman, like the Goddess of Life . . . gave him a rose that seemed to have been growing upon the tree.¹⁶

Numerous archetypal images appear in the above passage, including the anima. Regarding the Tree of Life, Gloria Kline, indeed, in *The Last Courtly Lover: Yeats and the Idea of Woman*, reproduces a mediaeval diagram of such a Tree, where a female figure, portraying the feminine principle, forms the basis of the tree itself.¹⁷ Colin McDowell and Timothy Materer, in 'Gyre and Vortex: W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound', similarly observe a feminine principle within the Sephirothic Tree of Life from the Kabbalistic tradition, which is 'the

central, organizing image of Yeats's order of the Golden Dawn'.¹⁸ But the most important image for me regarding present concerns is the walled paradise image, connected to 'Rose' and 'Tree of Life'. Kline also links this symbol with the feminine principle, anticipating an integration of imagery we will presently explore.¹⁹

Clayton MacKenzie, in 'Paradise and Paradise Lost in *Richard III*', discusses the significance of the circular enclosure in relation to *Richard II* and traditional images of paradise:

John of Gaunt . . . in the course of his English panegyric, speaks of England as

This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;

(II.i.46–49)

The sea as protective 'wall' is a useful complement to the mythology of England as an isolated Eden . . . In his book *The Lost Garden*, John Wilders . . . relates the 'gardens' of Shakespeare's history plays to Eden, and suggests that the 'old Persian word *pairideaza*, from which the English word "paradise" is derived, signified a walled garden . . .'²⁰

Like Shakespeare's walled paradise images, and Jung's walled mandalas, the present Yeatsian image also indicates a state of wholeness of existence. Indeed, rose and paradise are different expressions of the same wholeness. In the context of Yeats's note quoted above, in fact, the rose appears to be an emblem of paradise.

As is apparent, then, the rose is not an isolated circle image in Yeats's early thought, but is one of several, sometimes made to interact with the others, as above. Another instance of this interplay occurs in the story 'Rosa Alchemica', which describes a circular room with a mosaic rose on the ceiling. (In fact, in this instance, Yeats describes, to an extent, a Golden Dawn initiation room.)²¹ In the room a dance takes place, through the mechanism of which gods and men come into the momentary unity of a type of daimonic possession. A voice calls to the narrator: 'Into the dance! there is none that can be spared out of the dance; into the dance! into the dance! that the gods may make them bodies out of the substance of our hearts'.²² The dance itself traces the pattern of a rose upon the floor.

The most telling conflation of circle images in Yeats's early prose occurs in the volume *Discoveries*, where the poet attempts to fuse the

'holy' and the 'common', using the quest motif, the circular image implicit in the conflation of an ending with a beginning, a paradise image, and a rose:

I am . . . certain that a man should find his Holy Land where he first crept upon the floor, and that familiar woods and rivers should fade into symbol with so gradual a change that he never discover, no, not even in ecstasy itself, that he is beyond space, and that time alone keeps him from Primum Mobile, the Supernal Eden, and the Yellow Rose over all.²³

Other circle images are referred to a number of times in Yeats's early prose. Thus, paradise images are found in 'The Adoration of the Magi', 'Magic', 'William Blake and His Illustrations to The Divine Comedy', and 'The Holy Places'. The snake biting its tail, or the uroboros, occurs twice in *Discoveries*,²⁴ while references to cyclicality are made at least four times in the original volume, and three times in the later *Essays and Introductions*. God as a circle is referred to twice.²⁵ As Joan Dayan reveals, in 'The Love Poems of *The Wind Among the Reeds*: A Circle Drawn Around the Absolute', a more covert use of circular motion is apparent in certain of Yeats's creative processes in the late 19th century: '*The Wind Among the Reeds* [first published in 1899] remains, even to the contemporary reader, a web woven of language, spoken by a voice pure and ideal, who longed to create the supreme Work, a sphere of relations unconnected with outward reality. Preoccupied with mystic vision . . . Yeats strives to bring forth the divine essence . . . to express something that lies beyond the range of expression . . . The pure work proposes a self-referent system in which energy circulates endlessly without outlet'.²⁶ But this process is, as it were, simply the active equivalent of the circle imagery which, recurring over the ages in the 'self-referent system' of the Anima Mundi, so fascinated the poet.

IV

Apart from being manifest in early Yeatsian mandala imagery, the conception of Unity of Being begins to appear in the prose of Yeats's middle years. Thus *Autobiographies* refers (at different points) to Unity of Being in relation to Dante, Goethe and the Irish nation.²⁷ The Dante reference best defines the term as Yeats understood it:

I thought that in man and race alike there is something called 'Unity of Being', using that term as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the

Convito to a perfectly proportioned human body. My father, from whom I had learned the term, preferred a comparison to a musical instrument so strung that if we touch a string all the strings murmur faintly.

Yeats's father's image of Unity of Being probably inspired a passage in one of the poet's earliest published essays, where he considered the influence of 'great poetry' on man:

Great poetry does not teach us anything – it changes us. Man is like a musical instrument of many strings, of which only a few are sounded by the narrow interests of his daily life; and the others, for want of use, are continually becoming tuneless and forgotten. Heroic poetry is a phantom finger swept over all the strings, arousing from man's whole nature a song of answering harmony.²⁸

That is, poetry is able to 'tune' all the 'strings' of our lives, 'harmonizing' our 'whole natures'. The state of Unity of Being would exist where, so great is the level of attunement, all strings are responsive to one. Also, Yeats is actually describing how poetry enlivens all aspects of a person's being, thus suggesting the poetically achieved basis of Unity of Being in man, a notion related to the significance of shadow and anima (and the need to integrate both) in Yeats's art.

V

If Unity of Being were originally equated with harmony (implicit in the circle), this harmony must not be understood as excluding the shadow aspect. Integration of the shadow, along with integration of disparate selves, is a key concern explored in some detail in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. The remainder of this article will be devoted to an examination of *Per Amica* as a document of Yeatsian integration.

The cover design of the book is, significantly, 'the Rose, now a symbol of the mask, and thus a mark of deliberate continuity between the earlier and later Yeats'.²⁹ We might also observe that the rose-masked anti-self now becomes a consciously projected figure in a conception of overall unity. Thus, *Per Amica*, illuminated, as it were, by the moon-mandala inscribed in its title, is prefaced by Yeats's central poem about the anti-self, 'Ego Dominus Tuus', which is also set in moonlight; based on a dialogue between Hic and Ille, the poem reflects a conflict within the poet's own nature. Ille explains his activity to an incredulous Hic, thereby introducing the idea of the anti-self:

By the help of an image
I call to my own opposite, summon all
That I have handled least, least looked upon.³⁰

Hic, self-expressive and believing in sincerity in art, is poorly represented in the poem, and Ille dominates the ‘conversation’. Although Ille’s domination appears blatantly didactic in intent, it is important to bear in mind an observation made by Herbert Levine, in ‘Yeats at the Crossroads: The Debate of Self and Anti-Self in “Ego Dominus Tuus”’. Levine notes:

Both Hic and Ille are sides of Yeats, each wanting to denigrate the other in order to gain the upper hand in Yeats’s poetic future. The standard reading of the poem has always been to identify Yeats with Ille, but unfortunately this is a reading from hindsight. Yeats’s career bears out Ille as the rightful spokesman for his poetic future because Yeats deliberately reshaped himself as that masked figure . . . Yeats became a full-fledged version of Ille only in taking up Ille’s argument for the anti-self as a personal program for his own poetry.³¹

The poem reflects a ‘battle of ideas’ crucial to the poet’s future development. Yeats himself had long vacillated between either adopting the mask of the anti-self in his poetry or an ideal of sincerity. In some of his earliest verse, although he does not then link the assumption of another self with poetic creation, he posits the need for such a self. Consider these lines written in 1886:

The child who chases lizards in the grass,
The sage who deep in central nature delves,
The preacher watching for the ill hour to pass –
All these are souls who fly from their dread selves.³²

Levine traces the oscillation in Yeats’s thought between self-expressive sincerity and the assumption of a mask in some detail, conveying the difficulty of Yeats’s position in making his choice between one or the other. Levine describes Yeats at one point as being ‘in characteristic oscillation, fearing “absorption in outer things”, yet resolutely opposing his inner needs to seek out an extroverted energy. When his theory is closest to Ille, he would make himself into Hic’.³³ The poem ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’, then, is actually the record of the last stage in a long history of mental clarifying and positioning on Yeats’s part. If Ille dominates, his reaching this point has taken, in fact, thirty years, not simply the span of one didactically oriented poem. And although the poem is a measure of the poet’s resolution, he is yet aware of the need to temper Ille’s confidence, by suggesting the

distinction between one's own belief in certain knowledge and the sharing of that knowledge with others. Indeed, perhaps the concluding sense of fragility conveyed by 'Ego Dominus Tuus' attempts to suggest the extreme delicacy necessary in imparting such knowledge:

I call to the mysterious one who yet
Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
And look most like me, being indeed my double,
And prove of all imaginable things
The most unlike, being my anti-self,
And, standing by these characters, disclose
All that I seek; and whisper it as though
He were afraid the birds, who cry aloud
Their momentary cries before it is dawn,
Would carry it away to blasphemous men.³⁴

But if 'Ego Dominus Tuus', despite Levine's interventions, does not quite succeed in convincing us that as art it contains its own justification, or that it bypasses the didacticism of the intellect, it at least provides a basis for future theorizing, important to the poet's own mythological sense.

In 'Anima Hominis', where Yeats first begins to theorize in earnest, the doctrine of opposites seems to take root in a quest connected explicitly to the paradise mandala. That is, the goal of the quest which involves the 'heart's discovery of itself' is sometimes imaged as 'some fine landscape', which makes the poet think of Boehme, 'and of that country where we "eternally solace ourselves in the excellent beautiful flourishing of all manner of flowers and forms, both trees and plants, and all kinds of fruit"'.³⁵ But the mechanics of the quest, in this essay, are more important than the goal.

The quest is seen to incorporate two distinct selves, the confused self of every-day, and a more settled self not subject to the normal complexities which attend life. The first two paragraphs of 'Anima Hominis', for example, deal with these selves. The one self is full of shadow elements such as 'hostility' and 'fear', or its 'natural thoughts have been drowned by an undisciplined sympathy'; the other is characterized by thoughts full of 'ease and joy', and the poet is 'all virtue and confidence'. It is the second self (linked to an anima-like 'marmorean Muse') that brings completion to the partial man (who is subject to the fragmenting influences of 'hostility' and 'fear'), by embodying all the partial man does not represent or has not come to terms with. Often a writer's work reveals the presence of an opposite self:

When I think of any great poetical writer of the past . . . I comprehend, if I know the lineaments of his life, that the work is the man's flight from his entire horoscope . . .³⁶

Coming to terms with disquieting aspects of the self and the environment (or confronting the shadow) is an important element of Yeats's project in 'Anima Hominis':

. . . the Daimon comes not as like to like but seeking its own opposite, for man and Daimon feed the hunger in one another's hearts. Because the ghost is simple, the man heterogeneous and confused, they are but knit together when the man has found a mask whose lineaments permit the expression of all the man most lacks, and it may be dreads, and of that only.

Also, the essay begins to formulate Yeats's notion of the Vision of Evil, indicating the necessity to integrate dark and light in one's art: 'All happy art seems to me [a] hollow image, but when its lineaments express also the poverty or the exasperation that set its maker to the work, we call it tragic art'. Dante, purveyor of Yeats's principal God-image of Unity of Being, is also, in Yeats's eyes, a poet plagued by shadow-like anger and lust who seeks redemption through the integrative anima type: '. . . I am always persuaded that [Dante] celebrated the most pure lady poet ever sung and the Divine Justice, not merely because death took that lady and Florence banished her singer, but because he had to struggle in his own heart with his unjust anger and his lust . . .'³⁷ And in a sense, *The Divine Comedy* as a whole mirrors the integration of archetypes, the shadow aspect finding its perfect environment in Dante's Hell, while his vision of Heaven is nothing less than a paradise mandala in the form of a rose, whither he is led by the anima of redemption, Beatrice.

In another passage redolent of his later understanding of the Vision of Evil, Yeats also emphasises acceptance of the dark aspects of existence; the context underlines the strengthened position fostered by such acceptance:

He only can create the greatest imaginable beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs, for only when we have seen and foreseen what we dread shall we be rewarded by that dazzling, unforeseen, wing-footed wanderer. We could not find him if he were not in some sense of our being, and yet of our being but as water with fire, a noise with silence. He is of all things not impossible the most difficult, for that only which comes easily can never be a portion of our being; 'soon got, soon gone', as the proverb says.³⁸

In a sense, the above passage argues the necessity of the shadow in terms of artistic creation ('He only can create the greatest imaginable

beauty who has endured all imaginable pangs') and self-integration ('that which comes easily' – unlike our shadowy opposite – 'can never be a portion of our being').

But however much 'Anima Hominis' posits integration of the personality as the goal of its examination of the daimon, it ends declaring the necessity of a continued awareness of the shadow element, lest life become circumscribed by a type of complacency:

Surely, [the poet] may think, now that I have found vision and mask I need not suffer any longer. He will buy perhaps some small old house, where, like Ariosto, he can dig his garden, and think that in the return of birds and leaves, or moon and sun, and in the evening flight of the rooks he may discover rhythm and pattern like those in sleep and so never awake out of vision. Then he will remember Wordsworth withering into eighty years, honoured and empty-witted, and climb to some waste room and find, forgotten there by youth, some bitter crust.³⁹

In 'Anima Mundi' Wordsworth is emblematic of one who grasps the notion of the Great Memory, Jung's collective unconscious: 'Our daily thought was certainly but the line of foam at the shallow edge of a vast luminous sea; Henry More's *Anima Mundi*, Wordsworth's "immortal sea which brought us hither", and near whose edge the children sport, and in that sea there were some who swam or sailed, explorers who perhaps knew all its shores'.⁴⁰ Yeats's image of Wordsworth as 'honoured and empty-witted' expresses, to an extent, his disappointment that one with such a clear perception of the 'immortal sea', and concomitant notions of integration and Unity should, in the end, apparently relinquish his vision. And as Herbert Levine notes in *Yeats's Daimonic Renewal*, 'Recognizing that the subjective tradition of Romanticism initiated by Wordsworth had not provided any way of ensuring the permanence of the individual's fleeting experience, Yeats prefers the traditional sanction of a mask or pose that he can copy. If the poet ever lost touch with the intensity of his vision, as Wordsworth did in his later years, there would always be the energy of the assumed role as an antagonist to spur the tired self into creativity'.⁴¹ In criticizing Wordsworth, Yeats thus, by way of insurance for the future, as it were, clarifies his own creative standpoint.

