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# *Alternation*

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## ARTICLES

- Shane Moran* Introduction .....
- David Hemson* Critique in Retreat? Intellectuals and Inequality in  
South Africa .....
- Sikhumbuzo Mngadi & Tamlyn Monson* Nationalism and Feminism:  
Anne McClintock's Reading of South Africa .....
- David Johnson* Literatures of Nation and Migration: Charles Mungoshi,  
Nadine Gordimer, and the Post-colonial .....
- Richard Consterdine* The UDW Fees Crisis of May/June 2000:  
A Linguistic Analysis .....
- Johannes A. Smit* The Language of the Other .....
- Emmanuel Mgqwashu* Re-conceptualising English Language Teaching  
at an HWU .....
- Shane Moran and Elizabeth Greyling* W.H.I. Bleek and Black Athena .....
- Mduduzi Dlamini* Translations from Baudelaire .....

## INTERVIEWS

- Johan van Wyk* Interview with Dennis Brutus .....

## BOOK REVIEW ARTICLES

- Shane Moran* To Criticise the Critic: *Disgrace* .....

## BOOK REVIEWS

- Venetia Dlomo* Literature and transformation .....
- Shane Moran* Investing in South Africa .....
- Pravina Pillay* Sound and Fury .....

# Introduction

Shane Moran

The necessity of periodic 'retraining', due to the increasingly rapid change of basic labour skills, now spreads to the domain of intellectual labour; it even creates within the framework of capitalist reforms of the university, marginal tendencies towards permanent part-time study, thereby fulfilling one of Marx's prophecies. But within the limits of the capitalist mode of production, this potential tendency naturally cannot prevail. It is accompanied and stifled by a neutralizing and repressive counter-tendency to make the university and the teaching system as a whole directly 'profitable' (Mandel 1978:581).

Whatever the merits of Mandel's grand narrative, the contentious hypothesis of the incompatibility between life-long learning at the university and profitability is relevant. With this in mind, and as the doors of learning at some historically black universities are closing, I would like to note some general features of the current reforms of South African universities.

What, if any, is the difference between making something 'profitable' and instilling 'efficiency' and due regard for sparse resources? If profitability is equated with financial surplus, an investment ultimately recouped, then, clearly, efficiency demands the quickest possible return. However, it can, as we know, be inefficient to be profitable—that is, to be too profitable and inadvertently inflate or destabilise a market to the point of 'overheating' the values accrued via the virtuous cycle. But, on the other hand, can it ever be profitable to be inefficient? Doubtless inefficiency can function as a self-destructive resistance to invasive modernisation identified with the commodity and sheer instrumentality. It all depends on how you perceive the envisaged returns.

Moreover, the efficiency = profitability equation can be broken down into a form of teleological causality in which the end (profitability) explains the means (efficiency). The direction of this efficient causality is not linear and the means-ends nexus can be reversed, profitability leading to efficiency (the latter now being an effect of the former). It would seem that efficiency is itself as ideal as the end it subserves. In which case we have the following configuration: the effect (profitability) is the determining ground of its own cause (efficiency), or, 'the product of a cause whose determining ground is merely the representation of an effect is termed an end' (Kant 1989:64). In this kind of circularity the intertwined relation of means and ends signals not irrationality but rather a different type of argument from the purely mechanical.

It would seem that the hegemony of the economic genre based on exchange is composite. Consider that the faculty acting according to ends involves a unity of principle usually identified with the will and the purposiveness of human action. Around this voluntaristic agency gathers the inspirational rhetoric of resolution and national unity. Key to the idea of development and transformation is the matter of bringing together and combining the parts as determined by an idea of the whole. From this perspective the end of efficiency/profitability is more than an economic terminus. The drive for competitiveness in a global economy is a means to a greater end connoted by the proleptic slogan 'a better life for all'. In addition the universal aspiration of national-humanism requires that patriotism be distinguished from partisanship, since what is good for the country is not always synonymous with what is good for the ruling party. And in so far as this imperative transcends the national liberation struggle then the end is ultimately the Idea of free humanity. The victory over apartheid is then a sign (*Begebenheit*) of the universal history of humanity progressing toward the better. Even if what ought to happen frequently does not, the obligation to take up the struggle of humanity is an Idea that - like politics - is not (yet) entirely assimilated to economics.

What has this got to do with the alternation of obsolescence and innovation characteristic of the transformation-as-rationalisation process at the University of Durban-Westville? A colleague recently seconded to a lucrative management post (*umungu*) observed to me: 'While management is accountable in terms of financial returns, in terms of performance and delivery academics are strikingly unaccountable. This can't be right, can it?' The dogmatic recoding of academic autonomy in terms of bureaucratic autonomy and the mimesis of the bureaucratic career subordinate to the norms of productivity assumes an evangelical aura. Gramsci's (1971:186) observation that the problem of functionaries partly coincides with that of the intellectuals is confirmed, though in this case the *frôleuse*-like contortions of administrative nihilism take the place of party loyalty. The specious

hope is that the system growing around us will build us into its own body-walls. This antiphlogistic balm of entitlement and opportunism has some other features worthy of a passing introduction.

Self-imposed academic underdevelopment (*ukuvilapha*) perversely proffers a tentative bridge to management and eventual transcendence via the pulverisation of the old and substitution of new relations and unknown possibilities. Inadvertently what is revealed is that 'backward' areas are not anomalous to development; rather they are integral to a process that, although it includes an integration of disparate elements, generates a 'core' and a 'periphery' within the same overall framework (cf. Greenberg 1980). The university as a medley of peoples (they mix but do not combine) manages to provide a unique symmetry to this familiar pattern as the development and growth of the managerial core is dependent upon the stagnation and marginality of the academic periphery. Hence, as the bellicose subservience of my colleague signals, it is essential to incessantly find efficient new ways to reinforce the pre-requisite for coercive supervision and the rhythm of punitive auditing expeditions. Is a chilling vignette of the death-lock of dependency and under-development being played out in the corridors of learning? *Cui bono?*

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\* This edition of *Alternation* on the function of intellectuals is dedicated to the memory of Michael Matsope Makhabane, killed at the University of Durban-Westville, 15th May, 2000.

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## Critique in retreat? Intellectuals and inequality in South Africa

David Hemson

What makes men usually discontented ... is that they do not find the present adapted to the realisation of aims which they hold to be right and just ... they contrast unfavourably things as they are, with their idea of things as they ought to be (Hegel 1956:34-35).

One of the aspects of globalisation has been a tremendous expansion of knowledge and a proportional expansion of 'knowledge workers' who form an increasingly large proportion of the employed. This stratum has acquired vital skills and good education, is well paid, and highly mobile. Intellectuals are in one sense knowledge workers (usually at the lower end of the earnings market) who have an independent sense of their destiny and intellectual activity distinct from their employment, yet they also exist in an environment in which knowledge workers are increasingly absorbed into relationships of power. The transition in South Africa has brought all kinds of openings to intellectuals in the field of government and policy-making as Members of Parliament, highly paid officials, commissioners, etc. Critical intellectuals—those who are committed to sustain their independence and the ability to make critical assessment—have to some extent been excluded from this process. In the field of research, however, there are numerous opportunities in social and public policy that tend to be prioritised by those with orthodox views and with good relations to power. Consultancies reinforce this trend as government, both local and national, seeks solutions for dilemmas not through formulation of policy by direct political means but rather indirectly through experts who research the views of constituents and can involve critical intellectuals. In the field of labour there has been a drain of engaged intellectuals into the field of government which has often been used as a stepping stone into business with an associated transformation in

ideas, ideology, and personal wealth. These opportunities and dilemmas pose a challenge to the intellectual prepared to engage with the labour movement possibly at the cost of involvement in large-scale research work.

Intellectuals, it will be argued here, as critical thinkers could potentially have a decisive influence in the way in which post-apartheid society could be reconstructed; although social pressures operate towards the creation of uncritical engagement. In a sense the ground is ripe for the rise of critical policy makers, as the objective conditions of South African society are moving towards the growing inequality which is the hallmark of globalisation. Many observers of the South African transition initially had a simple minded belief that a liberation movement in power would make fundamental reforms in the interests of the majority. This was what was promised by the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) which was adopted as the election manifesto of the African National Congress in the first election of 1994, and it was imagined that this would be carried through on schedule. Over time, however, the structural reforms in jobs, income, and access to a better life have run into difficulties. Policy positions have also become problematic in relation to AIDS and towards tyrannical regimes in Africa and, along with the deeper social malaise of post-apartheid policy in relation to jobs, housing, and basic services, indicate a desperate disparity between what was fought for and what has been achieved. A brief synopsis of post-apartheid South Africa has to account for the growing disparities in life prospects and wealth that give a razor edge to the political debates of nation-building or racial polarisation.

### globalisation and new levels of inequality

South Africa in its retreating transitional moment is a laboratory for the analysis of social trends, not least of which is the role of intellectuals in either confirming the present compromises or in challenging the structures of inequality and impoverishment. The present reality is a test of strategies for 'structural' reform, and of attempts to bring about change through political participation under the conditions of neo-liberalism. South Africa is still pivotal internationally both in the mind of liberal and social democratic paradigms and, somewhat surprisingly, also has a place in conservative politics and thought as well. The history of segregation and apartheid has appalled thinking people internationally in terms of the categorisation of peoples into ethnic and racial groups, the allocation of privilege or oppression on a racial basis, and its extreme violence. The international anti-apartheid movements arose out of a deep rebellion against what was seen as a form of modern slavery and took on the same political and social significance as the anti-slavery movements of the past. This is the background against which government is being judged in terms of

delivery as recompense for the burden of the past, and the measure by which intellectuals are assessed in giving voice to the needs and demands of the poor and dispossessed.

Recent reports point to stunning differences in life opportunities under the impact of globalisation which is driving income for the better off upwards and for the poor downwards. Food consumption is declining (the rich eat out and the poor cannot afford to buy) while luxury vehicles such as 4x4s, BMWs, and Mercedes-Benz C-class vehicles are at record levels<sup>1</sup>. The decline in consumption is a matter of some controversy; some blame the increased expenditure on cell-phones and lottery tickets, but the Bureau of Economic Research of Stellenbosch University argues that the causes are wider and more complex.