The other self might also be revealed through an anima figure, the 'sweetheart' linked to the daimon:

. . . my imagination runs from Daimon to sweetheart, and I divine an analogy that evades the intellect . . . I even wonder if there may not be some secret communion, some whispering in the dark between Daimon and sweetheart.⁴²

In *A Vision* the daimon is to assume a specifically feminine nature, becoming a central anima figure, crucial to all the areas of existential process imaged in this work. At this stage Yeats is only vaguely aware of a feminine influence in relation to the daimon, a fact which nevertheless underlines the growing importance of the feminine principle in his thought.⁴³

At issue in the matter of the self and anti-self is self-knowledge, but not of the type which leads to a simple acceptance of the self. Yeats would *improve* the self. Thus it is that the limited self, or, as Jung would say, the ego,⁴⁴ must be extended to include what is beyond its grasp, the unconscious, which first manifests itself as shadow, or anti-self. Thus, paradoxically, the unity of the self is actually determined by an inner distinction essential in the Yeatsian quest for Unity of Being. Notably, the distinction is viewed in terms of conflict and evil, relating the daimon at this point, again, to the shadow: '... evil is the strain one upon another of opposites'.⁴⁵ This polarity in the area of human personality bears some resemblance to the general Coleridgean polarity at the heart of all finite Being. For Coleridge two opposing forces provide the *tertium aliquid* necessary for finite generation and Being. Coleridge would contemplate 'intuitively'

this one power with its two inherent indestructible yet counteracting forces, and the results or generations to which their inter-penetration gives existence in the living principle and in the process of our own self-consciousness.

The two forces, which might be described as subjective and objective, certainly relate to the subjective 'self' and the objectively perceived other, the 'anti-self', especially considering the central interpenetration of subjective and objective in Coleridge.⁴⁶ For Yeats this interpenetration of nevertheless discrete forces is suggested by the fact that the anti-self is the 'double' of the self, even though 'most unlike'. Also, the anti-self is 'of our being': 'We could not find him if he were not in some sense of our being, and yet of our being but as water with fire, a noise with silence'.⁴⁷ Thus, 'our being' is defined in terms of opposition, or polarity. This essential opposition is extended by Yeats into the dualistic system mobilized in *A Vision*, but we must bear in mind that it also foresees the integration of the self, reflected as Boehme's paradise mandala in the third paragraph of 'Anima Hominis', as we have observed. We should also not forget that Yeats presents a memorable image of freedom in 'Anima Hominis', by means of an anima figure who shoots an arrow into the sky, and thus symbolises the end of binding cyclicity, or a state of freedom to be linked by Yeats, in *A Vision*, to the thirteenth cone.⁴⁸

Yeats perhaps attempts a description of such a supreme state of achieved integration in 'Anima Mundi', the essay which follows 'Anima Hominis' in *Per Amica*:

When all sequence comes to an end, time comes to an end, and the soul puts on the rhythmic or spiritual body or luminous body and contemplates all the events of its memory and every possible impulse in an eternal possession of itself in one single moment.⁴⁹

We notice that the moment of redemption is accompanied by the transformation of the 'soul', the anima in its integrative function, which now exists in perfect unity with itself. At the basis of this particular image is a complex process of purification which takes place after death; the details are to be explored by Yeats in *A Vision*.⁵⁰ It is this process which leads to the elevation of the daimon into a prime agent in Yeats's vision of life.

At the conclusion of 'Anima Mundi', we find a description of Yeats's own, albeit momentary, experience of the supreme state of integration:

At certain moments, always unforeseen, I become happy, most commonly when at hazard I have opened some book of verse . . . Perhaps I am sitting in some crowded restaurant, the open book beside me, or closed, my excitement having over-brimmed the page. I look at the strangers near as if I had known them all my life, and it seems strange that I cannot speak to them: everything fills me with affection . . . It seems as if the vehicle had suddenly grown pure and far extended and so luminous that the images from *Anima Mundi*, embodied there and drunk with that sweetness, would, like a country drunkard who has thrown a wisp into his own thatch, burn up time.⁵¹

The matters introduced in the above passage are, in general terms, beyond the scope of the present article, but require some exposition. Briefly, in *A Vision* Yeats indicates that two types of unity exist: temporal, of which Unity of Being is a type, and transcendental. In describing the eternal moment, above, Yeats introduces the second type of unity, thus foreshadowing concerns he is to explore in his final years. In old-age Yeats renewed an interest in the Indian Vedanta, helping Sri Purohit Swami to translate both the Upanishads and Patanjali's yoga sutras. In these works the concept of an underlying transcendent unity is fundamental, resulting in 'what the Upanishads have named "Self"',⁵² and seems to have satisfied Yeats entirely, for, as Kathleen Raine points out in *Yeats the Initiate*, once he 'made his full discovery of the tradition of Indian thought, he no longer concerned himself with spiritualism, mediumship, magic, or any of his former interests in such matters'.⁵³ And he engaged in 'such

matters' in the first place because of his deep desire for the type of integration of disparate spheres of the psyche they appeared to offer.

Thus, by the time he has written *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, which is heralded by the mandalas – moon and rose-mask – of its title and cover, Yeats has a clearer conception of several features at the core of the integrative process: the necessity of the warring opposites and the need to face all we most dread (both represented by shadow archetypes); the centrality of the feminine principle (represented by the anima archetype); and momentary freedom from the restraints of our nature (which anticipates the integration of Unity of Being, and the transcendent unity of the Self, represented by the mandala). Even prior to *A Vision*, then, Yeats's engagement with various archetypes underlines important aspects and images of the drama of integration which will absorb him for the remainder of his life.

VI

Although I have not attempted to demonstrate the fact in any detail, I hope it is obvious that on the basis of material contained in this article, one could engage in a fruitful manner with a number of specifically South African texts, including at least one which is, implicitly, highly critical of the teaching of Yeats in the present-day South African situation – Sally-Ann Murray's powerful poem 'Easter 1989'.⁵⁴ Murray's central contention is that Yeats, in his world, has 'no real answers' for us in ours. But if certain poetry, however apparently remote from our situation, is perceived to draw on key archetypes related to psychological healing, the ensuing 'awakening and enlarging of the mind'⁵⁵ might be of far greater significance than we would usually give credence to. And, to suggest (by way of conclusion) a possible thematic focus, might not that pervasive sense of alienation which characterizes the literature of this land be related to an aspect of Jungian archetypal play, involving the giant shadow-figure Adamastor, the Other we have not yet recognized or accepted as being part of ourselves? As J.M. Coetzee points out, southern Africa, especially the Cape, has long been connected with the myth of a debased Paradise.⁵⁶ The type of disquietude at the heart of such a conception is evident in a central poem in Roy Campbell's volume *Adamastor*, 'Rounding the Cape'.⁵⁷ Commenting on the way Campbell employs the giant Adamastor for the original function for which Camoens primarily employed him, that of cursing the Portuguese voyagers and all the Europeans who followed them in the colonization of Africa,

Malvern van Wyk Smith observes, 'If curses mean what they say, all South Africans of European descent still live under Adamastor's'.⁵⁸ Still not free of the curse, we experience a profound lack of ease in our potential Paradise, which remains a debased Eden, the unintegrated mandala (symbolic of our fragmented national self-hood) at the basis of European perceptions of this land.

NOTES

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The Properties of Paradise

Pessoa, Campbell, Dhlomo, Durban*

A. E. Voss

What does 'Durban' mean? How does 'Durban' resonate? If 'Durban' is an epithet, what noun would follow it? Consider: Durban Bay, the Durban July, Durban poison, the Durban riots, the Durban strikes, the Durban system . . . Jean Branford's *Dictionary of South African English* gives, under 'Thekwini', a quotation from Patricia McMagh's *A Dinner Of Herbs* (1968): 'He not been to Tegwen . . . never see the sea . . . the big ships and the horses that . . . run races.' And in *The White Tribes of Africa* (1965), Richard West relates a story heard from an Afrikaner taxi-driver in Johannesburg:

. . . after the races . . . I had one man as a fare – I'd known him a long time from the race-track – who'd won a packet on the July Handicap. So I took him along to one of the clubs, where he found a woman. Then he said he wanted a Durban woman. So I took him to Durban, and he found a woman. Then he said he wanted to buy her a fur coat, so we went to Cape Town . . . (West:104)

Travelling in South Africa in 1957, James (now Jan) Morris heard Durban spoken of as 'the most inflammable, the most potentially vicious of all the South African cities'. His own impression was that 'Suspicion and resentment dampen the effervescence of the place'. (Morris:109)

South Africa is in a phase of devolution, which may also be a period of reconstruction. But devolution is both a historical phenomenon with local and global causes, and a structural principle of social activity. The sense of devolution has registered in academic literary studies recently in renewed interest in canonicity, which is itself related to millennial speculation, or at least to periodicity. The Nobel prizes of both Soyinka and Gordimer may be instances of the devolution of cultural energy from metropolis to margin, but the strongest and most articulate challenge to the canon could yet come from feminism, not least in post-colonial cultures. Indeed the canon, one could argue, is a constantly devolving form, and the millenium is a moment of devolution: it should be a fair guess that canonicity

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will survive this millenium, South Africa's inter-regnum. As J.M. Coetzee's magistrate says: 'Everything is coming to an end: we must live as we can'. (Coetzee:151) A new acknowledgement of regionalism in South Africa is part of this devolutionary moment.

This paper on some poems about Durban is part of a longer-term project on the imaginative/imaginary history of 'the place where Durban/Ethekwini is' (to adapt a phrase used by Northrop Frye about Canada). It is also part of a search for appropriate common ground between teacher and student, and is in this respect also devolutionary. I am aware of the dangers of hypostatisation, of thinking of Durban as some kind of entity distinct from the people who live and work there, and take social and economic decisions about the place and their community. I try to guard against these dangers by thinking historically, by relating what various people have written or said about Durban to the context which gives what they write or say its significance. The Durban I speak of is a virtual or discursive construct, not only changing all the time, but taking manifold forms at any one time.

'Durban' has both shaped and been shaped by the myths and stereotypes of Africa which Malvern van Wyk Smith has recently been analysing and synthesising. In a way that might have been anticipated from the general shape of South Africa's early colonisation, Durban hovers on the conceptual map between way-station and idyllic destination. Thus in some early European accounts, 'the place where Durban is' was a stage on the 'symbolic transit from a savage western to an idyllic eastern Ethiopia' (van Wyk Smith:20) – in the *Britannica* Durban was until very recently described as a gateway to the east. This image of Durban as a watering-place between west and east is captured in some early sailors' accounts, as in reports by the crews of the *Stavenisse* and the captain of the *Noord* in the 1680s:

Calabashes, pumpkins, water melons, broad beans, ground nuts . . . grew readily [as well as] European figs and a rather acid grape . . . In the bay itself were 'Kings fish and Sun fish, besides all kinds of fish known in India' and at the Cape. (McKeurtan:65)

But when Durban is a terminus rather than a stage, it constitutes its own paradise:

That part of the country which respects the Sea is plain Champion and Woody: but within land . . . is . . . interlaced with pleasant Valleys and large Plains . . . they have no money in this country . . . They are very just and extraordinarily civil to strangers. (Botha, ed.:129)

Captain Rogers' pastoral vision of 1703 could not be sustained: in Drury's *Narrative* of 1719:

Here we traded for slaves with large brass rings, or rather collars, and other things; we bought in a fortnight 74 Boys and Girls: these are better slaves for working than those of Madagascar, being stronger and blacker . . . (McKeurtan:74)

By the early nineteenth century, in the justificatory colonial discourse, Durban was again 'a country which may in truth be considered an earthly paradise', but, as Sir James Alexander went on to argue in 1840, it was empty: 'Strange to say, this African Elysium, the country around Port Natal . . . is comparatively uninhabited' (in Kirby:218). Slavery had no doubt contributed to its depopulation.

In the realms of romance, Durban remained a gateway: to King Solomon's Mines for Allan Quatermain in 1885, to the kingdom of Prester John for Richard Hannay in 1910. But the legendary treasures of Africa were giving way to mining capital. In 1899, in *The Story of an African Seaport*, Durban had become 'an entrepot to the vast trade resources of the sub-continent of Africa'. (J.F. Ingram: Preface)

The overall discursive change of Ethekewini/Port Natal/Durban has involved a change in the relationship between metaphor and metonymy and reflects a complex historical process; that change is the substance of the longer-term project of which this paper is part. Here I am concerned with writers identified as literary and with twentieth-century Durban, the city where was devised the Durban system, 'entailing the essential features of the future South African urban native policy' (Swanson:161): a mercantile, industrial and bureaucratic city, served by a labour force whose housing and control were financed to a large extent by the manufacture and sale of liquor.

The Durban to which Roy Campbell returned in 1926, was already distinguished by its 'system', whereby Africans could appear in the 'port of palms' only as labourers, and in the end this poet's most expressive social gesture was self-exile from Durban, exactly because he could not find work there. In his autobiographical writing, Campbell held on to the Edenic myth of his birthplace, but by that time and for him Eden had been privatised to a suburban garden, and his memory of the city proper was infernal rather than Edenic. In Part 3 of *The Flaming Terrapin*, the work on whose crest of fame Campbell had returned to Durban, while Noah's' crew ('Fit men . . . To mend the swamping havoc of the flood') are absent from 'the drowning earth':

The sooty Fiend . . .
 . . . whores with Nature and she brings to birth
 Monsters perverse, and fosters feeble minds,
 Nourishing them on stench such as winds
 Lift up from rotting whales. On earth again
 Foul mediocrity begins her reign . . .

(Campbell, 1924:47–8)

There may be a memory of the Bluff whaling station in these lines; in *Broken Record*, Campbell recalled whales ‘bombarded’ by porpoises until ‘heaved up, exhausted, by a great wave, just under our verandah, to stink for days . . .’ (Campbell, 1934:84). Certainly Campbell found ‘mediocrity’ in Durban – ‘a mongrel town’, a ‘carrion town’, and his return produced some oppositional poems, but in the end the ‘shopkeepers’ bought his allegiance, or compliance, in exile. The suburban Paradise myth and its anti-myth of the ‘grocer’s paradise’ were mutually functional.

Yet Campbell came later to write with pride of colonial culture, of his allegiance to ‘conquistadores and colonials’, as against ‘philanthropists’, even, in a vision of millennial devolution, to claim of South Africa:

We are a race of poets. As soon as the gold has been finished, the traders and politicians will fade out – they are going away already – and the only wealth of the country will be in livestock . . . There is nothing really to prevent our country from being, with South America, the last citadel and tower of European culture, which we certainly possess and treasure more than European intellectuals do themselves. (Campbell, 1934:50–51)

In Campbell’s poems about Durban, there is no such community. ‘In the Town Square’ gives an image of the city through some of its still recognizable public buildings, but the poet claims allegiance with the outcasts: ‘thieves and whores,/A poet, and the watchful dead’ (Campbell, 1930:54) ‘A Song for the People’ (42) is for the bourgeoisie, the city is ‘Babel’, and the poet rejects both. Is the rejection of (or sense of rejection by) Africa not as strong in these poems and in the more famous poems of the period (‘The Serf’, ‘The Zulu Girl’) as in Plomer’s ‘The Scorpion’? In the end Campbell’s image of his birthplace is avoidance and displacement rather than confrontation and transmutation.¹

H.I.E. Dhlomo (1903–1956) and Campbell (1903–1957) were almost exact contemporaries, but for Dhlomo Durban was a town without nostalgia. Born near Pietermaritzburg, Dhlomo grew up in Johannesburg and qualified as a teacher at Adams College (1922–

1924). He taught on the Reef, wrote journalism, short stories, plays and criticism and became first librarian-organiser for the Carnegie libraries in the Transvaal. In 1941, after some domestic and professional upheaval, Dhlomo came to Durban, where he worked briefly for the SABC before becoming librarian at the Ndongeni library and, in 1943, assistant editor of *Ilanga Lase Natal*.

Dhlomo's literary education at Adams was probably very like Campbell's at DHS. Certainly, Dhlomo's Durban sonnets are displacements of class- and race-related alienations into the diction and motifs of late Romanticism. Yet these poems' image of the city is more particular and localised than Campbell's, the very titles signifying Dhlomo's restriction to and within the city in ways which never affected Campbell: 'Botanic Gardens, Durban', 'Evening, Esplanade, Durban', 'Evening Falls on the Berea Hills', 'Durban Beach – Night'. The addition of 'Ricksha' to this list suggests a sequence of snapshots which might well illustrate a publicity brochure. But Dhlomo's treatment of these subjects, taken as a sequence, expresses the poet's struggle to hold on to a transcendental individualism in the face of an alienating and oppressive material culture and economy: this Durban has no centre, no heart: each poem locates the poet outside history and it becomes the function of the poem to seek transcendence of that alienation in Romantic tropes and a rhetorical appeal to a hypothetical like-minded audience. The worker for the election of Chief Albert Luthuli to the leadership of the ANC in Natal is in tension with the neo-Romantic poet. (My choice of Dhlomo's sonnets may make too much of the modal and formal restrictions on the African poet in English; the prosody, the Romantic imagery, the Christian-humanist literary education at Adams College.)

I offer a reading of 'Botanic Gardens, Durban' in an attempt to relate Dhlomo to the discursive tradition sketched earlier:

Freaks, rarities, pied treasures from the East!
Familiar names sprung 'neath our sun and skies;
Space-seeking arms, gnarled monsters from the West!
To God in chorus Nature seems to rise!

O heaven on earth! O growth Elysian in
A world convulsed in chaos of man's greed!
As to my soul I oft retire, within
Thy founts of Beauty, tired and bruised, I feed!

Alas! even here beauty is tinged with Pain!
 Wounding my heart with songs of Quest and Sorrow!
 War 'birds'! Hunger! These Colour stings! A train
 Of thoughts smites me who fears to face to-morrow!

'Not heavens!' I cry, 'I still crawl a slave on earth!'
 But birds and flowers reply, 'Here souls find birth!'

(Dhlomo:360)

The unreal ecology which combines the exotics of East and West (recalling, perhaps, Durban's earlier point on the transit from Europe to India) with the 'Familiar names' of indigenous growth makes a 'chorus' in stark contrast with the disharmony of history outside the park. Here the poet can retreat 'As to [his] soul', to an earthly paradise, invoking ironically enough earlier writers in 'the place where Durban is'. The third quatrain acknowledges that there is no escape into the garden from political and economic and racial anguish. The couplet attempts a resolution of the conflict, or, rather, an escape from it into another set of categories: although there is no escape into heaven while the poet is still 'a slave on earth', *nature* seems to offer an alternative outside history.

The rhetorical impetus of the poem is vitiated by the circularity in its action: while the Gardens are a retreat to which the poet retires as to a private interiority ('As to my soul'), they are also the birthplace of that very soul ('Here souls find birth'). In order to escape from, or transcend an imprisoning order, Dhlomo needs certain categories (privacy) generated by that order. There are profundities here which Campbell does not reach: paradise is no longer the whole colony (let alone the whole earth), it is not a private suburban garden: but a public park. The disappearance of the element of personal or national appropriation is significant, recalling Mazisi Kunene's argument that in traditional Zulu cosmology paradise is the whole earth. (Kunene: xviii-xix) Seen in the context of these urban poems, Dhlomo's pastoral brief epic, *The Valley of a Thousand Hills* (1941) takes on a new meaning and power that recall Blake.

In November, 1968 Octavio Paz, who had just resigned as Mexico's ambassador to India in protest against his government's suppression of student demonstrations on the occasion of the Olympic Games, sailed from Bombay to Las Palmas. 'Cuento de dos jardines' (Fable of two gardens), is Paz's poetic account of the voyage, as a reversal of the west-east transit of the ages of discovery, and locates Durban near its midpoint:

Ahora,
 Quieto,
 Solve la arista de una ola,
 Instantaneo penasco de espuma que se dispersa:
 Un albatros.
 No estamos lejos de Durban . . .

[Now, still, over the crest of a wave a momentary
 vanishing boulder of spray: an albatross. We are
 not far from Durban . . . tr. John Hill]

(Caracciolo-Trejo:291)

For South African readers, the imagery may recall Campbell, and beyond Campbell, Baudelaire, but for Paz Durban is the place ‘Alli estudio Pessoa’ (. . . where Pessoa studied). Fernando Pessoa(1888–1935), the great Portuguese modern takes a kind of precedence over both Dhlomo and Campbell as poet of Durban. Yet in 1905, two years after Dhlomo was born, Pessoa had left Durban never to return. Having come to Durban in 1905, with his mother and step-father (the Portuguese consul), Pessoa had already returned once, after a visit to Portugal and the Azores on his father’s leave. Pessoa also wrote in English, and, as David Bunyan has argued, may be thought of as a South African poet, yet we may be searching in vain for Durban in his lines. One of his translators, Peter Rickard, claims that the poetry Pessoa wrote in South Africa ‘does not reflect South Africa in any obvious way’. (Pessoa, 1971(a):8) And one of Pessoa’s Portuguese critics speaks of the poet’s time in South Africa as ‘exile’. (Jennings: 54) But Pessoa had adopted at least one of his heteronyms (Alexander Search) before he left South Africa, and later wrote to his friend Sa-Carneiro:

You admire Paris; you admire the great cities. If you had been educated in foreign territory and under the influence of a great European culture, as I have, you would care nothing for great cities.

(Jennings:3)

Am I reading Durban into Pessoa? In 1922 he published a Portuguese poem called ‘Natal’, a title which English translates into Christmas, and which, transliterated, named the imperial province where Pessoa’s youth was passed. This poem of religious scepticism opens:

A god is born: others die. Truth
 Neither came nor went: Error changed.
 A fresh Eternity has dawned for us:
 What went before was always best.

(1971(a):69)

Natal/Christmas is associated with mutation and periodicity. Six years later Pessoa published another (untitled) Christmas poem: 'Natal . . . Na provincia neva'/'Christmas . . . It is snowing in the country'. (1971(b):64) The categories of centre and periphery seem to have been transposed: a hint that Pessoa felt exile both in and from Europe:

How white and graceful is
The landscape which I do not know.
Seen through the windows
Of the house I will never own.

As early as 1913 Pessoa had composed, in English, 'Anamnesis' ('the recalling to memory of things past; the recollection of the Platonic pre-existence; a patient's remembrance of the early stages of his illness' – Chambers' Dictionary).

Somewhere I shall never live
A palace garden bowers
Such beauty that dreams of it grieve.

There, lining walks immemorial –
Great antenatal flowers
My lost life, before God, recall.

There I was happy and the child
That had cool shadows
Wherein to feel sweetly exiled.

They took all these true things away
O my lost meadows!
My childhood before night and day!

(Jennings:33)

Pessoa's bio-trajectory between two peripheries of Europe gives his account of the Freudian, or late Romantic polarities of innocence and experience tantalising referential substance: the explicit 'There' and implicit 'here' of 'Anamnesis' may be Durban and Lisbon (or Lisbon and Durban): natal/Natal.

Pessoa translated (or re-wrote) some of his own Portuguese poems into English. Roy Campbell, who translated 'Oda Maritima' into English and called it 'the loudest ever written', did not know that Pessoa himself had made a translation of his own (Alvaro de

Campos') Portuguese original. The ode opens, in Pessoa's English version, with the poet

Alone, on the deserted quay, this summer morning,
I look towards the bar, I look towards the indefinite . . .
I look and find pleasure in seeing,
Little, black and clean, a steamer coming in.
It is very far yet, distinct and classic after its own fashion.
It leaves on the distant air behind it the vain curls of its smoke,
It is coming in and morn comes with it, and on the river
Here, there, naval life awakes . . .

(Bunyan:83-4)

The 'bar' and the fact that the steamer seems to be silhouetted ('little, black and clean . . . distinct') against the morning sun suggest Durban, while 'naval life . . . on the river' suggests Lisbon. It is conceivable that Pessoa's Durban years were poetically important, that his second, linguistic infancy gave him resources in a second language and a second culture on a second continent that intensified his verse. That his 'psychographia' co-incided with striking historical passages, when Durban 'was the focus of [the British Empire] at war' (Jennings:2), made his exploration of identity itself ever more profound.

The ambiguous co-ordinates of Pessoa's Eden of infancy may seem far from 'the place where Durban is', but the Paradise myth is a clear link across time and space. In the work of two more contemporary Durban poets there are references which indicate transmutation and localisation of the myth. In 'Giovanni Jacopo Meditates (*On an Early European Navigator*)' Douglas Livingstone, who has done as much as any writer to give Durban a poetic presence, redraws a sea-chart as a map of Paradise and projects it on to the body of a woman. The poem is addressed to 'Sir Tongue' whose destination is

That Continent's sweet Harbour from the South-West Gales.
Drop anchor in this most redolent of Coves,
And taste for yourself Nectarines, Tangerines,
Pineapples, Grapes, Avocados, Paw-Paws, Cloves.

(Livingstone:33)

The counterpart to this private and sensual vision of paradise as retreat into the body of the other is the communal, predictive and expansive vision of the COSATU poet Mi S'dumo Hlatshwayo's 'We Workers are a Worried Lot':

Africa
 The Eden of nations
 The pillar of the universe
 Shall now lead the world
 And deliver the world
 From its hunger
 From poverty . . .

(Sitas:40)

The contrast is pointed between 'taste for yourself' and 'deliver the world From its hunger': Paradise itself, like Durban, is a site of struggle.

NOTES

1. See A.E.Voss, 'Roy Campbell's "The Zulu Girl"; Context and Tradition of a South African Poem', *English In Africa*, 15,2 (October, 1988), 1-12. Masculinism carries energy as fundamental to Campbell's poetry as the paradise myth. I am grateful to Chris Winberg for giving me a copy of her unpublished paper, 'Roy Campbell and Douglas Livingstone: landscape, sex and satire'.

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Ordinary – Modern – Post-Modern

Tony Morphet

In *Rediscovery of the Ordinary** Njabulo Ndebele has collected eight of his critical essays and published them together with a preface and an appendix. Apart from the preface, which is dated 1991, the remainder of the material arises out of, and is referenced within, the storm years from 1984 to 1987. The preface reflects on the collection and its currency in post-apartheid conditions. The author finds its value secure. I confess that I was startled by the degree of confidence with which he expressed his satisfaction with the work done under the near-impossible circumstances of the time. The project remains in his view valid:

In that time (since 1984) they [the essays] have occasioned a great deal of debate and discussion. If there is any link between the essays it is the attempt to explore new ways of understanding the nature of South African society in relation to the nature of our literary response to it. They are concerned with enriching that response in a manner that extends the horizons of our literary culture. (1992:7)

For him there is no sense that the events of 1990, however ambiguous they may in themselves be, have undercut or displaced the purpose of the work:

I believe that the current historical moment . . . underscores the significance and the relevance of much that I have attempted to say in these essays. I have no cause to think differently to any significant extent about many of my essential positions. (1992:9)

The confidence is impressive. There must be very few South Africans who can feel that recent history has drawn a line of emphasis under their arguments. Yet the evidence of the book does provide a justification for the feeling, if not always on the grounds that the author claims.

Ndebele's project has been, and remains, one of unusual significance in the cultural and political debates around the issues being

* *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* by Njabulo Ndebele. Johannesburg: Cosaw, 1992.

canvassed in this discussion of the tasks and challenges facing indigenous literature. It is also however a project which has produced what seems to me a paradoxical result. The discussion which follows will attempt to explore the nature and the significance of the project as well as the paradox it produces. Its goal will be to show that Ndebele's contribution to the debates about indigenous literature is not exactly what he takes it to be – but that it is the richer for having escaped from the restricting frame in which he conceives of his purpose.

Ndebele's project grows out of the task which he set himself well before 1984. An early paper written while he was President of the SRC at Roma University (published in 1972 in a volume edited by Steve Biko), shows that at that early point he was preparing to take on the very public role of the black cultural intellectual. In the essays published in this present volume the task and the role have matured into an authoritative production of a critical discourse which has the capacity to take hold of, and speak in the name of, the historical experience of his people; to recognize and valorize the intensities and urgencies of political oppression and struggle; and yet at the same time to call its record of limitations and deficiencies to account in the name of the literary and cultural imagination. This is a formidable undertaking requiring not merely exceptional personal intelligence, courage and nerve but an ability to draw upon deep wells of impersonal resources.

The roots of the authority of the discourse which Ndebele crafts and constructs in the essays are plainly visible in this extract from *Towards Progressive Cultural Planning*:

The starting point for all of us is the uncompromising demand for democracy. This democracy will necessarily assume forms that take into account the history of our oppression. One visible factor of this has been our enforced silence. This enforced silence has also affected communication among ourselves, thus blunting intellectual growth.

Hence our hunger for knowledge; our hunger for speech; our hunger for constructive social discussion; our hunger for the ultimate right; the right to determine the future with our minds and with our hands. Much of the energy will be turned in that direction. One way through which our voice will be heard is the way of art, and since we seek a consonance between all creative social activity on the one hand and the collective political will on the other, the social relevance of art will have to be defined in the context of that search. (124)

One of the impersonal strands of the authority of this statement derives itself from the public discourses of the Enlightenment. The calls for democracy; for rights; for knowledge, for speech and for constructive social discussion take their form from the universalizing framework inherited from the Enlightenment.

Also visible in the passage is a second strand to the authority. This is most obvious in the pronoun 'our' (where it plainly means black) but it is also present in the phrases 'the collective political will' and 'the history of our oppression'. The framework which constructs these phrases is anti-universal and particularistic – one which derives itself from the traditions of Romanticism and Nationalism. It rests on the notion of pre-conscious bonds between people formed in the crucible of common culture and history. The interweaving of these two, potentially contradictory, strands of thought into a single authoritative discourse is at the centre of Ndebele's project. A striking feature of the passage quoted above, and of the essay collection as a whole, is the ease with which the synthesis of the two forms of thought is managed. There is no evidence of disturbance, dissonance or dislocation in the voice as it passes from one to the other. Indeed the opposite is the case; each strand is used to shape and give direction and force to the other. It is this feature which gives Ndebele's voice its unique authority in addressing the relations between culture and political life in South Africa, but, as I will argue later in the paper it is this same feature which produces fissures of incoherence and it is through these that the paradox of the essays ultimately appears.