A slowing in household income, rising unemployment, a drop in formal sector employment, heavier tax burdens, higher medical costs, and high real interest rates all make a more decisive contribution. The rich are getting richer and fewer as the poor get more numerous and poorer<sup>2</sup>.

These are the startling results of a post-apartheid period which was premised on a better life for all. The growing burden of unemployment on the African population has not eased and indeed has worsened in the new dispensation. In general more than 20% of the potential labour force was unemployed in 1970 according to the expanded definition of unemployment, but increased to almost 40% in 1995. More recent statistics demonstrate that the situation has not improved. Employment is not growing to meet the demands of the black majority: in the same period employment of non-Africans in the formal sector increased by 45% while African employment declined by just under 4% and African unemployed increased by 160% (cf. Bhorat & Hodge 1999:Table 7).

Subsequent research indicates that there is an increasing tendency in every sector of the economy to employ more highly skilled workers and to retrench the unskilled. These tendencies towards greater employment of 'knowledge workers' with increasingly higher remuneration than manual workers operate to accentuate the privilege of the previously privileged and those relatively few who gain access to the upper levels of the formal sector. For the majority who do not, the marginal 'peripheral labour force' (the informal sector, subsistence agriculture, etc.) has expanded from 24% to 50% during the period 1960-1994 (cf. Van der Berg & Bhorat, 1999:Table 4). According to SA Statistics there has been a massive

expansion in the informal sector, growing 91,5% over the past four years. These are not indices of real growth but, as research has revealed, rather of survivalist strategies which see transfers from the working poor to the very poor as the median income in this sector is R200 (\$25) per month<sup>3</sup>.

These are powerful, if exceedingly sombre, trends in labour market and economy that point to the growing impoverishment of the poor. The gap between rich and poor has been, and still remains, among the widest in the world with the poorest 60% receiving 16% of total income and the richest 10% enjoying 48% (cf. Woolard & Klasen 1997). The indications are that after some advance with the African National Congress coming to power in 1994, and initially carrying out limited welfare measures, there was an improvement in the conditions of the poor. More recently, however, a report of the SA Reserve Bank presents the fact that the poorest 40% have had a decline in income of 21 % in recent years<sup>4</sup>. Although the statistics are difficult to source, it is logical to assume that the rising unemployment, particularly of less skilled workers, must have a particularly depressing effect on rural incomes as remittances decline.

It is frequently argued that the cause of much of South Africa's gross inequalities is in the labour market and it is within the labour market that redress must be sought (cf. Van Den Bergh & Bhorat 1999). The perception is that state regulation in the context of an economy stressed by the pressures of globalisation and the associated processes of liberalisation, casualisation, and privatisation can be less than effective. There has been an enormous growth in labour brokering with the implementation of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act as employers work to lower the cost of the new benefits by reducing workers from permanent to 'variable' (casual) labour. Those active in the reform of labour markets argue that eventually

<sup>3</sup> Poverty and Inequality in South Africa. Report Prepared for the Office of the Executive Deputy President and the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Poverty and Inequality: Final Report. 13 May 1998.

<sup>4</sup> This figure has been used in providing a critique of the present order, but is difficult to source. A search of the SARB Quarterly Bulletins over the past two years does not produce any material about income distribution at all. The official statistics of South Africa do not provide coherent data on incomes, far less on the wealth of individuals. Although the October Household Survey carries income in terms of categories (e.g. above or below R800 a month) it does not provide the absolute amounts and this makes it difficult to work out trends in income over time. Statistics South Africa has, however, published 'Income and expenditure of households', CSS statistical release POIII which provides data on income distribution in 1995. There does not seem to be subsequent information available.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Belt-tightening cuts into food sales, 'Business Report', *Sunday Independent* 8 April 2001; and A state of luxury, *Sunday Times* 8 April 2001.

<sup>2</sup> BER report in *Sunday Times*, 8 April 2001.

the provisions being made for the education and training of workers will feed into the system and that various labour shortages could be filled by trained workers. The problem is that funds for education and training are mounting unspent while retrenchments and casualisation are continuing apace. The education of adult workers (ABET) is at very low levels.

The Reserve Bank argues that the exceedingly poor growth in employment and rising unemployment—'weak labour absorption capacity'—is due to radical restructuring under the pressure of globalisation involving job loss through international competition, capital-intensive production, new technologies, the decline in investment, the 'right-sizing' of the public service, and a shift from primary and secondary sectors towards services<sup>5</sup>. It also notes that new technologies, and particularly information-technology, increase the demand for a small number of highly skilled workers but at the same time lowers the demand for less-skilled workers. This trend, which appears to combine managerial employees and information technologists, leads towards the rapidly increasing incomes of 'knowledge workers' (the managers, consultants, engineers, IT specialists, etc.) who are the 'winners' in the present distorted growth of the economy. In addition there is a sharp increase in the privileges of the ultra-rich consultants and directors exemplified at its uppermost reaches in the exorbitant earnings of the former CEO of SAA, Coleman Andrews whose contracts earned him R232m after less than three years work for the Corporation<sup>6</sup>. These figures are justified by government officials as the inevitable and necessary rewards for global expertise, but they indicate the huge waste of local talent and continued dependence on external competence to the irritation of local business leaders and the anger of the poor.

Such extravagance contrasts with the slow death of workers through casualisation, quixotic policies towards AIDS, the desperation of young criminals, and the wrecking of lives through crime. Many of South Africa's social problems can be traced to the combination of a deprived yet ardent youth consumerism and the colossal inequity between rich and poor. Some argue that it is such a contrast in life opportunities which lead to a culture of seduction and high risk sex which has placed South Africa in the forefront of the AIDS pandemic. This is brought into sharp focus in the contrast between those with the 4x4 lifestyles and the people of impoverished townships who, it is stated, have a culture of non-payment. However, on this last point, research in the form of a survey conducted by the University of the Free State's Centre for Development Support, concludes that non-payment is more about the ability to pay rather than the willingness to do so:

<sup>5</sup> SA Reserve Bank Quarterly Bulletin, March 2001, 219:19-20.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. SAA battle out in the open, *Business Day*, 14 June 2001.

... people found themselves in a cycle of poverty and nonpayment. This was as a result of low incomes, which reduced the assets available for people to use as collateral, and the fact that many people had no savings and high debt levels. These people could not improve their situation because they lacked the skills and education that could lead to them finding jobs<sup>7</sup>.

It is this background which has led to the ferocious responses to cut-offs of water and electricity and which are subjecting urban local democracy to great stress. These aspects of structural adjustment, graphically analysed by Bond (2000), advance without the concession of a social safety net in the form of increased welfare. Although promises are made about the provision of minimum needs in water, the reality of the moment is higher charges for existing services.

Policy directions at the moment are seen by an increasing number of people, including politicians, to be misguided and unintegrated. The recently announced industrial strategy for the manufacturing sector, for instance, carries the following pronouncement:

Strategies that can potentially have a major impact on employment largely lie outside the realm of industrial policy ... enhancing employment through industrial policies is likely to be constrained by largely fixed technical coefficients or labour/capital ratios of technologies utilized ... the role of an industrial strategy is to create the necessary conditions for employment creation, but it is not the necessary and sufficient condition<sup>8</sup>.

In short, industrial growth has little to do with job creation and the satisfaction of human needs; it has become a fetishized thing-in-itself. And more than this, a strategic turn in policy towards colossal expenditure on arms has been undertaken which appears equivalent, and related to, the turn away from the Reconstruction and Development Program. New priorities are superseding electoral promises on welfare and reconstruction and there is as yet no reparation date for the violence of the apartheid state.

### the terrain of discourse

Within the currents of political change which open or close opportunities for new

<sup>7</sup> Xolani Xundu. 14 March 2001. 'Culture of low income' blamed for arrears, *Business Day*.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Ensor 30 May 2001. MPs express fears about job creation. *Business Day*.

directions in society and carry the potential for 'a better life for all', intellectuals can have an important influence on the direction and strength of social change. But intellectuals are themselves not independent actors and are affected by the tides of ideology and the construction of discourses of power. Jürgen Habermas explains the process of interests being reflected in language and action:

From everyday experience we know that ideas serve often enough to furnish our actions with justifying motives in place of the real ones. What is called rationalization at this level is called ideology at the level of collective action. In both cases the manifest content of statements is falsified by consciousness' unreflected tie to interests, despite its illusion of autonomy (Habermas 1972:311).

Critical social science is based on active assumptions about knowledge and human interests with researchers being seen as either conscious or unconscious agents of the operation of wider social forces that act to reinforce or reproduce the existing social order (cf. Habermas 1971:72f). Intellectuals involved in critical evaluation regard themselves as undertaking research to transform social relations by a process of analysis of the underlying forces that keep oppressive relations in place, and the development of empowerment strategies. The critical evaluation researcher is thus action-orientated, working to change the world and transform the social order (Fay 1987). The methods and impetus for evaluation should be free from bureaucratic interests and be sensitive to the interests of the beneficiaries and workers of the programme evaluated. Schumpeter (1940:44) argues that criticism of the existing capitalist order 'proceeds from a critical attitude of an individual'—that is, from allegiance to extra-rational values. It is argued here that such criticism is tied up with the very impasse in society which leads to such gross inequalities, a staggering economy, the exclusion of the majority from reasonable living standards in the midst of plenty, and the reassertion of the discourse of race. This is a critical review based on facts and reason and allowing contrary argument on the same basis.

Habermas presents a simple formulation of the problem of truth, interests and social action; imagining that the 'unreflected tie to interests' could be excluded through discipline and self-reflection that aims at excluding such interests. Habermas gives less attention to the independence of the intellectual from power and appears to rely on the exercise of professional expertise in resolving these tensions. The matter is not, however, so simply resolved as the ideological formations of globalisation have a tripartite power: firstly in the powers of persuasion of agencies having communications skills; secondly in having the desired commodities; and, finally, through the appearance of a lack of any alternative. The crucial question is *how* the rationalisations of interest can be made plain and private interests brought into the

debate of the public sphere. According to C. Wright Mills the necessary elements of such self-clarification include independence, analysis, and ultimately involvement in political action against the stream:

The independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely living things. Fresh perception now involves the capacity to continually unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications [i.e. modern systems of representation] swamp us. These worlds of mass-art and mass-thought are increasingly geared to the demands of politics. That is why it is in politics that intellectual solidarity and effort must be centered. If the thinker does not relate himself to the value of truth in political struggle, he cannot responsibly cope with the whole of lived experience (Mills 1963:299).

Edward Said (who employs this quotation) argues that there is no readily available disinterested centre, that politics is all pervasive and that the intellectual is an individual with the capacity for articulating a message to and for a public. In this context an intellectual is someone prepared to raise 'embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug' (Said 1994:9). These are elevated projections of the intellectual, assuming a high level of critical engagement, resolve and stamina that is exceptional in individuals and even rarer in a whole strata.

Often the self-clarification of intellectuals appears pretentious, of ascribing a greater influence and power than they carry, a conscious knowledge of destiny and position, and too much indulgence and self-absorption. But ideally intellectuals are involved in creating, enlarging, describing and recreating the mental world in which we take stock of ourselves and our society. The critical researcher should develop a critical awareness of those involved in programmes, about practices, social issues and power relationships implicit in the social contexts in which they work:

Empowerment evaluation ... focuses on the educative potential of evaluation, with knowledge providing avenues for power and emancipation of the individual and of groups. The evaluator plays a collaborative and facilitative role that includes advocacy for the work undertaken by the program (Potter 1990:221).

Critical action research involves the aim of taking the understandings and actions of those involved in social action as the basis for developing critical theory. Through the public sphere significance is given the particular issues of our time—for example, the weighing up of social and monetary costs and benefits—in short, key questions of policy and social relevance. To this intellectual activity is ascribed a certain awkwardness, a questioning of contemporary values, a critical sensibility, a certain opposition to established truths, and an amount of controversy. Such are the conditions of critical engagement. But intellectuals are often professionals moving through a variety of planes (policy, academic, professional, political, communication, etc.) providing reward and status relating to individual capacity but also to alignment closer to power.

In the interests of self-preservation and modest advancement the intellectual often prefers the questions of the day to be resolved through amicable discussion and civilised discourse rather than adopt positions against those in power. At a recent United Nations conference on poverty in Southern Africa held in Cape Town a keynote UN speaker argued that the fact that poverty in Southern Africa was being discussed by policy-makers *in itself* indicated that a solution would be reached<sup>9</sup>. Here is evidence of real optimism in the convening of officials and experts, although the road to radical change or even modest reform, however, is rarely reached through quiet discussion alone.

### shifts and mediations

Much has been written about the ambiguous class position of intellectuals; their middle class status, the rise of the 'new' middle class distinct from the traditional middle class particularly in advanced capitalist countries, and whether they could form part of a redefined working class. Basically the traditional middle class intellectuals are found among journalists, doctors and lawyers who live off independent sources of income and are somewhat directly independent of big business in providing public comment on matters of the day, and the rising new middle class was to be found within the state and corporate world as 'employees' of the new order. These debates have been located within analysis of employment data and the nature of advanced capitalist society, but intellectuals are defined subjectively in terms of critical analysis and reflection.

The sociology of intellectuals, their social context, and ideology is explored by Petras (1997) in an insightful analysis of political, intellectual and funding processes. He argues broadly that there has been a metamorphosis of intellectuals in Latin America (and, can we argue, in other continents of the Third World?) from the

Gramscian 'organic intellectuals' of the 1960s to 'institutionalised intellectuals' of the 1980s. The elements of this transformation include: external dependence, competitive tendering for external funds, intellectuals migrating towards centre-left politics, the rise of new research institutes, and a change in the political language and concepts, the entire discourse of left intellectuals have some correspondence with the South African experience and is worth exploring even if there may be significant differences. His views are read as a confirmation of the generally rightward trend among intellectuals from the left to the centre and of their shift from radical expression towards research and policy concerns.

Petras argues that there have been two basic trends among Latin American intellectuals. Firstly there has been the growth of research institutes which have taken up waves of interests: human rights, new social movements, democratisation processes, with each concern increasingly taking direction away from the popular movements and drawing attention away from the politics of imperialism. Secondly, these flourishing, but externally dependent institutes, were pivotal in drawing the organic intellectuals involved in trade unions, student movements, or revolutionary parties into the privileged life of a professional researcher dependent on foreign funding with politically anodyne professional interests. The goal of the funders was to establish ideological hegemony over the Latin American intellectuals, since they were to serve as a major recruiting ground for the centre-left political class. In the transition towards democracy in Latin America these intellectuals avoided class analysis and much of the funding was blatantly ideological, 'freezing the process of transformation to a transaction between conservative civilians and the military'. These institutionalised intellectuals then became the 'prisoners of their own narrow professional desires' and were caught up in a 'vacuous and vicarious internal political life'. From an interest in social transformation they now regarded the essence of politics as bureaucracy and struggle as a matter to be 'contracted, managed and governed'. All of this amounted to the diffusing of emerging class struggles summed up as the 'metaphysics of post-politics'.

This was published originally in 1990 and no doubt much of the emphasis on the external funding, the dominant research institute model, and Latin American politics has changed as a number of the centre-left politicians, as in South Africa, have come to power. The South African experience is often held as illuminating many of the same processes, but it also brings forward other elements. These include a greater absorption of left intellectuals into key positions in the state and the greater attraction of academia. Intellectuals can adopt a certain class position, a place in civil society between power and powerlessness, and can be seen by the poor (even if not by themselves) as an intermediary, a translator (which is often directly the case with the African intellectual), an essential link between the abject subject and the

<sup>9</sup> Interview with UN official, *SAFM*, 27 March 2001.

powerful centre. The African intellectual has a particular challenge as was evident in an animated discussion among worker leaders last year:

We are illiterate, we haven't been through school we don't know how to speak to these people who control our lives [the employers and officials], you are educated and know how to speak to them and sort out our problems. How many of the educated people are prepared to come and struggle with us? None. They are all going away from us to enjoy a better life, but god has sent you to us to help us have a better life for ourselves and our families.

The praise is both desperate and extravagant, working to bind the intellectual to the masses and to the problems of the poor that are often exacting, demanding and difficult to resolve. These are the contradictory pressures on the intellectual who is available to the poor in the semi-colonial world; a demand for leadership, a request for an explanation of the configuration of power, for the mechanisms of access to official society, for communication with the powers that be, for amelioration of their conditions, the accessing of the relevant official, and finally making things change. On other occasions this may involve demands for radical social action in support of community demands. This poses a challenge to the aspiring intellectual caught between an often unsympathetic, indifferent, or hostile order, and an uncomprehending, suffering and determined mass. As the workers recognise, there are few prepared to stay the course.

### participants or apologists

In South Africa a vigorous critique of the transition of left white intellectuals previously closely associated with the labour movement into positions of power or influence has been mounted by Desai and Bomhke (1997). The critique is particularly sharp as these intellectuals were identified as having reinforced the theoretical link between apartheid and capitalism, strengthened the independent labour movement, and helped develop a working class leadership in the struggle for socialism. But at the crucial moment at which a negotiated settlement was being reached, the authors argue, these intellectuals 'turned their attentions towards making the system work' (Desai & Bomhke 1997:14). Their subsequent work is then subjected to criticism (in short) for either seeking stabilisation and increased productivity as priorities for growth, for putting forward the position that class contradictions should be contained rather than eliminated, and for supporting social compacts—positions which were not differentiated from the national leadership of

the African National Congress. Fundamentally the argument centred around the de-linking of intellectuals from the labour movement and their surrender to ideological pressures and to the attraction of power.

The ventilating of these issues caused great controversy precipitating the rupture of relations between the authors and this stratum which is indicative of the growing polarisation among intellectuals as the present neo-liberal policy framework is increasingly challenged. The critique was sharp and sustained, it seems, because of the influence attributed to these intellectuals and the demobilisation of the trade union and township resistance at the time of the negotiations and beyond. Yet the trend towards incorporation in the new order traversed the entire spectrum of political resistance—in one illuminating example a militant trained to work within the Mineworkers Union and build a left leadership now aims to be the richest woman in South Africa. Co-optation, incorporation, compromise apologies and collaboration go well beyond small blocs of white intellectuals. Black intellectuals who have written articles critical of the existing order are silent, and a culture built of veterans wanting to cash in their struggle credits thrives. In the universities the promotion of critical intellectuals into senior positions in administration has unfortunately almost invariably led to intellectual atrophy and often to bitter institutional politics. A milieu has been created in which an entire intellectual and political leadership has become caught up in the entanglements of power and a well-endowed lifestyle (Adam *et al* 1997).

Why should there be such a change in the social relations between intellectuals and the mass movement, in research orientation and in practice? It is worth exploring the current period to illuminate the dilemmas and possibilities present and the role of intellectuals. Analysts generally regard intellectuals as being critical of the capitalist order and search for psychological explanations in schooling and upbringing:

It is surprising that intellectuals oppose capitalism so. Other groups of comparable socio-economic status do not show the same degree of opposition in the same proportions. Statistically, then, intellectuals are an anomaly. Not all intellectuals are on the 'left'. Like other groups, their opinions are spread along a curve. But in their case, the curve is shifted and skewed to the political left (Nozick Jan/Feb 1998).

Reasons for this phenomenon are sought in schooling and upbringing. Yet the leftward and critical aspect of intellectuals is debatable since the present acceptance of the market priorities of globalisation appears to have been extraordinarily thorough-going. If there has been a wholesale shift from a tendency towards criticism of capitalism to its uncritical acceptance, this requires some explanation.



The first point to be made is that in South Africa critical intellectuals have been relatively isolated by the political shift towards a negotiated settlement and its various compromises. The thundering endorsement of the African National Congress in the first election provided a certain endorsement of the 'peace process' and subsequent compromises with the old order. The official labour movement to which they were often attached was associated with all the negotiations and gradually became, after some resistance, more accepting of their subordinate position; proud of the union leaders in power and expectant that over time many of their basic demands would be acceded to. Both the labour movement and intellectuals were changing and the existing official labour movement caught up in the compromises of the time, in investment funds, and in permanent negotiations in NEDLAC. Individual factors also have a social significance. Union leaders expect just the same upward mobility in the political realm as other aspirant politicians and the social mobility of individuals becomes the basis on which the labour movement stalls.