The composed form of the discourse did not, of course, come ready made to Ndebele. It is very much a personal construction unique to himself and it is in the context of the process of construction that his concern with the 'ordinary' becomes significant. In the terms he gives in the essays it is the encounter with Yashar Kemal's *Anatolian Tales* which first takes Ndebele's focus of attention towards the absence of any compelling representation of peasant life in South African fiction:

It seemed to me that there existed a disturbing silence in South African literature as far as peasants as subjects of artistic attention, were concerned. . . . What seems to be lacking, then, is an attempt at a sincere imaginative perception that sees South African peasant life as having a certain human validity, albeit a problematic one. (19)

One naturally accepts Ndebele's account of the impact upon him of Kemal's stories but one also cannot help wondering why Kemal should have carried such a powerful charge.

In the light of the discussion in the *Turkish Tales* essay, and from the range of argument developed elsewhere in the volume, it seems reasonable to suggest that Kemal served to precipitate, what had been for Ndebele an incipient critique, not only of South African fiction, but of the relationship between representations and the realities of South African cultural and political life. My point is that Kemal's representation of peasant life 'in a Third World country' made it

possible for Ndebele to establish a focal point for organizing his perceptions and judgements and for beginning to bring together the 'cultural' and the political in the process of the construction of his own particular discourse. The focal point is what he calls 'the ordinary'.

The incipient critique which begins to take formal shape and direction in *Turkish Tales* expresses itself through a series of dissatisfactions with the existing orders of expression of the conditions and aspirations of black life. For the sake of brevity (although at the risk of simplifying and crudifying Ndebele's empirical commentaries), I want to argue that the dissatisfactions resolve themselves into a set of judgements on three principal social discourses:

that of the white liberal establishment
that of the black urban milieu
that of the resistance/liberation struggle

In the account given in the essays each of these discourses has been the source of sets of images and symbols of black experience and that together, in complex processes of both challenge and collusion, they have generated a collective system of interpretation of the experience of black South Africans which has cut off not only creative writers but also social and political movements as well as individual people from an understanding and a creative response to the 'real' conditions of life.

Ndebele argues this case through a very wide range of examples and a number of interpretative moves. He speaks of the 'clash of slogans'; of the 'marketing of oppression' and its dialectical opposite the 'marketing of resistance'; of an 'information ethos' which produces an art of 'anticipated surfaces' rather than one of 'processes'; of 'exterior' rather than 'interior' analyses. The central point of the argument lies not so much in the critique itself, but beyond it, in the construction of an alternative discursive potential – the development of an alternative 'intellectual tradition'. The 'ordinary' is the place where he seeks to establish the ground for a new form of intellectual and artistic practice:

It would seem to follow then, that African fiction in South Africa would stand to benefit qualitatively if and when a radical intellectual tradition was to be effectively placed in and developed from the ranks of the mass struggle. It is there that the writers will also inevitably be found. (21)

What Ndebele appears to mean (although he does not say so) is a form of intellectual practice which endeavours to forge the connections between the perceptions and experience of 'ordinary' black South

Africans and the historically validated mass struggle towards a common destiny. The 'ordinary' is for Ndebele the place where the cultural and the political encounter each other as 'realities' rather than through the meshes of preconstructed concepts or slogans or symbols.

The impetus behind Ndebele's construction of the 'ordinary' comes from two sources (other than that is, than from the Kemal stories). The first is his sense of the entrapment of the intellectual resources of the black community. The second is his sense of the presence and significance of some field of perception and understanding within black life which has remained uncontaminated by the public discourses of the White establishment, the urban black milieu and the liberation movement. An exploration of the first source will lead us into a grasp of Ndebele's extremely acute understanding of the strategic problems facing the intellectual leadership of black life. An exploration of the second will lead towards his enthusiastic discovery and acclaim of Joel Matlou and Bheki Maseko as two writers who are able to reveal the inner meaning of the 'ordinary' as it is found in black life. These two tasks will take up the next part of this discussion but it may be worth noting at the outset that the two source points lie very close to Ndebele's own personal intellectual concerns. The discovery of the 'ordinary' also provides him with the means of constructing his own critical independence and authority.

Entrapment is a central theme of the eight essays. There is not one of the papers which does not, at some point move to observe the ways in which black intellectuals, both literary and otherwise, have been caught and put to service in causes not their own, by historical forces which operate beyond their control. The locus of these arguments may be found in the fourth essay – the Sol Plaatje memorial lecture given at the University of Bophuthatswana in 1984.

The essay begins with a deconstruction of the invitation to Ndebele, noting both the problem of 'political ethics' of acceptance, and the aggressive promotional purpose behind the staging of the lecture by the University. Ndebele goes on to observe an instance of the ways in which Plaatje himself had been trapped by white liberal discourse. He quotes the editorial of the *Pretoria News* which discusses Plaatje in order to promote

. . . a technique of containment, the essence of which is to show that the likes of Plaatje, while making legitimate claims, are not really a threat to the white man. On the contrary and more fundamentally the likes of Plaatje are on the side of civilization. (76)

This 'technique of containment' is as bitter a problem for Ndebele as it was for Plaatje. The essays are saturated with a thesaurus of terms

describing the experience:– ‘encapsulation’; ‘manipulation’; ‘controllable tradition’; ‘unintended trap’; ‘web of containment’; ‘trap the unwary’ are among the most obvious. In part it is the consequence of his affiliation with the universalizing discourse of the Enlightenment. With Plaatje Ndebele seeks the fulfilment of the promise of the Enlightenment (democracy; rights; speech; knowledge) but he will not allow his demands to place him in the hands of the White representatives of the same tradition. He insists on ‘civilization’ on his own black terms.

At one level this has to be admired. Readers of the last chapters of Willan’s biography of Plaatje will be only too aware of the tragic defeat of Plaatje’s efforts to construct and pave an African pathway into the inheritance of democracy, and of the sad role of the white liberal establishment in the drama. And Plaatje’s career is only one instance of the general predicament. There are several parallels in the intellectual positions and projects of Plaatje and Ndebele but Ndebele’s turn away from the proffered alliance with the white establishment and towards the resources and capacities of the black traditions marks his understanding of the strategic problem facing black intellectuals. Yet the turn itself faces him with fierce problems since he finds the resources of the black traditions drastically underdeveloped – whether they are found within the ‘advanced’ urban milieu, or in the political movements. The one has opted for accommodation to the logic of white dominated capitalist production and consumption; the other speaks in the language of ‘ossified moral symbols’ and rehearses its purposes within ‘closed epistemological structures’. It is out of these realizations the the search for the ‘ordinary’ becomes an issue of urgency.

The essential creativity of Ndebele’s projects rest in the fact that he has worked to renarrativize black experience as a whole. His ambition has been to rescue the narrative of black history from the false turns imposed upon it by the producers of slogans and symbols whether they are black or white. To carry his purpose through he was bound to attempt to return his readers to ‘the beginning’ – not to a myth of origin in the usual form – but to the experience of ‘actual’ suffering and from there to retextualize its trajectory. In *Against Pamphlet-eering the Future* he puts it this way:

the common aim of all writers, at this point in our history, is to assail relentlessly the textual authority of oppression and replace it with the textual authority of liberation. (143)

He is more explicit in the Noma award acceptance speech:

I came to the realization, mainly through the actual grappling with the form of fiction that our literature ought to seek to move away from an easy preoccupation with demonstrating the obvious existence of oppression. It exists. The task is to explore how and why people survive under such harsh conditions. The mechanisms of survival and resistance that the people have devised are many and far from simple. The task is to understand them and then to actively make them the material subject of our imaginative explorations. We have given away too much of real and imaginative lives to the oppressor and his deeds. The task is to give our lives and minds to the unlimited inventiveness of the suffering masses and to give formal legitimacy to their aspirations. (159)

Here, then, is the significant point at which the ordinary, the political and the imaginative coincide.

If we are to accept the order and the logic of the essays and allow Ndebele the authority he asserts, it is to this conclusion that his encounter with Kemal has led. Yet despite the composure of the voice and the rhetorical power of the arguments there are, what I called earlier, fissures of incoherence, in the text of the essays. The most serious of these lie deepest, and the sense of vague unease and of dim frustration that one feels gathering somewhere behind one's focus of attention can, I think, be traced to the author's confident and unexplained fusion of the traditions of Romantic Nationalism on the one hand and Enlightenment universalism on the other. It is, it hardly needs to be explained, in the trajectory towards freedom that both find each other, and while that path and goal dominate the vision it is not necessary, perhaps, to notice where they divide and fall apart. But the fissure is there all along.

Ndebele's unslipping grip on the fact that the Enlightenment comes to South Africa riding in the juggernaut of imperialism is absolutely to be admired. So, too, is his readiness to enter the terms and conditions of 'his' history. And the fusion of the two moves allows him to mobilize a double-edged critique with which he can cut down opponents to the left and the right of him. While unmaking the narratives of others he is able to protect and nurture his own. Yet despite the seriousness and the adroitness of these moves the question of his own position – of his own trajectory – perhaps of his own framework – does insist on some kind of answer. Where does the author of a retextualized black experience, which begins in actual suffering and creative survival and ends in 'a universally meaningful democratic civilization', speak from?

One answer might be that he speaks from within the English language – an issue which he discusses at length in the essay, 'The English Language and Social Change in South Africa'. In the argument he gives in this paper I think the fissure widens noticeably. He is acute and eloquent on the 'guilt of the English':

Basically, I think that we cannot afford to be uncritically complacent about the role and future of English in South Africa for there are many reasons why it cannot be considered an innocent language. The problems of society will also be the problems of the predominant language of that society, since it is the carrier of a range of social perceptions, attitudes and goals. Through it, the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. In this regard the guilt of English then must be recognized and appreciated before its continued use can be advocated. (112)

The incoherence between this and the other arguments of the book is masked, but it is unmistakable. What is being advanced here is the Romantic/National blade of the critique and it is aimed against the claims of universal use of English (put forward within the essay by Professor Butler). Ndebele plainly has a point, but the logic of his general position (or framework) should take him to the vernacular – to ‘our’ language – in order to escape entrapment or containment or contamination. Yet this is what he signally does not do. The furthest he will go is increased critical awareness – after which ‘the continued use (of English) can be advocated.’

This retreat from the overall logic of his arguments is covered by a powerful rearguard sally against the ‘educative function’:

At the center of the problem, in fact, is the educative function itself. The humanization of the educative function is a dire need since South Africa still has to produce a viable, home-grown humanistic ethical tradition. . . . That ethical culture (based on capital accumulation), particularly for the ESSA’s, especially in their moral stance towards the oppressed, became instead no more than humanitarian politics. (116)

But this does not deal with the problem. The question which slips through the guard of Ndebele’s double-edged (or barrelled) critique is the (apparently) simple one of timing. And it addresses itself in uncomfortably direct terms to the author himself: ‘At what point, and under what guarantees against encapsulation, did you reach the decisions to study, and to write, in English?’. It might even pose itself in more abstract terms: ‘Is there some life stage at which affiliation with the ordinary; engagement with ‘our’ history; can be evaluated as secure enough to permit open commerce with the language, terms and values of the oppressor?’. These are cruel questions but they are not arbitrary. I did not make them up. They are alive in the stifled voices of the figures and institutions both black and white whom Ndebele puts at such critical distance. They come from the encapsulated and the encapsulators alike – the characters of earlier narratives of liberation – like Plaatje and his impotent friends in the white establishment – who find that under Ndebele’s authorship they made their moves too soon.

Another answer to the question of where Ndebele speaks from, might be found in his fiction itself. Here I want to follow Michael Vaughan's excellent essay 'Storytelling and Politics in Fiction'. The central comment of his extended discussion of *Fools* I take to be this:

Ndebele's stories are not overly dependent on white information; they are skilful narratives with their own fictional centres, and they contain an inward cultural analysis of South African township life. Neither are they organically connected to oral narrative traditions; they relate more closely to a Western realist tradition. They are an example of a practice of writing in the English language in which a Western, realist narrative tradition is adapted to a South African subject matter. (1990:192)

Vaughan goes on to say, explicitly, that this is not to be taken as implying that Ndebele is 'betraying his African identity, his roots in the African population, by writing in this tradition' but that he is working in a narrative tradition which originated (his emphasis) in the West. But he also adds at a later point:

These stories are not composed for just anybody to enjoy. There is an agenda to them; the agenda of intellectual leadership. It is the members of this nascent intellectual leadership, as they conceive it, who can best enjoy the emphasis in the narrative on the problematic freedom of the inner self . . . (1990:194)

And in Vaughan's view 'the way in which non-vernacular, English language education intervenes in the development of this leadership cadre' is decisive in determining the relations between this group and the wider African population.

If the argument thus far, appears not only to be operating within contradictory tendencies, but also to have reached a point where the subject is all but immobilized – where to put the point in other terms, Ndebele's authority has been both recognised and undermined, it will have succeeded in reaching the point of paradox which was referred to in the opening paragraphs. The paradox is not negative, or rather not only negative; it has a powerful positive drive as well which breaks the mould of the discussion and constructs a new set of terms.

Graham Pechey, in an especially relevant and interesting essay coins, for the first time to my knowledge, in relation to Ndebele the term 'post nationalist.' For me this captures the positive thrust of the paradox because it throws positive light on the fissures of coherence, the ambivalences, which I have tried to suggest lie beneath Ndebele's position and which threaten at every point to fragment his framework. Pechey's term is grounded in a comprehensive discussion of the

coloniality, post-coloniality, modernity and post-modernity of apartheid itself. What his essay does is to re-time the entry of modernity into South Africa.

Where Ndebele situates his 'rediscovery of the ordinary' as a return to the pre-modern experience of 'peasant' life in South Africa (a life he does not, in his fiction uncover), Pechey argues that apartheid itself is the working out of an already post-colonial modernity, albeit in a highly distorted form – a form he describes as a 'counter march.' Ndebele's pre-modern peasants turn out as already well within the modern. Pechey's discussion moreover cuts across some of the ground under survey in this discussion, which has proved contentious. On the use of English by African speakers and writers he has this to say:

For the African majority English is the 'natural' means of 'secondary resistance', not only unifying and mobilizing for the struggle speakers of many different vernaculars but also determining by its very adoption the ends for which it is used? (1992:15)

and concludes his comment:

English commits even its would-be nativist users to ends which cannot be other than culturally hybrid and politically modern? (1992:16)

This is particularly appropriate to the problems which Ndebele baulked at in his address to the English Academy. His attack on the 'guilt' of English was indeed 'nativist' but his recommendation of vigilance and continued use was, properly, 'culturally hybrid' (eg. Vaughan's discussions) and politically modern.

In a further development of his resynchronisation of South African history Pechey pays attention to the extraordinary history of *The Pilgrims Progress*. He argues first that Bunyan in the moment of transition to modernity in 17th century England 'claimed for his class the right to imagine community beyond that terrible division' (the English Civil war). Further he notes that it was

Small wonder that the text – proffered in mission contexts as the devotional classic it had then become, translated early on into African vernaculars – should be so eagerly taken up by African writers as the record of a socio-political experience that spoke so directly to their own. (1992:25)

And finally he brings his complex interpretation to bear upon South African time:

That experience has in South Africa been speeded up from a process unfolding over ten or more generations to the experience of a single life: indeed it is the distinction of twentieth-century South African experience that it has for so many been the almost intolerable condensation of otherwise historical processes into the concretely and subjectively lived'. (1992:25)

Pechey's terms make possible a fuller and more just answer to the question posed some while back: 'From where does the author speak?'

The answer is that he speaks from the breach. He is lodged neither in merely the restoration of the past and the recovery of 'our' history (though both of these are of intense concern); nor does he speak from the spaces of the future as one who has made the passage into the democratic universal world. His language is neither the vernacular of the storyteller (as imagined through Kemal) nor is it the metropolitan 'case making' information, as heard in the 'closed epistemological structures' of the urban political élite. It is the language of passage – of the most painful negotiation of substance. It moves between two fields of thought because it has to. Its composed tone – the lack of dissonance, dislocation or disturbance – noted at the beginning of this essay grows out of the concentration given to the rites of passage in which attachment to the past, vigilance in the present and faith in the future join in stabilizing the attention and securing the authority of the voice. It is in terms of the passage that the authority of Ndebele is constructed.

These may seem extravagant and unusual claims to make for a collection of essays. They are likely not to be claims which the author would acknowledge or endorse. Nonetheless they are claims which can be subject to test.

The crucial test of any cultural critic, at any time, is valuation of the voices of the future – of what lies beyond rather than behind the moment of criticism. In 1984 Ndebele acclaimed the appearance of the writing of Michael Siluma, Joel Matlou and Bheki Maseko. Each had written only one story published in *Staffrider*. The trio, were, nevertheless, in an obvious way, candidates for recruitment in Ndebele's project of 'the ordinary'. I have not read Siluma's story but I have read (and reviewed) the collections of Matlou and Maseko. I think Ndebele overvalued Maseko principally because his themes could be integrated into Ndebele's project, but with Matlou I think Ndebele knew that he had come up against a writer who was already then working well beyond his own boundaries. His criticism of Matlou in the essay 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary' is almost all directed toward claiming him for the Ndebele project and explaining, in terms acceptable to the political/intellectual élite, why Matlou

should be allowed to work in the way he does. But the recognition of Matlou is, beneath the apologetics, absolute. He is, for Ndebele the quintessence of the positive meaning of 'the ordinary.'

In 1992 COSAW published a volume of Matlou's stories. They are difficult to characterize in a short space and it must suffice in this, already overburdened, essay to say that they are the antithesis of the stories in *Fools*. They are the creation of an extraordinarily self-aware, disordered, consciousness. They are the first stories from a black writer in English which, wittingly or unwittingly, employ a profoundly reflexive authorial strategy. They figure the experience of a black person entirely from within. They betray no sense that they will be read by anyone – anyone at all. They are meditations of a kind – the verbalized terms of the internal circuits of a person who appears not to know that there is a community of any kind beyond himself. Yet this account of absolute internality, one has to remind oneself, cannot be the only truth, however compelling the experience, because the stories also succeed in constructing a coherent identifiable external world. Matlou's world is the Magaliesberg; it is Pretoria; it has specifiable dates and mappable places.

The parallel with Faulkner's disordered narratives which come, later, to find their times and places in the order of others is evident perhaps only to the critic. But it is powerful. Under the warnings given in the Ndebele essays I hesitate in fear of the charges of 'encapsulation' and 'containment' to go further to make the point that through Matlou will come, after the long duration of the passage, the first tentative points of contact between the counter suppressed halves of the intellectual literary culture of South Africa. Nonetheless it does strike me that Matlou is taking on, from his youth and life on the farm in the Magaliesberg something similar to what J. M. Coetzee began to examine in the *Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*. Along different lines and at different velocities the 'post modern' has come to us all.

In conclusion, I return to the startling confidence which Ndebele displayed on reviewing his essays for publication. My argument was that the feeling was justified though, not on the grounds claimed. The counter ground I would wish to assert is that Ndebele has been on the long watch between the pre- and post-modern and that he has, through patient attention, vigilance and faith, successfully delivered his charge. Grounds enough for confidence! The ultimate paradox is that his evocation of the pre-modern 'storyteller' should emerge from the storms of the 1980's as a post modern 'fabulist' – both of them speaking under the sign of 'the ordinary'.

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Interview with Mongane Wally Serote*

Duncan Brown

After many years of political and cultural activism in exile, how do you feel about returning to receive an honorary degree?

Serote: I'm hoping that we'll soon arrive at a time when I'm no longer considered an exile, and I would see my receiving the honorary degree and many other welcomes as a process enabling me to shed whatever was negative about being an exile. The honorary degree was a very pleasant surprise, especially coming from that institution which, as you know, we've always regarded as an exclusively white institution. But I shared the stage with Beyers Naude, and although Beyers is much older than I and has been involved much longer I think we were there for the same reasons. Our having been there says to me that as a people, at certain levels, we are searching for a way forward. This is very important, and such efforts should be encouraged. I referred to many other welcomes that I've been to, and the impression that I get at these is that people have been waiting for our return – that they expect that their experience will be enriched by our coming back. Generally speaking there is a very positive anticipation of the future. So it is very good to be back in the country. In adjusting some of my thinking and experiences from the long time I was in exile, I feel that the times are very challenging. At the same time I am keenly aware of the very serious problems that our country is facing, for instance the violence which is tearing our people apart. One wonders what it is that will enable us as a people to see that this is not a problem of Natal or Alexandra or Katshele or any of the townships, it is a national tragedy. Somehow we seem not to be equipped to come to this conclusion.

Since 1986 you have worked for the Department of Arts and Culture of the ANC in London, and you are now head of this department in South Africa. What is the nature of your work?

Serote: It starts from using as a common point of reference the political struggle for the creation of democracy in this country. You

* This interview took place in April 1991, when Serote was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Natal.

then try to understand the cultural implications of this. The manner in which I have done this, whether as Head of the Department of Arts and Culture or when I was Cultural Attaché in London, has been to try to translate political struggles – including the armed struggle – into the cultural sphere, to inspire those of us who are cultural activists to search for the manner in which democratic structures can emerge, so as to complement what the politics are doing and be complemented by those politics. The result has been the emergence of various cultural structures inside the country. I found that many times I was involved to a great extent with managing the cultural boycott. But I was also trying to create bridges between emerging democratic structures and international cultural structures.

What have been your perceptions of South African literature during your period in exile?

Serote: My general impression is that in the nineties we have arrived at a point where we are producing impoverished literature – judging from the type of oral poetry that is being performed, some of the published poems and short stories that I’ve seen. It seems to me that we have not been able to produce writers in the last ten or fifteen years who are ready to write novels or plays. While the experiences of our society in general have been so intense that there is no way that we can not be able to detect stories which need to be told, we are still unable to produce a proper film. We are still churning out plays which if you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all. Something is wrong with our literature in the nineties. I think I have an understanding of what went wrong, but the first point to accept is that something is lacking in our ability to produce literature.

There has been a large number of South African writers in exile in various countries. Did you have any contact with other exiled writers or groups of writers?

Serote: There was a time, especially in the first few years after I left South Africa, when I was in contact with different South African writers in different countries, and at that point it reminded me of the very dynamic contact that we had among ourselves as South African writers when I was at home. I had very close contact with people like Mphahlele, Kgositsile, La Guma, Nkosi, and we did influence each other a great deal. Then I was in Botswana for ten or twelve years and we lost contact, except for the ‘Culture and Resistance’ Conference in Gaborone in 1982 which created an opportunity for us to exchange

views with both exiles and writers from home. There has never been any other chance like that. At a certain point I think we all developed as individuals, although at the same time we were bound by the particular political structures or educational institutions to which we belonged. Even in exile, in my view, we have contributed to this literature of impoverishment.

Writers and critics often distinguish between those writing 'inside' and those writing 'outside' the country. Do you see writers in exile as having a different constituency?

Serote: Yes, insofar as apartheid prevented people from looking at the world as their constituency – because I think that's how we writers should see our constituency – writers in exile did have different constituencies from those who were working inside South Africa.

Mbulelo Mzamane argues that exiled writers 'suffer from having been removed from their primary audience and sources' ('Sharpeville and Black South African Fiction'. Ariel 16(2) April 1985. 37). Did you find it difficult to stay in touch with what was happening in the country?

Serote: Well my situation was slightly different, because I lived for a very long time in Botswana, which is a stone's throw from South Africa, although I couldn't come into the country personally. Even so I think there are very basic things a writer survives on: the minute-to-minute experiences of our people; the smells in this country; the sense that one develops when one hears conversations within South Africa influenced by local events. I was denied this. So in that regard I've always said exile is a brutal assault on writers, especially since I know that many times I'm called a self-imposed exile. It's not true. At the point at which I had to decide whether to come back to the country or not, I had to choose between two evils, and I rejected that choice. To be outside does involve being removed from one's primary audience and primary resources, but I think one should always be conscious of trying to broaden one's audience – our audience should be the world.

In the poem 'Exile' you evoke the pain, emptiness and desolation of exile:

*it is quiet here
 the silence is blue, large and far from the tree tops
 it hangs above, this silence, concave and massive
 always threatening to cling to one's shoulders
 the silence here is as hard as the mountain and so unmovable.
 Like a tick
 it hangs like ivy does on walls, its thin feet stuck to
 the sun's eyeball.*

(The Night Keeps Winking. *Gaborone: Medu Arts Ensemble, 1982.* 17)

Were there any positive aspects to being in exile?

Serote: I would say there were two positive aspects. Firstly, while I think I am correct in defining exile as an assault, I was fortunate in the sense that I was a member of the ANC, an organisation which enabled me continuously to try to explore the most positive aspects about our country, and as a result informed my vision as a writer. Secondly, being in the ANC gave me the opportunity to travel quite extensively, knowing that my sole objective was to try to explain to people how we worked, why we ran our struggle in the manner we did, and what perceptions our people had about what we were doing. As a result of this, even as I was geographically removed from South Africa, I lived, almost every minute, a South African life, because I had to search for detail, for understanding of what we were doing. So while many people inside the country remained concerned only with the struggle, I was given this other opportunity.

You have constantly linked writing and political activism, both in your own life and your statements about literature. Do you feel that the role of writers within South Africa has changed as a result of the unbannings of 2 February 1990?

Serote: I agree with what the Congress of South African Writers is saying and doing presently, and this arises out of the fact that during the 1980s, because of the intense repression in this country, cultural structures in this country found themselves having to play a direct political role. And cultural structures can't play that role. My understanding is that we must continually find a balance between being political people and cultural workers – how do my politics inform my cultural activity, and what contribution can my cultural activity make to that political activity? COSAW is currently considering how to become an organisation of *writers*. I'm hoping that by saying so we are not then taking the other extreme that writing has

nothing to do with politics. I don't think, if I know the leadership and membership of COSAW, that this is the position the organisation is going to take. I'm sure it will be searching for this balance I'm talking about.

In an interview in 1980 you said:

I have always wanted to be guided in my writing by the aspirations of my people. However, in none of my poetry collections so far do I fully understand the collective creativity. Had I, the four books would have been written very differently. I have to start from scratch now, and I feel very ignorant. (Michael Chapman. ed. Soweto Poetry. Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1982. 113)

In your more recent poetry the pronoun 'I' is almost invariably replaced with 'we'. Similarly, your novel To Every Birth its Blood proposes collective political action in response to individual alienation. You appear to have made a conscious effort to tap the 'collective creativity' and to be 'guided by the aspirations of [the] people', which you felt you had failed to do in your previous work.

Serote: I'm describing a dilemma which, I suppose, all writers experience. At the end of the day, I am a writer only because I take a chunk of time and use it for writing. But when I do that, I must also have taken a chunk of time to give myself a chance to be informed by societal activity. My view is that constantly, whether we like it or not, literature is going to be informed by society. I also recognize that at a certain point, depending on the calibre of the literature we produce, we will in turn inform our society. Literature at that point contributes towards the fibre of that society; it contributes to relations between people; it contributes to perceptions of the world; it contributes to environmental issues. It must do that, as literature. But it can only do that because it has understood its reality.

In No Baby Must Weep, Behold Mama, Flowers and A Tough Tale you have favoured the longer, open-ended poetic forms over the shorter lyrics which characterised your first two collections. What was the motivation behind this?

Serote: *No Baby Must Weep* was informed by events prior to 1976 – it was eventually produced in 1974. At that time I had travelled extensively in South Africa, and I was keenly aware that we were heading for a very deep crisis. I felt that the collective experience of the masses in South Africa was going to overwhelm poems as I wrote them. I couldn't write a short poem at that point. I felt that a time

had arrived where I had to explore alternatives. I used the word ‘baby’ in that poem because I was aware of the deep militancy in the youth, and I was saying that if the youth are to take on their responsibilities, they are going to have to learn how to be involved in a very intense way without crying. It was followed by *Behold Mama, Flowers*. I was in New York when I wrote this, and I had arrived at the point where I was wanting to understand the source, origin and future of this question of racism. But I was also concerned with world power-politics, other liberation struggles, and, although it was late in the day, what America had done in Vietnam. I was conscious of the struggles in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique – aware of how a people, in order to claim life, had to deny life. All of this is reflected in *Behold Mama, Flowers*. I was also aware of the pride and desperation of black Americans. So I was going through a personal crisis, but, more importantly, I was aware of the crisis in world politics as a whole. *A Tough Tale* was written immediately after 1985, which was the termination of an era for us as ANC members in Botswana. At the same time in South Africa, when you switched on the TV, you saw someone burning alive – you saw them wriggle, wriggle, and lie motionless. It was a time when the army, the police, the government, had consciously decided that life was very cheap. This had also affected us very directly in Botswana, because it was after the SADF raid when twelve people were killed. Nine of the people were very close comrades whom I had worked with, and it was sheer luck that I wasn’t one of the corpses myself. *A Tough Tale* was written against this background, where I still had to search for a way forward.

You have mentioned that when you started writing ‘it was as if there had never been writers before in [the] country’ (quoted in Mbulelo Mzamane. ‘An Unhistorical Will into Past Times’. Current Writing 1 (October 1989, 37). Are there any South African writers, besides those of the ‘Soweto’ generation like Sipho Sepamla, Mafika Gwala, Oswald Mtshali or James Matthews, who have influenced you or whose work you admire?

Serote: I try as far as possible to follow South African literature closely. I have no doubt that as I do so I’m influenced by it. The two writers that I would isolate as continually fascinating me are Kgositse and Ndebele. They come from two worlds which are far apart – Ndebele has never left Southern Africa really, while Kgositse only came back to Southern Africa for the first time in 1982, after having left South Africa in the early sixties. They are very conscientious and conscious of their role as writers.

What is your response to the emergence in the 1980s of worker poets like Alfred Qabula, Mzwakhe Mbuli or Mi Hlatshwayo?