The basis on which social change can be secured is also now challenged. In the past intellectuals have defended the nation-state as the basis on which reforms and development strategies are enacted. But writers such as Castels (2000) now argue that the nation-state is no longer a defence against the trends associated with globalisation (financial instability, social inequality, changes in the labour regime against the interests of workers, de-industrialisation, etc.) which marginalise development strategies and social reform. Indeed in his view the state is the instrument through which the rule of globalised capital is enforced. As the conventional approaches to social reform have declined, intellectuals have accommodated themselves to current circumstances and established power.

### the privilege of criticism

The intellectuals identified as crucial to the transition by and large did not have a leadership role within the movement and saw themselves as advisers and supporters of trade unions which were increasingly taking their own direction. Some were certainly instrumental in fostering the idea that there could be strategic reforms through necessary compromises which would set society in South Africa on the path of sustained growth and development. This expressed more theoretically the state of mind of most labour movement leaders. But if intellectuals lost influence in the labour movement this did not exclude them from participating in the debate of the extraordinary variety of policy issues which were freshly addressed even as the macro-economic framework was becoming fixed. Intellectuals of all kinds were and are under pressure to contribute towards resolving major social problems or in proposing alternative policies, to turn from a position of resolute criticism to finding solutions. The questions are often posed: 'What are you doing for your country? Its

all very well to criticise but how are you making a contribution?' Specifically the following letter appeared in the *Mail and Guardian*:

... criticising the government and the head of state under the facade of intellectual independence is gradually losing its fashionableness. When we raise our dissatisfactions on matters of national importance (something which is natural and accepted in any democratic society such as ours), should we not also suggest decisive and practical solutions that will take this country forward?<sup>10</sup>

Intellectuals who have fought to bring about the new dispensation are vulnerable to such appeals, although they may find their solutions not always taken seriously. They desire to participate in reconstruction and development; to make their contribution, to be associated with the socio-political shift to majority rule, to assist in developing the new democratic order, to employ their intellect and skills in positively reshaping policy, to constructively support the transformation project. More venally they are also not unattracted by the prospect of being close to power, assuming lucrative official positions, and gathering at the remuneration pool of consultancies.

After having being alienated from the state for a whole period they also have an intellectual curiosity about how society changes, how the state actually works, and the relationship between the intellectual and power. Surely they have the necessary skills and strength to contribute without losing their critical edge? While there is often evidence of intelligent debate it remains within relatively official circles, increasingly caught within the narrower ranges of possibilities within the existing order. The edge of critical intellect is soon dulled by the need for yet another report aimed at eminently practical concerns and targeted at the wide gulf between 'where we are' and 'where we could be'. And, finally, the intellectual as researcher, as in the Latin American case, is excited by the possibility of funding which may become available for comprehensive research programs. Research funding is closely linked to established national priorities and requires contacts and skills to access the necessary funds, to ease open the guarded doors of information and data, and provide a broad spectrum of analysis and original critique, with the attractive (although not guaranteed) possibility of remedial action. Pragmatism has become espoused as a method of research and a philosophical approach to difficult social problems (cf. Hyslop 1998).

<sup>10</sup> Nkosana Sibuyi, employed by GCIS (Government Communication and Information Systems), *Mail and Guardian*, 22-28 June 2001.

The general tendency towards engagement in policy matters makes it clear that some intellectuals, at one level, regard the main problem of capacity as lying within the state rather than within communities and unions. This has, however, blunted their critical engagement with the existing order and their ability to examine and possibly propose alternatives to this order. Many have made a personal transition from exile and marginality to central decision-making—regular flights to and from Pretoria—to assist policy-makers in framing new methods and in implementation. There is a growing pilgrimage of many intellectuals from labour movement to political involvement to public position to public official to consultancy or business (cf. Webster & Adler 1998). The movement is ultimately from labour and community interests to those of business, and transitions in the opposite direction have yet to be discovered.

The relationship between knowledge and power is central to the debate about the role of intellectuals. The attraction of academics to consultancy work, in particular in the evaluation of projects and other forms of commissioned work, has the potential for bringing to the lecture theatre the policy questions of the moment but also of distorting priorities to suit personal interests. Consultancy research has to be narrowly focused and the findings pitched within the range of the feasible. From an academic perspective it also seems that the engagement in consultancy work tends to lower the number of peer reviewed publications in research institutes as journal editors and peer reviewers demand higher standards than the agencies who commission research. Consultancies involve what Petras (1997) identifies as a continual struggle between professional opportunism and political commitment both in the nature of work and in time. The existing practices of consultancy are strongly criticised by black students who feel excluded from remunerated research, raising questions about capacity-building and advocacy in research.

### conclusion

In my introduction the stark statistics of inequality and poverty were presented as an opening to the issues engaging intellectuals in South African society. As society internationally is increasingly polarised around the poles of wealth and poverty, knowledge workers are gathering around the upper pole and the intellectuals among them are drawn into global inequalities. Critical intellectuals have to be aware of the questions of perverse growth in economy and society, the growing gulf between rich and poor, black and white, rural and urban, educated and uneducated. The working class itself is also becoming differentiated between the organised employed, the rapidly growing casualised layer, and the unemployed. It is these inequalities and growing unemployment which are refracted in complex ways in the polarising discourses of race. Knowledge workers generally are the servants of power, caught

up in social processes they accelerate but don't control. Intellectuals should be aware that behind the apparently remorseless tides a wide field for critique and social action remains. Intellectuals are engaged in understanding the social field we occupy, of conveying significances from the global to the local, in adhering or resisting the social and political power, confirming or widening the spheres of action.

Poverty, for instance, is a wider social condition than low income. Chambers (1995) argues that there are various dimensions to poverty, the most obvious being the question of low income, but also including a wide range of other features of social and political indicators of poverty such as social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonality, powerlessness and humiliation. As well as the material factors are included those relating to social conditions which form part of the discourses of the moment: patriarchy, violence, oppression and stigma. In societies where there has been a contestation with ancient oppressions, as in Kerala state in India, there has been remarkable social progress even on a relatively stagnant economic base. The social and political still form a basis for engagement and change. Certainly the destiny of individuals and society is tied up with their life prospects, and whether there is sufficient material basis for hope. The mother of Kondile Sizwe, slaughtered by agents of the apartheid regime, has made the following statement:

It is easy for Mandela and Tutu to forgive ... they lead vindicated lives. In my life nothing; not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians ... nothing. Therefore I cannot forgive (Krog 1998:109).

Two points arise here: firstly the class differentiation between those who are in the category where forgiveness is possible, and, secondly, the illustration of the point that society is based on a myriad compromises between wealth and poverty—a compromise felt to be impossible by this victim. The latter point leaves society hanging in the balance, between the hundred daily compromises and impending confrontation.

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## Nationalism and feminism: Anne McClintock's reading of South Africa

Sikhumbuzo Mngadi & Tamlyn Monson

... the most radical programs of a deconstruction that would like, in order to be consistent with itself, not to remain enclosed in purely speculative, theoretical, academic discourses but rather ... to aspire to something more consequential, to *change* things and to intervene in an efficient and responsible, though always, of course, very mediated way, not only in the profession but in what one calls the *cite*, the *polis* and more generally the world. Not, doubtless, to change things in the rather naïve sense of calculated, deliberate and strategically controlled intervention, but in the sense of maximum intensification of a transformation in progress, in the name of neither a simple symptom nor a simple cause. In an industrial and hyper-technologized society, academia is less than ever the monadic or monastic ivory tower that in any case it never was (Derrida 1992:8-9).

In her essay, "No Longer in a Future Heaven": women and nationalism in South Africa', Anne McClintock (1991:109) focuses on the Afrikaner *Vrouemonument* (Women's Monument): 'erected in homage to the female victims of the (Anglo-Boer) war,' in which, '[i]n a circular enclosure, women stand weeping with their children'. McClintock theorises the image of weeping Afrikaner women in gender terms, as a by-product of Afrikaner patriarchal condescension, in which women were given a domesticated heroine status, in spite of historical evidence pointing to their having participated on the front-line of the war. Her aim is to go beyond the

privileging of well-worn critical choreographies which ignore the ambiguities of power by 'traffic(king) in the abstract Centre and Periphery' without evoking, as she would prefer, 'the multiple, contradictory constructions of subjectivity ... crisscrossed by myriad differences and loyalties' (McClintock 1991:123).

We will argue that, however well-intentioned, this commentary elides some of the intersubjective intimacies that nationalism(s) share with class, ethnicity and sexuality; even though McClintock cautions against such an elision in her essay. In the tradition of McClintock's interest in the contexts of names, a tradition firmly established by her two interventions in cultural-political critique<sup>1</sup>, this speculative essay is concerned with the names 'nationalism and feminism' and their particular non-generalisable cultural-political contexts.

### mothers and renegades

The opening line of McClintock's (1991:104) essay, '[a]ll nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous', establishes a clear theoretical-political agenda. Nothing is to be taken for granted. Nationalisms are not, as Benedict Anderson argues, 'imagined communities'. Far from being 'phantasmagorias of mind'—the 'term "imagined" carries in its train connotations of fiction and make-believe, moonshine and chimera'—'nationalisms', as Ernest Gellner (1991:104) has argued, 'invent nations where they do not exist'. 'Women', McClintock (1991:105) argues, citing Frantz Fanon in 'Algeria Unveiled', relate to the nation as its "'bearers", its boundary and symbolic limit, but lack a nationality of their own ... serve to represent the limits of national difference between men'. As bearers, however, women do so without being made to feel that they are bearing a burden. Citing Nira Yuval Davis, she highlights five ways in which women bear a nation:

- \* as biological reproducers of national groups (the biological mothers of the people);
- \* as symbols and signifiers of national difference in male discourse ('Singapore Girl, you're a great way to fly');
- \* as transmitters and producers of the cultural narratives themselves (mothers, teachers, writers, playwrights, artists);
- \* as reproducers of the boundaries of the nation (by accepting or refusing sexual intercourse or marriage with prescribed groups of men);

<sup>1</sup> With Rob Nixon, 'No Names Apart' in *Critical Inquiry* (1986:140-154), and 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the term "Post-colonialism"' in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A reader* (1993:291-304).