Serote: I think that it was a very important development in terms of our literature and culture generally, and in terms of the development of language in this country. Whether we like it or not, we have given ourselves a mandate to break down barriers, and we must do so quickly and conscientiously. I think that oral performance poetry contributes to this. You must remember that in the early seventies when we read poetry we did so to small audiences. If there were big audiences they were in universities, white universities at that. So you can imagine what I think when I see Qabula performing to hundreds of people, and I know these people are workers. I see a qualitative change in the role of literature in our country. Equally, I realise that even if apartheid structures wanted to ignore this development, they had no choice, and they have been influenced by it. But it's very important that people like Qabula started performing in Zulu. I have seen many translations of his work into English and other languages. He's given a voice to the cultural experience of workers, and since he has done this in Zulu and it has been translated into English, he has made a very important contribution in terms of our understanding of the development of language in this country.

But there's something that worries me. You must remember that the context that produced this kind of poetry was one of very intense repression. People found at one level they were being journalistic, at another level they were being poetic, at another level they were being politicians, and they tried to combine all this and produce poetry. I have no problems listening to the pioneers of this thing, but I'm very worried about the followers, for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is very important for all of us still to have a binding culture. Secondly, it is very important for us to develop a culture which tells us that we are part of the world, and as a result we have to be conscious of the world. Thirdly, there are phases in the life of any society – we have continuously to respond to objective change. If we don't do that we stagnate. When I listen to the followers of the pioneers of this very important kind of literature, I get worried.

Are you working on any new material at the moment?

Serote: I suspect that I've been saying that I'm writing a novel for a very long time now. I must take this novel up. What form it will take is a very difficult thing, because in the past five or six years I've been a wanderer, with no proper base. This has affected my writing very drastically. I'm hoping that I'm based enough here. I'm conscious of the fact that if I continue the novel I started outside, I'm going to have to resolve a number of issues in the process. But I feel equipped for this, it's just a matter of making time.

Mad Women in the Tropics

Report on a Conference

Elizabeth Thompson

Several women from South Africa, black and white, attended the 'First International Conference on Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: Bridges Across Activism and the Academy' in the university town Nusukka, Nigeria (July 12–22, 1992). Attended by about 600 people, the conference aimed to give opportunity for researchers and activists inside and outside Africa to discuss mutual/collective interests and plan collaborative work. After four days and 100 papers, I doubt that the conference realised its objective. Nonetheless some valuable – if grim and even unpleasant – lessons could be learnt by the South African delegates.

It is easy to sound like a superior intellectual here, and point to some disarray in conference organisation, travel plans and accommodation. Last minute switches of speakers and times led to several participants, including myself, being told on the spot to cut the time allocation for our papers in half and to extemporise the gist of the argument. The problem was more fundamental, however, than one of difficult organisation. Rather the 'activism' and the 'academy' had different ideas as to the purpose of the meeting with activist experience tending to speak from the heart and ignore the possibility of analytical understanding while the academy fell short on experience, and spoke too persistently, even dogmatically from the head.

This falsifies the picture somewhat, for I have not mentioned a third agenda that was not evident from the programme, but which burst out at plenary sessions and set up other kinds of unities and divisions. In this white South Africans were the target, and attacks made from the podium by black Americans, assorted ANC and liberation representatives, other expatriate South Africans and several delegates, were directed at the South African white women's privileged status in education, and life in general. With calls for expulsion from the conference ringing through the hall, South Africans were reminded very forcibly that in emotion and symbol, if not in legal structure, apartheid continues to damn white South Africans as racists, whether they are women or men. The atmosphere was charged, accuracy of detail did not prevail (the Afro-Americans thought P. W. Botha was still State President) and it was not the appeal of the organiser for Igbo

culture to prevail – ‘We shall share’ – or the statement by Namibians ‘We shall not dehumanise blacks or whites’ that prevented the South Africans being unceremoniously kicked out of the conference. Rather it was a kind of tropical fever that finally debilitated the necessary planning to take effect that would have removed the South Africans from the scene. In staying the South African delegation was reduced to weeping (a statement admitting privilege but hoping to work for the betterment of all women, made little impression.) Yet, perhaps, we can see a larger picture here, somewhere, as I said, some valuable lessons can be learnt.

First, white South African women need to take cognisance of the real feeling – whether it stands up to analysis or not – that the time for whites to speak about black lives is over, at least in activist circles. (One white South African delegate had taken seriously the well-meaning statement at a women’s conference in Durban of 1991, that white women spend most of their time helping black women formulate papers. This delegate had not quite carried this through. Instead, in an unconscious parody of the Eurocentric manner, she paraded to the conference a black woman to whom she planned to ‘give speech’. The gesture was not appreciated.) Unfortunately, most of the white South African delegates chose to deliver papers on black subjects rather than interrogate their own compromised positions as relatively privileged people – subjects or objects? – in a culture which, although it is patriarchal, is also white supremacist in ways that cut across gender divisions.

Secondly, women academics – whether from South Africa or elsewhere – need to make as a focus of investigation the question of how to bridge the obvious gap between the ‘academy’ and the ‘activist’ organisation. This does not mean that we should abandon analysis for a kind of emotional experience. It does mean, however, that papers on this or that, written on this or that genre, should suggest not only the ‘authenticity of personality’ or the ‘evocation of expression’, but also how literary insights into various lives can be given effect in the hard, practical world of economic, political and sexual disadvantage.

How do we turn art into policy?

In Search of a Common Podium

Report on a Conference

Helize van Vuuren

Fifty speakers from places as far apart as Soweto and Wrocław (Poland) offered papers at the October 1992 conference of the Afrikaans Literature Society (held in Stellenbosch). The theme – whimsically? – was ‘Afrikaans reaching out. . .’ But most remarkable was the ‘amount and diversity of materials’ *not* ‘integrated’, the sheer volume and disjuncture of view-points offered.

Mrs Tshesane (Soweto College of Education) called teaching Afrikaans in the townships ‘A devilish difficult task’. The Polish, Dutch and Belgian representatives spoke on the reception of Afrikaans literature in Europe, and added perspectives on this ‘small literature’ (as Pakendorf, University of Cape Town, called it in his brilliant paper on ‘Kafka and the challenge of the small literature’). Using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘deterritorialization’ in connection with Kafka, Pakendorf suggested that perhaps Wopko Jensma could be seen as a writer falling into this category. He pointed out that everything has a ‘collective value’ in a small literature and that collective utterance takes place in literature and nowhere else. Literature produces solidarity in this way and offers possibilities for another kind of consciousness, other sensitivities. The concept of ‘an underground literature within the literature’ which utilizes the ‘syntax of the shout’ probably applies, within the broader framework of South African literature, to the strong presence of protest and resistance literature.

Apart from papers offering traditional textual analysis (on Opperman’s poetry) or *oeuvre* studies (on Schoeman’s narrative prose), a salient characteristic of many of the contributions was the shift towards a comparative view. This seems to indicate a growing tendency to cross linguistic and cultural borders and to work with related texts (Maphike, Vista, spoke on ‘Afrikaans and Sesotho literature’, another paper dealt with ‘Typical characteristics of South African Autobiography’). There was also evidence of a tendency towards a creative re-reading of literary texts along with a reinterpretation of South African history. Coetzee (Western Cape) focused on the ‘unformed literature’ present in our historical texts, examining seafarer journals, Camoens’s *Os Lusíadas* and the first descriptions of

indigenous peoples as seen through the eyes of the settlers. This procedure has begun to throw new light on our concept of the historical narrative as well as the myths present in canonized texts. The construction of an 'alternative' Afrikaans literary history in which Willemse (Western Cape) is engaged, became clear through his resuscitation of the forgotten writings of Piet Uithalder. This so-called 'coloured' columnist was engaged between 1909 and 1922 on a long-forgotten journal of the African Political Organisation, as satirist and critical commentator on social events at the Cape.

The presence of Dutch, German, Polish, African and Afrikaans scholars at the same conference, and the tendency to work across linguistic and cultural borders, point to a growing need to move away from narrow, linguistically confined 'literature societies', such as the Afrikaans Literature Society, AUETSA, the German Literature Society, et cetera. Has the time not come to start a *common podium* for all scholars of South African literary studies, thus breaking through linguistic and cultural confines? Would this not be a true reflection of the central concern of many leading literary scholars? The conference clearly illustrated the advantages of a comparative approach to texts produced during the same historical period, and within the same geographical confines, whether they be written by Afrikaans writers, South African English writers or African writers. This would have the added benefit of generating mutual understanding and tolerance within the community.

The Function of Literature in South Africa Today

A number of academics were asked to respond in a brief position paper to the question: What function should literature perform in South Africa today?

Tasks and Challenges

Michael Chapman

Debates in South Africa over the last decade have suggested several tasks and challenges facing writers – from the need for accurate, powerful depictions of oppression and liberation to the need to guard against the fear that ‘politics in art’ may favour the rhetoric of the slogan over the ‘verbal artefact’. Prominent commentators such as Lionel Abrahams, Stephen Watson, Douglas Reid Skinner and Patrick Cullinan – they have virtually commandeered the editorial opinion of the little magazine *New Contrast* – see ‘politicisation’ as reducing the scope for moral and imaginative contemplation regarded as the true path of creative writing. Adopting as his priority the liberation of the oppressed, Njabulo S. Ndebele is concerned that spectacles of protest may simplify our understanding of ordinary human beings in the process (as opposed to the events) of their lives. In the academies, the immediacies of local literary life are muted through a still predominant ‘Eurocentric’ preoccupation with the great metropolitan culture. This however can have peculiar consequences: one is the attempted appropriation of Ndebele himself as the most articulate black critic on the current scene, he is in demand as a speaker – into a kind of Western literary figure privileging the experiential, essential ‘inner life’ (the continuing justification of university literary discussion) against the declamations of most black expression.

Some of these debates were given a gloss by Albie Sachs of the ANC who, in early 1990, called for a moratorium on culture as a weapon of the struggle, and pointed writers to the full range of our humanity, in its laughter, love and tears. Subsequent remarks by Sachs suggest he regrets the alacrity with which his comments on culture and struggle were taken up mainly by white South Africans as a sign of new international opportunities on the horizon (a glut of the

latest West End plays in South Africa, perhaps). Speaking to a solidly 'cultured English' audience at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival Sachs felt compelled to remind those present of the strength, diversity and challenge of South African culture. Tony Morphet, for his part, has alerted us to an ANC-affiliation a specific view of a 'National people's culture' in both Sachs and Ndebele. In the same context, Johan Degenaar has warned that buzz-words such as 'national culture' in a sharply divided society are likely to mean little more than the political and cultural predisposition of the particular commentator or organisation. The white minority-Western adherent in South Africa, therefore, will probably remain estranged by the cultural priorities of African communalism, or Pan Africanism, or by Jeremy Cronin's SACP definition of 'national' as a popular worker-cultural alliance. Following the lead of Ndebele (national chairman of the Congress of South African Writers) Andries Oliphant (editor of the magazine *Staffrider*, published under the aegis of COSAW) has recently listed thirteen new themes for writing in a new South Africa. Like Ndebele, he 'redefines relevance' as the challenge of focusing on black people now fully human in a society struggling towards the creation of civil democracy.

It is illuminating to hear writers predicting their own courses or being given advice by critics on what to write, or in what to believe. I am more interested, however, in the way in which we decide to value the writing we have. Creative writers, whether they would phrase it this way or not, tend to speak in mimetic, even romantic terms about the efficacy of their art and craft, as though they tap truth and insight to a greater degree than their readers or, generally, their fellow human beings. The critic, in contrast, needs to keep in mind the 'insights' and 'truths' of new theory according to which all narratives, even those promulgating the truth of science, are governed by conventions, culturally grounded, and provisional in their institutional life. As meanings are unstable, the tasks and challenges facing critics are to re-read our writers through the most profound sense of humanity and justice we can muster, in a society requiring radical transformation in all aspects of its life from the economic to the artistic, and with a special emphasis on education.

In seeking usable pasts and presents the critic should keep alive a memory of our darker practices (our history, and near-history, of aggression, sectarianism, fierce exploitation and greed) while giving substance to the abstractions 'reactive' and 'progressive'. In this, redemptive voices are important, and some writers marginalised because of their 'style' might find prominence according to the sanity of their 'ideas'. 'Spectacle' is probably as valuable to investigate as the 'ordinary', so long as terms are transformed into philosophical loci

for rational enquiry. A usable past is simultaneously a relevant present, and a relevant present should point the critic to considering the purpose of literature for living in the future. Syllabuses in literary education will require changes which, in enlarging understanding of our society and culture, might find a modern, living significance for our oral traditions. Comparative analyses should aim to open previously closed frontiers between South African English and Afrikaans literature, while African-language writers, perhaps in translation, need to be assisted to reach wider audiences. Instead of designating literature as 'good' or 'bad', the step is to understand ideological preference through encounters with the diversity Sachs mentioned. The objective, however, is not a utopian unity in diversity, but a dialectical attempt to chart a way forward in full knowledge of our history and culture.

In such activity there should be a continuing role for the still influential European and North American cultures. Their literatures reflect hard-won bourgeois freedoms that, in traditional literary study, have been frozen into myths of freedom, but which deserve to be strenuously re-investigated. Questions for us, accordingly, should involve 'African' understandings of the West's collusion in racial and economic imperialism. We know, for example, how the decoding of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a 'colonial' text can help return sets of bland 'universals' to stimulating intellectual debates about forms of thought and action specific to a history. Many such projects can assist us to see the metropolis from a South African perspective while increasing our modernising insights and involvement. A reading of American mass culture as 'universal' or 'peculiarly American', for example, might turn TV viewing into a literary-cultural exploration. Or the fact that Europe raided Africa not only for slaves and ivory but for its modernist forms of masks and vitality could encourage multi-accentual debates between South and North.

If we are indeed to re-enter the modern world – at least white South Africa rejected Eugene Terreblanche as our horseman of the Apocalypse – the challenges to the critic will be as demanding as the challenge to the artist. At the moment, we do not perhaps require praise singers. Neither do we require Great Traditions. We do however require our own theatres of difficult, enlivening possibility.

Do Foreign European Languages Have a Chance of Survival?

Arnold Blumer

The number of pupils offering German as a subject for Matric in South African schools has declined drastically over the last couple of years. This in turn has led to fewer and fewer students taking German as a subject at university. Does this mean its fate would be the same as Portuguese and Italian, which are already being phased out at the Universities of Cape Town and Stellenbosch respectively?

On the other hand, the number of students enrolling for the German introductory courses (i.e. courses which do not require a prior knowledge of the language, last for one year only and provide a basic reading and speaking proficiency) has remained more or less the same or has even increased.

What we have here, it seems, is a typical supply–demand dilemma: there is a surplus of what students do not want and a shortage of what they do. A businessman would probably solve this problem in one of two ways: either change the supply, i.e. only put on the market what is demanded; or change the demand, which is more difficult, because it entails convincing the consumer that he or she needs what is supplied more than what he or she wants, which, often leads to consumers wanting things which they do not need.