- \* as active participants in national movements: in armies, congresses, trade union activism, community organizations (McClintock 1991:104f).

Because her argument centres, primarily, on the two nationalisms in South Africa, namely, Afrikaner (sometimes 'white') and African (sometimes 'black') nationalisms, and the different ways in which they related to women/women related to them, her argument is primarily a racially orientated one. Yet she is also aware of the intimacies that race shared (and continues to share) with class, generation, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, etc. In this regard, her primary focus is constantly under erasure, which sharpens her dialectic approach to race itself, as a subjectivity that must be simultaneously strategically occupied and resisted:

In South Africa, certainly, women's relations to the competing national narratives and struggles have taken a number of *intricate and changing historical shapes*, contests in which women are themselves deeply involved, and which have profound implications for the future of a transformed South Africa (McClintock 1991:106; e.a.).

This last point prompts our appraisal of her argument now (in the 'future' her article historicises) as part of the renegotiation of those intricate and changing historical shapes.

McClintock dates the invention of Afrikaner nationalism to the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century, after the devastation of the Anglo-Boer War:

Violently impoverished in the shocked aftermath of the war, Afrikaner nationalism was a doctrine of crisis. After their defeat by the British, the bloodied remnants of the scattered Boer communities had to forge a new counter-culture if they were to survive in the emergent capitalist state. The invention of this counter-culture had a clear class component. When the Boer generals and the British capitalists swore blood brotherhood in the Union of 1910, the raggle-taggle legion of 'poor whites' with little or no prospects, the modest clerks and shopkeepers, the small farmers and poor teachers, the intellectuals and petite bourgeoisie, all precarious in the new state, began to identify themselves as the vanguard of a new Afrikanerdom, the chosen emissaries of the national volk (McClintock 1991:106).

How this 'new Afrikanerdom' was forged is a matter of well-documented knowledge. Suffice to say that it was a combination of borrowings from High Dutch, 'kumbuistaal' (kitchen language) of the slaves, Ngunis and Khoisan, the symbolism

of the Great Trek, Aryan Brotherhood-type Broederbond (brotherhood) and a plethora of popular memories of persecution and notions of divine sanction and manifest racial destiny. For McClintock (1991:107) this new invention 'had a clear gender component'. The re-enactment of the Great Trek in 1938, she points out, enacted simultaneously what was to become a thoroughly masculine Afrikaner history and nation:

No wagon was named after an adult woman, but one was called, generically, *Vrou en Moeder* (Wife and Mother). This wagon, creaking across the country, symbolized woman's relation to the nation as indirect, mediated through her social relation to men, her national identity lying in her unpaid services, through husband and family, to the volk (McClintock 1991:107).

Besides this wagon's name, the only other tributes to Afrikaner women were the name 'Eeufesia' (Centenaria) that was given to baby girls born during the Great Trek re-enactment, and the 'Vrouemonument' (Women's Monument), 'erected in homage to the female victims of the war'. The symbolism of the monument, McClintock observes, inscribes '[i]n a circular enclosure, women stand(ing) weeping with their children'. Moreover,

[i]n the iconography of the monument, women's martial status as fighters and farmers was purged of its indecorously militant potential and replaced by the figure of the lamenting mother with babe in arms. The monument enshrined Afrikaner womanhood as neither militant nor political, but as suffering, stoical, and self-sacrificial. Women's disempowerment was figured not as expressive of the politics of gender difference, stemming from colonial women's ambiguous relation to imperial domination, but as emblematic of national (that is, male) disempowerment. By portraying the Afrikaner nation symbolically as a weeping woman, the mighty male embarrassment of military defeat could be overlooked, and the memory of women's vital efforts during the war washed away in images of feminine tears and maternal loss (McClintock 1991:109).

This took place even when South Africa was rapidly industrialising, and 'white working-class women were drawn into the factories in large numbers, discovering a taste for independence, and ceasing to wreck their father's rod':

As in Victorian Britain, a revamped ideology of motherhood was invoked to usher women back into the home, and thereby into unwaged service to

fathers, husbands, and sons [and as] readers of *Huisgenoot*, ... women began the enormous task of transforming every aspect of daily life into the ciphers of the Afrikaner spirit (McClintock 1991:110).

Because of this, she avers,

[t]he idea of 'motherhood' in Afrikaner nationalism was not a concept imposed willy-nilly on hapless, inert women. Rather, motherhood is a political concept, under constant contest. This is important for two reasons. Erasing Afrikaner women's historic agency also erases their historic complicity in the annals of apartheid. White women were not the weeping bystanders of apartheid history, but were active participants in the invention of Afrikaner identity. As such they were complicit in deploying the power of motherhood in the exercise and legitimation of white domination. White women were jealously and brutally denied any formal political power, but were compensated by their limited authority in the household. Clutching this small power, they became complicit in the racism that suffuses Afrikaner nationalism. This is a major reason why black South African women are justly suspicious of any easy assumption of universal, essential sisterhood. White women are both colonized and colonizers, ambiguously complicit in the history of African dispossession (McClintock 1991:110).

In 1961, as she observes, the fact that Afrikaner women were exhorted to 'Have a Baby for Republic Day' further bolsters her basic point. And of the status of white women within Afrikaner nationalism: 'one cannot forget the few renegades who have militantly crossed into the forbidden territory of anti-apartheid activism: in Black Sash, the Mass Democratic Movement and the ANC' (1991:111).

The picture drawn of the relation of (African) women to African nationalism is progressively differentiated from that of white women. Here there is movement from acquiescence to rejection of parternalistic notions of motherhood and its corollaries:

At the outset the ANC, like Afrikaner nationalism, had a specific class component. Drawn from the tiny urban intelligentsia and petite bourgeoisie, its members were mostly mission-educated teachers and clerks, small businessmen and traders.

While the language of the ANC was the inclusive language of national unity, the Congress was in fact male, exclusive, and hierarchical, ranked by an upper house of chiefs (which protected traditional patriarchal authority through descent), a lower house of elected representatives (all male), and an

executive (all male) .... Women could join as 'auxiliary members' but were denied formal political representation, as well as the power to vote (McClintock 1991:114).

Even after women had in 1913 'marched mutinously on Bloemfontein' to protest against the imposition of passes on them, and had formed, on their political initiative, 'the Bantu Women's League of the African National Congress in 1918', they still were denied voting rights within the ANC. It was not until their insistence that the ANC 'granted women full membership and voting rights in 1943'. This, however, did not automatically give women equal status with their male counterparts, despite the historical fact that what became the substance of the ANC Freedom Charter was 'inspired' by the Women's Charter, formed in the wake of the 1956 women's march on Pretoria, and 'calling for land redistribution, for worker benefits and union rights, housing, food subsidies, the abolition of child labour, universal education, the right to vote, and equal rights with men in property, marriage, and child custody'. Pronouncements of the recognition of women, McClintock notes, had not gone beyond pacifist notions of 'mother of the nation', and of women as 'auxiliary members', at least not until Oliver Tambo declared in 1955 that

... the Women's League was no longer a mere appendage to the ANC, and ... broke taboo ground by deploring the 'outmoded customs' that hobble women, and broached the vexed issue of domestic labor, urging fellow Congressmen to relieve women 'in their many family and household burdens so that women may be given an opportunity of being politically active' (McClintock 1991:114-115).

Thus, in African nationalism, despite the similarities in the 'presiding ideology of motherhood' through which women's subjectivities in both Afrikaner and African nationalisms were mediated, 'the ideology of the "mother of the nation" differs in some important respects from the iconography of the volksmoeder in Afrikaner nationalism' (1991:116).

Recall that for McClintock (1991:110) Afrikaner women acquiesced to a glorified male construction of motherhood that reinforced their undervalued relation to an ostensibly male nationalism. This acquiescence did not mean that Afrikaner women were thus victims of 'a concept imposed willy-nilly on hapless, inert women'. However, in the hands of African women within the ANC, this same concept acquired a redefined political status. McClintock informs us that 'African women ... embraced, transmuted, and transformed the ideology in a variety of ways, working strategically within traditional ideology to justify untraditional public

militancy'. One example she gives is of an 'anti-pass pamphlet of the 1950s [which] couched women's indecorously insurgent defiance within the decorous language of domestic duty: "As wives and mothers we condemn the pass laws and all that they imply"'. Moreover, unlike Afrikaner women,

African women appealed to a racially inclusive image of motherhood in their campaigns to fashion a non-racial alliance with white women. A Federation of South African Women pamphlet of 1958 exhorted white women: 'In the name of humanity, can you as a woman, as a mother, tolerate this?' In 1968 Albertina Sisulu appealed impatiently to white women: 'A mother is a mother, black or white. Stand up and be counted with other women' (McClintock 1991:116).

African women, 'unlike their Afrikaans counterparts' were less mothers of the nation than 'mothers of revolution' (McClintock 1991:116). This was because for them systematic state harassment and violence traversed the private and public spaces similarly. McClintock (1991:117) quotes an interview which appeared in an ANC's women's magazine *Speak*, in which 'leaders of the ANC Women's Section warned of the very real danger of exclusively glamorising the profession of motherhood: "We must not assume that every woman is a wife or mother. This is a weakness. It arises from our tradition"'. Thus, 'On August 9, 1985, the twenty-ninth anniversary of South African Women's Day, the ANC's Women's Section called on women to "take up arms against the enemy. In the past we have used rudimentary home-made weapons like petrol bombs. Now is the time that we use modern weapons"'. McClintock concludes:

Black women's relation to nationalism has significantly shifted over the years. At the outset, women were denied formal representation; then their volunteer work was put at the service of the national revolution, still largely male. Gradually, as a result of women's own insurrections, the need for women's full participation in the national liberation movement was granted, but women's emancipation was still figured as the handmaiden of the national revolution. Only recently has women's empowerment been recognized in its own right, distinct from the national, democratic, and socialist revolution. Only recently has women's empowerment come to be seen as a separate, independent, and indispensable element of the full social transformation of the nation (McClintock 1991:117).