Applying these two solutions to German as a subject at university means either:

1. Scrapping all courses in literature, literary theory and literary criticism and offering a three year degree course teaching language only. But it remains to be seen, whether those students who now flock to the one-year-courses have enough stamina to continue for another two years;

or:

2. Scrapping all language teaching courses from the university curriculum, arguing that language teaching is not an academic subject anyway and that language teaching can be done more cost-efficiently by language schools in the private sector. Language departments would then concentrate on the ‘science’ of literature (‘Literaturwissenschaft’), and if the requirement that the students should have a knowledge of the specific language is done away with and the subject is taught in the prevailing *lingua franca* then various language departments could amalgamate into departments of, say, comparative literature or European cultural studies.

But there again it remains to be seen whether this is actually what the students want.

Then there is the third possibility of combining both, namely having a three year language course running parallel to a three year literature course with possibilities of switching from the one track to the other. But this would entail an increase in staff and in the current economic situation with state subsidies to the universities being cut every year this seems out of the question.

There is a variant, though, to the third possibility: change the one year introductory course in such a way that it provides access to the three year literature course without the loss of a year, and changing the literature course in such a way that it can accommodate a student who has had only one year of exposure to the language.

A last, but totally idealistic thought (which therefore has no chance of ever being implemented) is: change the government's university subsidy-formula in such a way that student-numbers have no bearing on it anymore. Then the above problem-solving strategies would become unnecessary. Then universities (even schools) could offer all the languages and literatures of the world, like Nepali or Chinese or Catalan. And then one could start thinking about the role of foreign languages in the New South Africa, namely to further communication.

But until this never-never day arrives we will have to use our energies to try and maintain the few channels of communication we have.

Language, Writing, Literature

Preliminary Notes to the Orality-Literacy Debate

E.R. Sienaert

To pose the greatest of the human problems in the purview of writing only is falsifying them from the start. (Marcel Jousse, *L'Anthropologie du Geste*. Gallimard 1974, 71).

What symbiosis will Africa be able to find between its autochthonous orality and conquering literacy, this is one of the questions at the root of many others it faces and which it cannot elude. (Jacques Fédry, 'L'Afrique entre l'écriture et l'oralité'. *Etudes*, May 1977, 592).

The terms language, writing, literature must be of the most used in academic parlance. Yet, what do these terms mean to us? And to others? I hold that the way we have come to view language, writing and literature shows how an all-dominating literacy has narrowed our vision of the world around us, has cut us off from most of that world, and that it is a matter of social sensitivity and responsibility and of intellectual honesty for us to rethink our basic terminology and to at least become aware of its underlying assumptions and presumptions.

Langue-age is a gesture of the tongue (*langue* in French); it is a laryngo-buccal gesture that serves to communicate, along with other gestures: ocular, labial, facial, manual, corporeal capillar even if you happen to have some or other hair-raising experience. Laryngo-buccal gesture became privileged because it is the most economical, ergometrically and energetically 'speaking', and because it has the advantage above other gestures in that it does not necessitate the visible presence of the addressee: it goes through walls and darkness. But it is grossly reductionary to equate communication with language. A much more accurate term here would be *gestuality*. This is not mere splitting of terminological hairs, for it is such reduction of communication to language – to spoken gestuality, i.e. the reduction of the whole of human communication to one part only of the body – and the concomitant neglect of all other forms of communication still very much alive in oral societies, that has led to such un-human and inhumane aberrations as educating children by forcing them to remain immobile, as teaching 'language' without sound or context, as studying direct interpersonal communication through language divorced from its accompanying other gestuality.

Writing is either something written – there is writing from the moment there is reading, i.e. whenever someone sees and interprets a natural phenomenon (= a hunter 'reading' a spoor, a geologist 'reading' a rock) – or writing is the act of writing, which most probably came to mankind the day when a human being related the shadow that accompanied her or him to herself or himself – the writing on the wall as the shadow of our thought. The whole of such passive or active writing constitutes a signage that far exceeds our commonly held definition of writing as alphabetic or, at best, cheirographic writing. As with *langue-age* against gestuality, writing as we have come to conceive it, alphabetic writing, is economically and technologically superior for it is the most supple and the most easily transportable of all signage. Yet again too, the reduction of writing to alphabetic writing leads to the neglect of the multitude of other signage, and as with language, superior technology is confused with superior culture: technologically superior, our black specks on white paper came to mean power over those who did not possess this

technology (perhaps because, culturally, they did not feel the need for it or refused it).

It is with *literature* however that we reach the height of our terminological arrogance and narrow-mindedness for here we have managed to exclude all gestuality and signage that is not laryngo-buccal gestuality transposed in cheirographic signage – all that is not verbal ‘language’ and alphabetic writing. Yet for at least three quarters of our contemporaries, not to mention for nearly the whole of our global ancestry, what we call ‘literature’ is oral and thus not a matter of letters at all, but of sound and gesture. Their experiences, thoughts and values are shaped, stored and recalled as oral texts, as vocal ‘books’. Their stories and histories, past or in the making, are moulded to be remembered (= put into the memory) as audible and visible, as gestualised texts – tissues of audible and visible gestures making sense, be they macro or micro, proverbs or myths, riddles or epics. But to us, if it is not in our writing, it is not ‘literature’ and this not because it lacks intrinsic aesthetic and social value, but because of the narrowness of our own frame of reference.

In all three instances our ‘theoria’ (= observation) has been narrowed by our myopic tunnel vision. We will not of course be able to change centuries-old terminological habits, but when using these terms, we should at least limit the abuse by being humbly aware of how restrictive and biased they are and we should see it as not one of our least tasks to create such humble awareness in others.

Speak Up! Women Who Do and Women Who Don't

Marianne de Jong

A certain consensus has been reached about the term ‘the other’ as a description of peoples excluded by entrenched, dominant discourses. The term is ‘out’ since it demonstrably refers not to the excluded but to the excluders as they experience a certain object – their ‘other’ – as something they cannot with confidence objectify, analyse, discuss and appropriate. When, as a term, ‘the other’ was still *en vogue*, it forced excluded, marginalised groups to speak as ‘other’ while allowing creators of the term to settle down in gratifying moral ease.

The report on the Nigerian Women's Conference confirms the aggressive rejection of othering on the side of modern black women, particularly Afro-American women. However, it also reports, in my reading of it, that this rejection is achieved at the cost of the initiation of a new marginalisation, i.e. of the white women present at the conference. This marginalisation does not entail the 'mothering' which used to characterise white dominant discourse, but it does entail a calling to task or, if one wants, a strong 'step-mothering'.

Not having been there, one can only speculate about the questions the white South Africans asked themselves and their black compatriots before finally returning to the conference. One such question might have been: am I privileged or is it rather my black women compatriots in South Africa who have not had access to normal social, educational and other modes of existence? Is it privilege which should be eradicated, or is it the unjust difference 'privilege' marks? If social action is required and demanded to eradicate privilege as difference, how can women embark upon it without solidarity and how can there be solidarity within new marginalisations?

Reading the report on the Nigerian conference, one is left with the impression that speaking up as black women was of necessity accompanied by confrontation.

Within this problematic, the task literature should set itself, according to the report, is effectively to address or influence the realities of inequality and injustice, as for example induced by sexism and chauvinism. For this reason it seems relevant to pose a question which might, at first glance, seem quite out of context. This question is: Why is there no feminism proper in Afrikaans South African literary production (with exceptions which I shall return to)?

Of late there has been a proliferation of writing 'oor die vrou' in Afrikaans literature. Never before have so many Afrikaans woman writers written so frankly and freely on hitherto outlawed aspects of female existence, ranging from menstruation to fornication, from experiments with the same sex to experiments with different nappies. However, it is a writing about women which lacks feminism inasmuch as it lacks a view of society as gender problem. It therefore also lacks the intent to fight – aggressively and consistently. On the contrary, this writing, as readable as it often is, apologises in advance for its seeming to be 'feminist'.

I am referring to recent texts by writers such as Riana Scheepers (*Die ding in die vuur, Dulle Griet*), Rachele Greeff (*Die rugkant van die bruid*) and, albeit a text of liberating wit, Marietha van der Vyver (*Griet skryf 'n sprokie*). This lack of feminist substance is also obvious in the poetry of Antjie Krog and, on a much more vulgar level, in the poetry of Joan Hambidge which is blatantly chauvinistic

(the fact that it is also explicitly lesbian simply underscores the problem outlined here).

Literary writing in Afrikaans seems incapable of taking leave of its old safeguarding institutions. To write 'in a literary fashion' is still the predominant mode. Whatever is being written is still subject to what the institution can recognise, in other words, following Foucault, to literary visibility as expressed in recurring formulations with regards 'vernuwing', 'tematiese verryking', 'bydrae', etc. In a single stroke, this writing offers apologies to the male and to 'letterkunde'. It therefore does not speak for itself, even as it speaks proficiently about itself as woman. There is no anger at having been marginalised and othered in a male dominated and sexist society.

In contradistinction to this, Jeanne Goosen's writing unabashedly allows individualised women to speak, producing a collection of often rather displeasing and unpleasant 'ladies'. (Less intense but arguably feminist is, perhaps, also the writing by Emma Huismans, to mention one more exception). Goosen's women speak an impure, unliterary Afrikaans, they go for the cliché in its most unaesthetic forms, they are the most common of common people and introduce the most undramatic situations. Worse even: in Goosen's first collection of plays – three one-person acts – some female voices come ominously close to propagating white protest (as in black protest theatre). In 'Koffer in die kas' (English translation: 'In a Suitcase') the podium is given to a voice which spits out all conceivable forms of agony and anger about a South African Hillbrow situation, checking itself in shock about its own use of the word 'kaffer'.

The new writing 'oor die vrou' does not have an effect on inequality and repression as social realities. At most, it might instil in some male readers some curiosity, even a little additional respect, for female sexuality. Goosen's naturalistic, bizarre but unapologetic exploration of conflicts might, however, make a difference. Here literature relates to reality without good will and niceties, not to speak of 'personal authenticity' or 'evocative expression'. Otherwise repressed, marginalised by-products of our bids to speak to each other are given centre stage.

For white and black South African women, in order to find the solidarity essential to effective social action, it seems necessary to find their own voices, to speak up regardless of old and new institutionalisations. As long as it leads to more effective communication, confrontation should perhaps not be avoided.

Quo Vadimus? Classics at the Crossroads

William J. Dominik

Has the revolution come? Does the impending retrenchment of Classics lecturing staff at the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Port Elizabeth signify that the future of Classical Studies in South Africa hangs in the balance? Are we moving into a period of the gradual disintegration of the discipline in this country? It is against this background that the University of Natal Department of Classics held its recent 'Roman Studies Conference' in Durban (8–10 July 1992). Scholars representing thirteen universities in South Africa and abroad presented papers on various esoteric subjects at this specialised conference. However, it was the last session on 'Classics in Africa' that provoked the most interest and discussion from delegates. This session consisted of some observations by Fabian Opeku, Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, on the state of Classics in West Africa; this was followed by a question and answer period in which he presented his views on the value of Classics in Africa and advised delegates on what Classicists could do to ensure the vitality of their discipline.

I had particular interest in this final session of the Conference, having taught and studied Classics and other humanities subjects in Australia, the United States, Britain and Mexico before coming to South Africa to take up a lecturing position at the University of Natal, Durban in July 1991. While I was never called upon *personally* to defend the study of Classics before an unfriendly audience in the USA – a phenomenon that I attribute partly to the American attitude that all disciplines are of equal worth (e.g., cosmetology is just as important as electrical engineering) – my teaching of Classics in Australia was accompanied by the occasional need to defend its study to colleagues (even in other humanities disciplines) and the community. This is becoming increasingly the case here in South Africa. Classicists in Australasia, Europe and North America like to defend their discipline as a cornerstone of *Western* civilisation, but it seems to me that in South Africa they must defend their discipline against charges of irrelevance from many quarters, including one that views Western traditions as imperialist, racist and sexist. Although the climate has not reached the point where students on campuses toi-toi to the chant of 'Hey, hey, ho, ho, Western culture's got to go', it is becoming fashionable in some circles of the academic community to make Classics and other largely Eurocentric disciplines in the

humanities whipping boys for the past crimes of the European community and of the prevailing apartheid structures. European cultural superiority, as reflected in Saul Bellow's absurd statement that he knew of no 'Tolstoy of the Zulus', smacks of the worst kind of cultural arrogance, but the solution for the ignorance of some Westerners is not to be found in the attempted eradication of the foundations of European culture and thought in Africa. Notwithstanding the activist viewpoint that European culture has had a predominantly negative impact upon the African continent, it seems to me that contemporary African culture has become so heavily Westernised that there can be no question of turning the clocks back to the pre-European era. Furthermore, Afrocentrists in the process would be simply promoting another brand of cultural chauvinism.

On the continent outside South Africa there are university Classics departments in Egypt, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Malawi and Zimbabwe. How have they managed to survive the post-colonial era? What do Classicists in South Africa have to learn from their colleagues north of the border? What would an experienced Ghanaian academic recommend to a privileged group of largely Eurocentric scholars? And how would they respond? According to Dr Opeku, 'Classical Studies in Ghana, far from being regarded as useless or obsolete, have much prestige attached to them as a discipline which implies the highest academic excellence of its practitioners, students and teachers alike'. He points out that Classics survived the post-independence period of Marxist ideology when politicians were clamouring for a practical curriculum to meet the material needs of a developing country. In fact the Classics Department was one of the first departments established at the University of Cape Coast when it was founded in 1962, five years after independence. When questioned by delegates at the Conference on how best to defend the interests of Classics in a society in transition to a new order, Dr Opeku replied that students enjoy the study of any culture they find interesting and challenging, whether it is Western or African.

At Cape Coast, one of the three Universities in Ghana, students in Arts and other faculties such as Science and Education are required to take Arts electives in the first and second years of their courses. Out of a total first-year enrolment in 1991 of 800 students, 152 students from the Faculties of Science and Education enrolled in 'Classical Theatre' taught by the Classics Department, while 50 signed up for 'Classical Philosophy'. 'What we have tried to do', says Dr Opeku, 'is to salvage sterling and relevant areas of Classical Studies and integrate them into new and flexible University syllabuses . . .' The healthy enrolment figures bear testimony to the success of the Department in devising courses that are interesting and relevant to the intellectual and cultural

interests of Ghanaian students. Dr Opeku asserts that the people of his country are great lovers of drama. This is reflected not just in the large numbers of students who enrol in courses in Classical drama at the Universities of Cape Coast and Ghana, Legon but also in the fact that 'ordinary Ghanaians, who perhaps would not appreciate the so-called invisible benefits of the Classics . . . have great enthusiasm for Classical Greek drama on stage and television . . .'

Classics Departments in Ghana are currently devising other courses such as 'Political Theory and Practice of Greece and Rome' and 'The Ancient History of North Africa', which have a demonstrable link to contemporary social and political developments on the African continent. These titles reflect the interdisciplinary and contextual approaches at the heart of the effort in Classical Studies in Ghana. So do the topics of essays written by final year Classics students at Cape Coast: 'The Fescenine Verses and Agozi Songs of Abuse' and 'The Rise of the Military and Their Rule in Rome' (with comparisons of military dictatorships in Africa). Classics Departments in South Africa would do well to structure some of their courses according to the Ghanaian model.