We will return to this gesture of solidarity.

### feminist imperialism and magazines

The last section of McClintock's essay explores what she calls 'Feminism as Imperialism'. The main thrust of this section is summed up by her citation of Chandra Mohanty, who 'has decried the appropriation of the struggles of women of color by hegemonic white women's movements, specifically through the production of the category "Third World woman" as a singular, monolithic, and paradigmatically victimized subject' (1991:120)<sup>2</sup>. In this spirit, McClintock makes the point that:

There is not only one feminism, nor is there only one patriarchy. Feminism is not transhistorical, any more than nationalism is. History reveals myriad feminisms, and all take very different contexts. Feminism is imperialist when it puts the interests and needs of privileged women in imperialist countries above the local needs of disempowered women and men, when it operates within the terms of imperial power, borrowing from patriarchal privilege. If theories of nationalism have tended to ignore gender as a category constitutive of nationalism itself, so too have some feminist tendencies (largely white and middle-class) ignored race and class as categories constitutive of gender (1991:120).

It is perhaps not an extraordinary observation to make that where discourses of race and gender are concerned (and any such discourses which constitute points of political-theoretical contestation), a certain amount of essentialism<sup>3</sup> cannot be

<sup>2</sup> In an essay not included in the list of references, Mohanty is said to have 'argued brilliantly' that 'assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of western scholarship on the "third world" in the context of a world system dominated by the west, on the other, characterize a sizable extent of western feminist work on women in the third world' (McClintock 1991:120-121). South African feminists, among others Sisi Maqagi in 'Who Theorizes?' (1996:27-30) and Desiree Lewis in 'The Politics of Feminism in South Africa', (1996:91-106) have proffered versions of these arguments.

<sup>3</sup> It is this recognition which led Stuart Hall (cited in Azoulay 1996:137) to assert that: 'Political identity often requires the need to make conscious commitments. Thus it may be necessary to momentarily abandon the multiplicity of cultural identities for more simple ones around which political lines have been drawn. You need all the folks together, under one hat, carrying one banner, saying we are for this, for the purpose of this fight, we are all the same, just black and just there'.

avoided, lest one falls into infinite anti-foundationalist regress<sup>4</sup>. And McClintock's (1991:111) article refuses concession to 'white' women broadly and, white Afrikaner women in particular, if giving it grudgingly to 'the few renegades who have militantly crossed into forbidden territory of anti-apartheid activism: in Black Sash, the Mass Democratic Movement and the ANC'. The article, it must be noted, was published in 1991, when it was becoming evident that the apartheid minority regime, to use its crude terminology, could no longer promise its predominantly 'white' conservative constituency protection from 'blacks'. As is evident from the above quotations, McClintock is not making a simple case for a universal feminism that must realise that its (universal) future does not lie with a (universal) gendered national consciousness but, rather, a case which reminds us that the futures of feminism have always been drawn from specific positions of power (racial, class, and first worldist for example). In this spirit we do feel that, at the present historical juncture, it might be salutary to 'close ranks', as it were, without being either overly ungenerous with the analysis of crucial markers of power, in particular those relating to class and 'white', or without being overly generous with accolades where 'blackness' is concerned.

In McClintock's article the fields of 'whiteness' and of 'blackness' are, understandably, separate; the crucial point that it would be dangerous, indeed unnecessary, to elide race in order that a universal sisterhood can be used to sweep historical tensions under the carpet. With this understanding in mind, she moves to fix the space of black African womanhood as a repository of progressive feminist consciousness, and white women enter this space as 'renegades'. What is lost in the insistence that we see and talk about gender questions under the sign of a generalised notion of what constitutes progressive political affiliation? What *was* the Mass Democratic Movement, the United Democratic Front or the Black Sash, and the ANC? More precisely, what were the voices within these political formations?

Another crucial question we want to open a bit more is one that relates to the cultural capital whereby nationalism, in particular Afrikaner nationalism, sought to legitimate its gender bias. In the article, McClintock (1991:110) makes the point that Afrikaner women, 'as readers of *Huisgenoot* ... began the enormous task of transforming every aspect of daily life into the ciphers of the Afrikaner spirit', while, on the other hand, African women read *Speak*, a more radical feminist journal. While the cultural significance of *Huisgenoot* in reinforcing certain stereotypical

<sup>4</sup> Sisi Maqagi's (1996:27-30) response to Cecily Lockett's paper on the political usefulness of French linguistic theories/theories of signification to the agendas of feminism in South Africa (1996:3-26) echoes Hall's anxiety with regard to a certain universalising theoreticism.

ways of conceiving the values attached to gender difference can hardly be challenged, there is a sense in which McClintock elides a crucial comparison with *Bona* and *Pace*. The latter were, and remain, two of the most influential magazines which targeted 'Black' consumers on a similar scale as *Huisgenoot* did 'White Afrikaner' readers, and whose pinups of naked women, women using skin lighteners, muscular men, and readers sending their pictures for publication, sometimes showing lightened skin, standing next to a flashy car or showing a well-etched torso, have continued to be objects of desire and identification among their readers. Of course *Speak* was characterised by a very specific feminist agenda, and by implication, was also a critical commentary on the aforementioned magazines. But the affinity between 'white' and 'black' representations raises an important issue:

The 'masses' ... have become individual historical subjects, at least in western capitalist societies, not so much through the representative organs of parliamentary democracy ... but through the diverse modalities of urban popular culture. It is there that the greatest exercise in the powers of individual and local choice and taste has been realized, effectively remaking the field of culture in a far more extensive fashion than the presence of the 'masses' in the more restricted field of politics has so far achieved. To adopt this perspective is to raise questions about the understanding of power and politics in the everyday world. Perhaps the particular histories of cultures and politics in Britain, and elsewhere in the West, suggest that *it is not a more political culture that is needed but rather a culture that interrupts and interrogates the existing codification of the 'political'*. This would be to reiterate and reinforce the Gramscian proposition that it is 'civil society that makes 'political society' possible (Chambers 1996:205, ea.)

The question, of course, is the extent to which this applies to 'non-Western' societies and, indeed, whether one can retain such a strict distinction between 'Western' and 'non-Western' societies while acknowledging the transnational rubric of capitalism<sup>5</sup>. At any rate, the point that it is not a more political culture that is needed but rather a culture that interrupts and interrogates the existing codification of the 'political', seems to us to apply with equal force to any interrogation of the roles which the

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Hall, in 'The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity' (1991:19-40), seems to suggest that capitalisms create locals as repositories of the logic of exchange and demand.

magazines such as *Huisgenoot*, *Bona* and *Pace* have played in the creation of the needs of particularly working and petty bourgeois classes.

There is surely a danger in the assumption that texts such as *Speak* and/or *Vukani Makhosikazi*, because of their avowed feminist positioning, have access to an exemplary feminism. To *read* these texts is to begin to engage the structural and ideological anomalies in documentary discourse, for instance, but also to begin to disentangle the term *woman* in specific instances of its articulations. If the predominantly American soap operas, for instance, or the visual discourses that they may be seen to have propelled on the local cultural scene, reinforce well-worn stereotypes relating to a range of social signifiers, including woman and man, perhaps the discourse of 'stereotypes' is not a sufficient one with which to sustain this engagement, and to explain why such images continue to have a strong purchase on mainly working and petty bourgeois classes, men and women (the question of proportion is beside the point). In this light, perhaps it will be more useful to look at the critical grammars themselves, instead of collapsing what may be very complex voices (conservative, liberal, rad-lib, lib-rad, conservative-radical, all of these simultaneously, etc.), into 'renegade', 'mass democratic', or 'united democratic'. In the hope of addressing some of these issues we turn now to look beyond McClintock's immediate argument at some of the instances in which African womanhood has been figured.

### figuring women

The preface of *Vukani Makhosikazi: South African women speak* announces the text as 'written by a group of Johannesburg women who have participated in a women's study group since 1979'. 'We are', the authors introduce themselves,

Jane Barrett: General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union.

Aneene Dawber: Speech and hearing therapist and part-time worker with Christian women's groups.

Barbara Klugman: Researcher at the Health Information Centre.

Ingrid Obery: Editor at South African Research Services.

Jennifer Schindler: Researcher at the South African Institute of Race Relations.

Joanne Yawitch: Rural field worker at the Black Sash.

Concerning the project, the authors inform that

In 1982 the Catholic Institute of International Relations asked us to write a short booklet on women in South Africa as part of a series. As *white intellectuals with university training* we felt the booklet was a *good opportunity* to share with *our fellow South Africans*, some of the substantial research we had done on *women* in South Africa. The challenge was then to rewrite academic work in an *interesting way*, accessible to others who were also concerned with change in South African society and women's position in it.

Through our work and broader involvement we recognised the need to *document the experience of women in South Africa*. Also, that it was necessary to *understand their oppression as Africans, as members of the working class and as women*. We agreed to focus the book on African women since this would reflect the experience of the women most abused by the process of apartheid and capitalism, the women who are at the centre of the struggle for meaningful change.

Although we locate the position of women within a class framework, in the book we draw out those factors which comprise their specific burden. These include the assumption of differing sexual roles in the family and male dominance in sexual relationships. As a result women shoulder responsibility for the household and children. Women are also drawn into the labour market at the lowest levels of employment—capital conveniently assumes that they are supplementary earners within the family (Barret *et al* 1985:v).

The study, thus, states as the methodology by which it constitutes its subject, the 'document[ation]' of the 'experience' of women in South Africa and, in particular, 'African women', who are 'most abused by the process of apartheid and capitalism, the women who are at the centre of the struggle for meaningful change' (1985:v). In the first chapter, entitled 'Stamped and dated lives', Tryphina Lesea, one of the women whose life is told

... sat quietly in the Black Sash Advise office. She folded her hands in her lap. She told her story calmly. But her story reflects the desperation which many South Africans feel because of the pass laws (Barret *et al* 1985:7).

The authors continue to make the point that:

Although she has lived a relatively peaceful life in the city, Tryphina is in serious trouble. For neither her residence, nor her employment, have ever

been reflected in the reference book (pass book) which she took out in 1964.

Because of this, officials will not believe that she is an urban resident who should have the right to live and work in Johannesburg. If arrested for a pass offence, she would probably be deported to Frankfort, where she was born. She has not returned to Frankfort since 1964 (Barret *et al* 1985:7f).

In her own words, another informant, Sara Sibisi, tells a 'common' story:

I was born in 1946 at a place near Klaserie in the Northern Transvaal. Until I was 13 years old we worked and lived on a white farm. The life there was hard, but even so we had our own plot to plough, and we had some cows and some sheep. Then we were chased off the farm. The farmer just told us to go—he gave us no reason at all. What could we do? We just went.

We trekked to this village and got a plot. They promised us land but it never came. Our troubles really started here. My youngest brother got sick. He swelled up and died. He was only a baby. It was hunger. It was really painful. Then my other sister.

My father was working on the mines at that time. But there was little money. As soon as I could I decided to go and work and help my family with food and the other necessities.

So in 1963 I went to Jo'burg and found a job. I was very lucky at that time. It was before the passes were so heavy.

I went on contract and worked in Southdale. Then the people left. They went to Durban. It was in 1970. I went to stay with my aunt in Soweto.

I had piece-jobs for some time. Then I had my firstborn. I went home at that time. Since then I have never found a job. Not a proper job.

When I ask at the commissioner they say only farm work. City jobs are only available from the commissioner's office. The work on the farms it is heavy, and the money is little. It can kill people.

I tried to go back to Soweto without a contract and work. But it is harder than ever before. Many madams are scared now. They say they'll get caught if they have a 'girl' without a pass. I tried at the pass office. But they just say I must go home. There is no work for 'girls' from the homelands.

I was arrested too. That was bad. So I came home. Maybe I will work on the farms. But only for a while. It's bad (Barret *et al* 1985:8-9).



And consider Lena Msini's dilemma at the hands of the same system:

Mr. Harlan Msini ... is a crippled African factory worker who resides in Paarl in the Cape province. His wife, Lena Msini, however, is not legally entitled to live with her husband, since, on marrying, she became at once the wife of a 'disqualified person'—a disqualified person being a person who has not earned the right of permanent residence by serving ten years in continuous employment with the same employer. Since her relation to the national rights of residence and work is entirely mediated through the marriage relation, Mrs. Msini was told she could live legally with her husband only when he had qualified. Summarily banished from Paarl, Mrs. Msini set out for the bleak Dordrecht location in the Eastern Cape, where she had been born, to wait.

In July 1970, when Mr. Msini became a 'qualified' person, the headman at Dordrecht sent Mrs. Msini to live with her husband at Paarl. At a stroke, falling now under the tutelage of her husband, she forfeited her right to live in Dordrecht, the place of her birth. Yet in Paarl, at the whim of the local bureaucracy, she received only a 'temporary permit', and this permit was not renewed. In November Mrs. Msini was charged with living illegally in the area. She was ordered out of Paarl and banished once more to Dordrecht. In Dordrecht, however, she was given only a temporary permit. This soon expired and was not renewed. In short, Mrs. Msini had entered the impossible nowhere-land of permanent illegality inhabited by thousands of South Africa's 'displaced people'. As the 'superfluous appendage' of her husband's labor, in the notorious official terminology, there is not one inch of her native South African soil on which she can legally tread (Barrett *et al* 1991:112f).

We have quoted at length from the cases presented before us as evidence of the 'difficult' life of many Black South Africans 'without documents', with the impact on Black women even more strongly felt. Even though this situation could be said to have been 'common', as the authors put it, the scene in which this common situation is made to play itself out, and to be mediated by the informants, is one that the authors have determined. Thus, it is important to trace what seems to us to be an *intransitive structure of feeling* that shapes that mediation itself, and to ponder its merits and implications for the shifts towards the militancy of later chapters. Crucial, of course, is the critical grammar that the book adopts, a grammar that seems to determine its choices.

For *Vukani Makhosikazi*, with its totally depressed domestic workers, this means that the women whose photographs we see and whose stories we read, may

very well be the constructing gaze returning to itself, and not evidence of the book's conclusions. Indeed, it seems to us that the movement of the book from a totally depressed situation to one of mass unionisation, is made easy by the evacuation of the civil socio-cultural scene (if not its representation as entirely politically denied/impossible), and the romanticisation of the narrowly political one, as though they were mutually exclusive. Part of the difficulty lies in precisely the words with which one can articulate outrage, without the penalties of the binary structure that Ania Loomba (1998:235), for instance, argues has, in large measure, determined the critical choices in studies of subalternity, that is, on the one hand, a 'romanticising and homogenising [of] the subaltern subject' and, on the other, the adoption of the trope of the 'silent' subaltern as a 'definitive statement about colonial relations' (and, by extension, sexual and gender relations).

It seems to us that, if one is to talk about the issues raised in McClintock's article and *Vukani Makhosikazi*, one cannot adequately appreciate them without the critical contexts that these interventions have drawn. This involves moving to theorise the 'everyday' and the relation of such a notion to the *grand récits* with which the 'everyday' has been seen to exist in a relation of rapture. The very idea of 'the everyday', in its apparently decided singularity and the various metaphors that may be seen to accentuate it, signals towards the constitution of the modern in South Africa, and the manners in which modernity, in its senses as progress, development, possibility, etc., have been narrowly constituted as such. The question of the valorisation and interrogation of the everyday points us in the direction of problematising the far from redemptive complexities of 'the rediscovery of the ordinary'.<sup>6</sup> If the speech of the subaltern women and men is in question, perhaps it may be a good idea to start by dispensing with the ideal subaltern, and to listen to the many voices which may not at all be in the expected sense 'pleasing' to the 'trained' ear.

<sup>6</sup> Njabulo Ndebele (1992) argues that the intimate knowledge associated with the 'rediscovery of the ordinary' can counter the fixation with spectacle indicative of the struggle era. In the first volume of his autobiography, *My Life*, Godfrey Moloi (1987:112) says of one of the dancehalls, Mai Mai, in which he and his band used to play: 'Mai Mai was often booked up to six months in advance. Everybody wanted a date there because one was sure of a full house. The bait here was the "Sheilas" who patronized the venues in scores from all the neighbouring suburbs, *emakhishini* (the kitchens). 'Sheilas' is a collective name that was and still is used to refer to domestic workers and, to this day, people still talk about Thursday as 'Sheilas' day.



## conclusion

McClintock's comparison of the magazine *Speak* with *Huisgenoot*, elides what is a crucial comparison with what could be considered *Huisgenoot*'s 'Black' consumer-orientated counterparts, that is, among other magazines, *Bona* and *Pace*. It is crucial to talk about these magazines as well, and there to ponder questions of consumerism, of the voices that speak in them and the investments of such voices not merely in vague ideas of 'mass', 'popular', 'from above', 'from below', 'democratic', 'united'. Why, after such struggles by 'African women in the African National Congress' to change the perceptions of the male leaders, does *Speak*, on page 5 of its "Jokes Aside" section, find it necessary, in its number 38 issue of 1992, to write again about 'ANC NEC member Steve Tshwete [who] recently spoke in Natal about people's courts [and] said they would continue, but would deal with "minor offences—like wife bashing"'.

The magazines, *Huisgenoot*, *Bona* and *Pace*, over and above their emphasis on domestic bliss when it came to the 'huisgenoot' (housemate, or, more notoriously, inmate), also offered dreams of, admittedly, chequered financial independence (i.e. within the confines of one's gender and racial station in South African political life). In this sense, it is not such a terrible and/or inexplicable trajectory that the market forces have so smoothly claimed the space that they had always occupied anyway<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps the question that was never asked with rigorous insistence, save some isolated critical readings of the Freedom Charter, and the election promises, is what the struggle was *for*. Whereas appraisals that are much more substantial have been offered of the 'struggle' discourses we would like to re-pose the question: what *were* the United Democratic Movement, the Mass Democratic Movement, the Black Sash, and the ANC?

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<sup>7</sup> See Eve Bertelsen's (1998:222) discussion of the surprising turn in the discourse of quasi-socialism of the struggle decades

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## Literatures of nation and migration: Charles Mungoshi, Nadine Gordimer, and the post-colonial

David Johnson

Returning now to the more general question—are there any national literatures in sub-Saharan black Africa yet? –the simple answer is still no; but a fuller answer that takes into account the linguistic, political, and literary complexity of the sub-continent would have to be: ‘No, but maybe there will be fairly soon’ (Lindfors 1975:9).

I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation, or a specific race, then fuck you (Marechera 1986 quoted in Veit-Wild 1992:297).

America leads to Africa; the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis (Bhabha 1990:6).

The forging of a national literature is assumed to be a natural part of the rise of nations: so, from the eighteenth century on, we have iconic writers like Shakespeare in England<sup>1</sup>, Goethe in Germany, and Racine in France established in their respective national literary canons. And, if we accept Benedict Anderson’s influential argument that twentieth-century nationalisms ‘draw on more than a century and a half of human experience and three earlier models of nationalism’

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dobson (1992) and Bate (1997).

(Anderson 1983:123), we recognise that in the post-colonial world too, new nations aspire to having their own national literatures. In Africa, the constituting of a national literature has invariably had an anti-imperial dimension, so that Ngugi wa Thiong’o, for example, self-consciously writes back against the cultural imperialism that sought to install European writers in Kenya. In a famous statement, Ngugi and colleagues at Makerere University declare: ‘[w]e reject the primacy of English literature and cultures. The aim, in short, should be to orientate ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa and then Africa in the centre’<sup>2</sup>. What remains in place even in such radical attempts to re-conceptualise literature is the category of the nation as a defining reference point.

Critics of Southern African literature have for the most part obediently followed national boundaries in writing about the region’s literatures<sup>3</sup>. What I argue here is that such an approach is severely limited, in that by accepting the principle of a ‘national literature’, certain important questions are suppressed. In particular, certain crucial relations and connections that exceed the nation state—forms of community as well as circuits of exploitation—are either ignored or treated as secondary. To demonstrate the need to think beyond the nation in conceptualising the literatures of Southern Africa, I first juxtapose two Southern African short stories, and then consider how certain post-colonial critics have installed ‘migration’—as opposed to ‘nation’—as the key term in theorising literature.