Surely educators must never lose sight of what is one of the higher purposes of universities: the perpetuation of whatever there is in civilisation worth perpetuating. As long as there are African educators who keep uppermost the Aristotelian belief that the chief importance of education is to train the mind to think and there are students who enjoy thinking about thoughts, then Classics has a role to play in African society. As P.J. Conradie, Professor of Classics at the University of Stellenbosch, argues, 'Classical culture is not something alien to Africa but is part of the general cultural heritage of all mankind' (1990: 89). The Classics have a vital link with so many other humanities disciplines – the Fine Arts, Philosophy, Rhetoric, Archaeology, Romance languages, Literature, Theology, Law and History – that it is ironic that they are considered by some activists to be irrelevant to the concerns of a South African society in transition: the political dispensation, negotiation and diplomacy, the wealth gap between the races, the violence racking the country, discrimination and prejudice, affirmative action and equality of opportunity. Cicero and Quintilian would have been astonished at such a suggestion. Although they recognised the humanistic and civilising aspects of the liberal arts, they believed their ultimate purpose was directed toward the training of men to sway and lead the masses toward right action. This purpose seems especially important to me in the current socio-political climate of this country. Can the natural and social sciences (equally Eurocentric in their origins and orientation) really provide all the answers to the problems burdening this country?

Unless one is a specialist in Physics, Biology, Geometry or Calculus, what is the *practical* use of these subjects? The same can be asked of the specialised disciplines in the social sciences (e.g., Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Politics and Economics) and in the humanities (e.g., Literary theory, Linguistics, Archaeology and Philosophy). Although they are of little practical value to the masses, I do not attempt to deny the importance of any of these disciplines for a normalised South Africa. The problem with some scholars in the social sciences and humanities is that they are preoccupied with the contemporary, as if only in the present can one experience the real. Some departments scramble madly to make their research output and course offerings 'relevant', mainly by presenting them in the light of some recent theory cultural, psychological, literary, historical, philosophical, political or economic. Scholars forget all too easily how the present is a function of the past and that any decision made without consideration for the lessons of the past is fraught with danger for the present and the future. However, even from this preoccupation with the contemporary and the real there is something that Classicists can learn. For there can be no denying that social science subjects are more popular than humanities subjects, especially among black African students. We should therefore consider adopting some of their methods.

In an article that appeared a few years ago in this journal, Michael Lambert, Senior Lecturer in Classics at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, maintains: 'To Africanize the classics (or rather the teaching of the Classics) is *not* to research the African connection in Greek and Roman literature. It is *not* an in-depth study of 'Roman' Egypt or the archaeology of Leptis Magna or the history of Jugurtha, King of Numidia, or the study of the Vandals or even idle speculations on how black Terence and Septimius Severus were. To Africanize the Classics is to contextualize, for only in contextualization can there be heart-to-heart contact between Græco-Roman culture and our situation. Only with such contact can the Classics be truly involved in the process of education in which *all* need to participate if this country is to have any sort of future' (1989: 19–23). I wholeheartedly concur with Mr Lambert, for I believe that there are hitherto unexplored and potentially fruitful areas in interdisciplinary and comparative studies that have a place in the Classics curriculum. Classicists need to be more self-critical about their role in South African universities. There have been too many lost opportunities to exploit the importance of our subject in interdisciplinary courses and in attracting students from other disciplines. In this respect Classicists in South Africa have something to learn from their colleagues overseas, who can scarcely restrain their astonishment when informed that Latin is required to

practise law. If truly democratic elections are held in the next two years before the present government's white mandate expires, then it is likely an ANC-led government will assume control. Although a future government will be preoccupied with pressing social and economic problems, it seems only a matter of time before a new parliament abolishes the statutory Latin requirement. Without the legal requirement of Latin the faculties of most Classics Departments in South Africa will lose their lifeblood. Surely the circumstances constitute a time bomb whose ticking should serve as an omen, yet more than just a few Classicists seem to me remarkably complacent about the warning signals.

The content and methods of courses in Universities are increasingly becoming student-centered and consumer-oriented, as they have become elsewhere in North America, Australasia and Europe. Classics Departments at universities in the United States, for instance, often cater to hundreds of students in undergraduate courses in civilisation, mythology, word studies, women's studies and black studies. The possibilities for new and interesting interdisciplinary courses that suit the needs and interests of the wider South African university community exist. An interdisciplinary course on Africans in Classical Antiquity is not just an exercise in conjectural ethnography and history. It meets the important need for South Africans to understand the history of their continent and the significant role that Africans played in the development of European civilisation. A comparative mythology course in Classical and African mythology meets the need both to know about ourselves and about the cultures around us. After examining the nature and meaning of myth, the course can proceed to a comparison of Classical myth with that of Southern African peoples. Such a comparison reveals that bodies of mythic thought and practice (e.g., rituals, creation stories, heroes, notions of time, the relationship between the temporal and spiritual worlds, origination of tribes and clans) belonging to peoples widely separated in time and space reflect not only sharp differences but also striking similarities suggestive of a common ancestry. The oral traditions of the European and African continents are also fruitful grounds for comparison in an interdisciplinary studies course. But it is perhaps in the area of comparative social history that Classicists are presented with their best opportunity of contextualising their discipline. In a recent article in an American Classics journal, J. H. D. Scourfield, Professor of Classics at the University of Witwatersrand, discusses some of the unique opportunities available in the South African context: 'The position and roles of women in ancient Græco-Roman society can be compared with those of their counterparts in African society, where the twentieth century can be seen to

have had a powerful impact on traditional social structures . . . Roman rites of passage, or the social and political functions of the Athenian funeral, or ancient views on sex and sexuality, can all be introduced by reference to corresponding African phenomena and attitudes. Still closer to home, the oppressive treatment meted out to subject peoples or cities by Rome or Athens may find ready echoes in the experience of students who have grown up in South African townships. Indeed, the ancient world offers a variety of parallels to the socio-political situation of apartheid South Africa, some of them continuing to have validity in the post-apartheid era. The whites-only franchise has the flavour of an oligarchy, the majority possessing citizenship but not full political rights. The availability of cheap labour in the home, on the farm, and in the mines, recalls the slave-based economies of antiquity. Cultural protectionism and absurd notions of racial purity were familiar then as now' (1992: 52–53).

In an attempt to meet the needs of a diverse and increasingly underprepared student population, the Classics Department at the University of Natal, Durban is introducing a Foundation Course entitled *Words and Ideas* in 1993. In the Department's motivation to the Board of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor E.A. Mackay asserts that

students will meet a selection of current concepts deriving from ancient ideas and the key words associated with them. These will be studied in grouped categories such as Sport, War, Myth, Religion, Books, Calendar, Numbers, History, Philosophy, Science, Medicine, Politics and Law . . . The aims . . . are to extend the general knowledge and vocabulary of the students in certain key areas; to demonstrate the continuity and inter-relatedness of Western culture; to arouse what should be an abiding curiosity about the relationship between words and concepts in separate but related cultures.

Other aims are 'to help students to develop the ability to analyse polysyllabic words in terms of their derivational components, and so to reduce the block which many experience when encountering unfamiliar terminology; to develop standard academic skills'. (1992: 3) It seems to me that the course is partly a conscious attempt to demonstrate the relevance of Classical culture and languages even when they are judged by nothing more than their contribution to thought and expression. Only time will prove if this course is able to attract – and retain – black and other African students.

Of course the needs of the wider university community may not suit the needs and interests of lecturers in traditional Classics Departments. There are research opportunities for Classicists in comparative studies with African cultures, as evidenced by Michael Lambert's article two years ago in a South African Classics journal in which he

compares the function and rituals of the Zulu nature spirit Nomkhubulwana and the Greek goddess Demeter (1990). Although few Classicists may wish to extend their *research* interests in this way, we have an obligation either to extend our *teaching* interests or to collaborate with African Studies Departments in the offering of interdisciplinary courses. Much of the South African Classics community, I fear, however, will desire to remain loyal to the traditional specialised role of Classics, which means that they will end up imparting the truth, insight and splendour of Greece and Rome to increasingly smaller groups of white students. The future of Classics in South Africa is in the hands of those who teach it. We shall have no excuses. Unless Classics adapts to the circumstances of a society in rapid transition, we shall be left to perform an autopsy in which we poke around in the corpse of our university discipline in a vain attempt to discover why it is dead. Is this not what revolution is all about?

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Book Review

In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture by Kwame Anthony Appiah. London: Methuen, 1992, xviii + 366pp.

The writing of this review fills me with some apprehension. What am I doing commenting on the work of a philosopher? I can at best adduce three reasons to justify my task. One is that Appiah sets out to develop a thorough, lucid and very well-argued case against what I have once in the introduction to *The Making of Contemporary Africa* briefly critiqued as African essentialism, the idea that African society has a common identity inherent in the *race* of its inhabitants. For students of any discipline – economics, sociology, geography, etc. – within African studies, this is an issue that has to be confronted at some point. Second, Appiah's concern with identity, culture and race raises questions about categories through which South Africans, often as intellectuals and even more so in everyday thought, see the world. If one accepts his assumptions, exciting possibilities for the cultural development of this fractured society emerge. Third, this is a challenging and fascinating book that deserves publicity in its own right.

The book chapters stand on their own as extended essays. The first deal with early black American writers, particularly Crummell and Blyden, and their conceptualisation of Africa as the motherland of a biologically and spiritually definable 'race', and move on to show how W.E.B. du Bois and others tried to counter white racism with a positive, sometimes Afrocentric but always essentialist defence of the black race, biologically imbued with particular cultural qualities. 'The Pan-Africanists', he argues, 'responded to their experience of racial discrimination by accepting the racialism it presupposed' (1992:26).

From this, Appiah follows with a dissection of Afrocentric views of Africa by Africans. Appiah feels that such views ignore the depth with which African intellectuals have been affected by, and in turn form part of, the modern era as well as the genuine distinctive aspects of the numerous historically-formed, individual cultures of Africa which rarely form a whole even within particular countries. The purely nativist (his term) perspective 'ignores the reciprocal nature of power relations . . . neglects the multiform varieties of individual and collective agency available to the African subject and . . . diminishes

both the achievements and the possibilities of African writing' (1992:115).

Appiah does not even believe that what he calls 'Afrocentric particularism' has a genuine intellectual autonomy independent of its struggle with its Eurocentric antagonist. 'The course of cultural nationalism in Africa has been to make real the imaginary identities to which Europe has subjected us' (98). Afrocentrism simply substitutes Caliban for Prospero as central figure in *The Tempest* rather than genuinely writing a new play. It is one thing falsely to assume that a European writer on Africa commands objective truth and that his or her own background is irrelevant to the analysis. However, to argue that a European critic *cannot* legitimately subject to a critical reading a work by an African writer is to delegitimize equally any contemporary attempt to give a writer a different reading apart from that which is literally stated, including a Marxist or a feminist reading or even simply by an individual commenting on work from a previous time, in Appiah's view.

Particularly for those intellectuals who are at least partially critical of progress and what we now fashionably call modernity, Appiah claims that writers from Africa and elsewhere have much to learn from each other: 'In coming to terms with what it means to be modern, Western and African intellectuals have interests they should share' (172). However, more crucially, he wishes to situate himself within a post-modern framework where identity is fractured, multi-faceted, impacted on by the ease of modern international communications. In effect, he doubts that a contemporary African intellectual can have a simple 'African' identity, let alone one that can be derived from his or her skin colour, defining his or her relationship to the contemporary world.

As illustration (and not only as illustration) Appiah deliberately emphasizes the personal. For Appiah, Africa is his father's house, the father in question was a prominent Ghanaian lawyer and politician, and a liberal critic of Nkrumah, a man of multiple identities and values derived from varied sources. The author has other identities too, connecting to the English intelligentsia through his mother's family and his own schooling, and to America where he lives and teaches. Indeed his book must partially have been intended as a challenge to the fashionable Afrocentric world of the 'African American' nationalist-minded intellectuals there. In addition, Appiah is the nephew of the queen of Asante (astonishingly, she is actually named Victoria) and he feels the strong pull of an older, coherent and distinctive African culture through this particularity. The book ends with a symbolically laden clash over the nature of his father's funeral which divides his family and involves some of the most prominent

individuals in Ghana, including the head of state, Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings.

This short summary cannot do justice to the book's most impressive individual parts. Appiah comments with great insight on the work of African, particularly West African, writers and philosophers. He has produced two fascinating chapters on the extent to which one can distinguish between philosophy and oral religious and cosmological wisdom in Africa which comments on the significance of rationality and literacy, on the relation of tradition, African and otherwise, to modern thought. This is followed by a wickedly funny account of a recent New York exhibit on 'primitive' art in which Africa was appropriated by the organisers in ways that remind one of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a book on which surprisingly Appiah does not comment directly. Indirectly though, he talks about the African as the Other and the danger (and temptation!) for African writers in becoming Otherness-machines within a cultural universe in which power is most unequally divided.

One caveat, apart from the unfortunately frequent typographical mistakes, is that Appiah's depth of command of contemporary African politics is less impressive than his philosophical bearings. This book is in the end largely by, for and about intellectuals. Appiah's self-assertion of his own extremely elite background tends to mask questions of class and social injustice. He has an ease with the claims of pre-conquest culture and identity (admittedly restructured under colonialism) as internally coherent and living in contemporary Africa, which is far from universal. His relatively untroubled assessment of the decline of the impact of the state and growing importance of civil institutions such as the church in post-Structural Adjustment Ghana struck me as far too calm, far too optimistic to grapple with the often tragic condition of Africa today, yet much starker in some other countries than Ghana. He occasionally refers to South Africa but without trying to comprehend the particular complexities of South Africa's identity crisis.

The power of Appiah's thought lies, however, in the clarity of his overall argument, an argument which can be transferred to very different situations, times and places inside Africa and out. He is trying to make the case for *universal* human problems and values refracted through *particular* historical and social experiences over determination by ethnic and racial categories. His book can read as a navigator's chart as to how to steer between the arrogance of modernity, the cultural tyranny of the notorious 'dead white males' reeking of their own superiority and the equally self-absorbed and dead-end relativism of much post-modernist theorising. Finally, Appiah also begins the job of affirming the possibility of philosophy

as a discipline which can illuminate the understanding, and notably the self-understanding, of Africa and how African studies can engage with those academic battlegrounds.

Appiah does believe that Africans have critically important things in common, coming from what he calls their social-historical situation, from relatively common experiences in confrontation with the modern world, (of which they are part), not with their skin colour or some assumed common traditional values. While anyone prepared to grapple with Appiah's ideas will admire his vast range of learning and his writing style, this is a book which will anger those who believe in a self-evident unity of black people or people of colour and hearten those who believe that the characteristic form of identity in our world, including in Africa, is complex, sometimes contradictory, and that that complexity both fractures and enriches our lives.

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