### Charles Mungoshi: Mozambique to Rhodesia.

Charles Mungoshi was born in 1947 in Enkeldoorn in Eastern Rhodesia. His father had returned from working as a cook in Cape Town to purchase a small plot of designated tribal trust land. After spending his early childhood on his father’s small-holding, Mungoshi attended boarding school, first Daramombe from 1959-1962, and then St. Augustines from 1963-1966. Leaving school at the end of Form Four, he worked in 1967-1968 as a research assistant with the Rhodesian Forestry Commission in Mutare near the Mozambican border. From 1969-1974, he was an invoice clerk for Textbook Sales; from 1975-1981, he was an editor for the Literature Bureau; and from 1982-1988, he worked for the Zimbabwe Publishing

<sup>2</sup> Ngugi (1981:94). See also Ngugi (1993:60-75) for an updated version of the same argument. For a useful discussion of Ngugi’s understanding of anti-colonial nationalism in the colonial and post-colonial periods, see Ogude (1999:15-43).

<sup>3</sup> See for example, studies by Chapman (1996) and Chabal (1996). There have been a few notable exceptions that have examined the function of borders and migration in Southern African fiction, like Stotesbury (1990), Crush (1995) and Nixon (1996).

House. He lives with his wife and five children in Chitungwiza Township bordering Harare. Mungoshi's trajectory is unusual among recent Zimbabwean authors in several respects: he never attended university, he has never spent any significant time abroad, and he has published extensively both in Shona and English.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, he published in a range of genres in English: short stories (*Coming of the Dry Season* 1972; *Some Kinds of Wounds and Other Stories* 1980; and *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World* 1988); a novel (*Waiting for the Rain* 1975); and a collection of poetry (*The Milkman Doesn't Only Deliver Milk* 1981). After a long silence, he published in 1997 another collection of short stories, *Walking Still*. His publications in Shona include three novels, a play, and collections of children's stories, and he has also translated Ngugi's *Grain of Wheat* into Shona. Zimbabwean critics have greeted his work with acclaim, though to date it has received little critical attention from outside Zimbabwe<sup>4</sup>. Flora Veit-Wild has categorised Mungoshi as a Generation Two writer, which she defines as follows:

The public voice of Generation One has given way to the private voice, the extrovert author-politician has been replaced by the introverted lonely poet; heroes and the fate of the nation have given way to everyday events and ordinary people; the didactic impetus to better humanity has been succeeded by the therapeutic, cathartic impulse of self-discovery .... (Veit-Wild 1992: 267).

She continues with warm praise: 'Mungoshi's style is outstanding and quite unique in Zimbabwean, and even African literature, in its sensitivity, depth and density of thought and style' (Veit-Wild 1992:268). Tim McLoughlin is equally generous, describing Mungoshi as 'Zimbabwe's most substantial writer' (McLoughlin 1984: 109), and emphasising Mungoshi's acute sense of his context:

Mungoshi's fiction is more subtle and elusive. Opposition between black and white, traditional and urban life, Christianity and traditional religion are the context rather than the object of his writing. The prose is not self-conscious about its subject matter. It does not gesture to an international audience. Mungoshi writes for Zimbabweans with whom he shares the

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the critics quoted here, Mungoshi has also been acclaimed by Stratton (1986), Alden (1994) and Nyandoro (1994). In general, however, Mungoshi has to date received far less critical attention than his Zimbabwean contemporaries like Dambudzo Marechera, Chenjerai Hove, Tsitsi Dangaremba and Yvonne Vera.

problems of being an individual in a society that demands many irreconcilable responses (McLoughlin 1984:108).

Finally, in her study of representations of women in Zimbabwean fiction, Rudo Gaidzanwa notes that while in general women characters in English (as opposed to Shona) literature 'are more sensitively drawn and explored' (Gaidzanwa 1985:47), in Mungoshi's case, '[m]ost of the women characters in his writing are very strong, large in life and domineering' (Gaidzanwa 1985:35).

Mungoshi's short story 'The Flood' is from his 1980 collection *Some Kinds of Wounds and Other Stories*, and is set on a forestry plantation in the Eastern Rhodesia of the late 1960s<sup>5</sup>. Using a third-person narrator, Mungoshi alternates between flashbacks and extended passages of dialogue to tell the story of Mozambican worker Mhondiwa. Oblique fragments of narrative disclose the traumatic violence of Mhondiwa's Mozambican childhood, when his family were burnt to death in their hut, his long trek to find work in Rhodesia, his experience as a worker on a Rhodesian forestry plantation, his unhappy marriage to a 'Rhodesian' wife, and his ultimately murderous conflict with co-worker, Chitauro. There are three aspects of the story that provoke difficult questions about the relation between nationalism and literary representation: the unsentimental evocation of the pre-colonial past; the descriptions of labour relations on the plantation; and the contradictory ideas of 'home' expressed in the story.

The pre-colonial past is evoked initially through the memories of Old Makiwa. The heavy rain in the opening passages—the 'flood' of the story's title—prompts a comment from Old Makiwa which establishes an ominous tone: 'I think it is a bad sign. In the old days it rained like this before a paramount chief died' (Mungoshi 1980:156). Chitauro rejects Makiwa's gloomy predictions as superstitions, as beliefs rightly banished by the church, but Makiwa refuses any optimistic interpretation of the heavy rain, insisting that it serves only 'to soften the earth for the grave-diggers' (Mungoshi 1980:164). Even though Chitauro is the character described as being in sympathy with western values, he too has doubts: 'He knew where Mhondiwa came from and, in that land, they had the best witchcraft practitioners of any land' (Mungoshi 1980:164). Like Old Makiwa, Mhondiwa's fears are expressed in terms that derive unequivocally from an African social universe at odds with the modernising language of the church and plantation. His first unsolicited words allude to the bad omen of seeing a squirrel cross his path

<sup>5</sup> Mungoshi returns to this setting in his 1997 short story 'The Little Wooden Hut in the Forest' (Mungoshi 1997: 151-62), though he sets it during the Zimbabwean war of liberation.

twice. Secondly, Mhondiwa is described as afraid of his wife, whose 'mother was the worst witch in her village, [and the] daughter had inherited this hard formidable I-get-what-I-want streak from her' (Mungoshi 1980:166). Mhondiwa also remains deeply in thrall to the lion-skin belt the medicine man Muganu had given him after healing him from the trauma of his family burning to death in their hut. In the violent conclusion of the story, these disparate images derived from African folklore and his own painful past coalesce as Mhondiwa kills Chitauro for sleeping with his wife:

Somewhere in the back of his eyes, Mhondiwa saw the tiny black animal cross the path, twice, crash into the jungle, then come back from behind and now it was sniffing his heels. He felt the smoke thickening, rising and curling into tiny coils inside his throat and chest and way back beyond memory he felt the river crashing, breaking over the banks and scattering into the jungle (Mungoshi 1980:178).

Unsentimental in its presentation of African belief systems, the conclusion to 'The Flood' nonetheless emphasises the residual power of pre-colonial allegiances. Further, the tale suggests that recently-imposed national boundaries do not impinge upon these allegiances, as the 'westernised' Rhodesian Chitauro is set in opposition to the Mozambican Mhondiwa with his portentous vision of the 'tiny black animal', and the Rhodesian Old Makiwa with his grim interpretation of the heavy rain. Thus the opposition between tradition and modernity in the characterisation of the story cuts across national boundaries.

National allegiances are also shown to be secondary in Mhondiwa and Chitauro's dealings with the white plantation manager Mr. Gardner. Plantations like the one in "The Flood" relied heavily on 'boss boys' and supervisors, described by economist D.G. Clarke (1997:150) as 'the ever-present symbol of "absentee landlords" or "invisible employers"'. [They] often absorb a lot of the immediate discontent of workers, being both the first "object" of respect and also resentment'. What Mungoshi emphasises in narrating the class tensions between the worker, 'boss boy', and supervisor is the precarious and compromised status of the 'boss boy'. There is no internal focalisation of supervisor Gardner's thoughts, only the monologue of his orders, whereas the conflicted emotions of competing 'boss boys' Mhondiwa and Chitauro are elaborated in detail. When Mhondiwa loses his position as 'boss-boy' for fighting in the compound, Chitauro gets his job, and they effectively swap roles as 'worker' and 'boss-boy'. The exchange, however, is complicated. Although after his sudden elevation Chitauro 'walked at a leisurely boss-boy's pace towards the men who immediately shut up and bent down to their

work' (Mungoshi 1980:161), he tries desperately to apologise to Mhondiwa for being promoted at his expense: 'I don't understand it. I didn't ask for it. I know [Gardner] is going to do the same to me one day' (Mungoshi 1980:161). Also of some satisfaction to Mhondiwa is the fact that his humiliation is accompanied by unspoken sentiments of sympathy from the other workers:

The other men kept away from him but he knew he had some friends among them and they just didn't want to intrude on his fresh pain with useless condolences. He knew he had friends because he had never been hard with anyone. In fact every one of the men in the gang had once received a favour of some sort from him (Mungoshi 1980:162).

These passages suggest that the forms of common identity in the work-place are based primarily on class: the workers wearing blue overalls have a common bond, and they are loosely united against the khaki-clad 'boss boy' and the white manager. What gives Mungoshi's story particular force is that the forms of class conflict he depicts between Mhondiwa, Chitauro and Gardner were integral to the economy of the region, as the scale of Mozambican migration into Southern Rhodesia escalated in the 1950s. By 1957, there were an estimated 183 000 Mozambican migrant workers like Mhondiwa in Southern Rhodesia employed in agriculture and mining<sup>6</sup>.

While Mhondiwa's blue overall might give him some sense of identification with his fellow workers, his notion of belonging is hardly secure, as the references to 'home' in the story suggest. There are three references to 'home' in the story, and each one has a very different connotation. The first refers to Mhondiwa's dilemma when his wife leaves him with her children: 'The trouble was he couldn't go back home to Mozambique because it was so long ago now since he had left home and his parents were no longer there' (Mungoshi 1980:167). The connection between 'home'/Mozambique/parents is registered here, but in the second reference 'home' is associated with his new woman and by extension with Rhodesia. This second reference is chronologically prior, and describes the first night with his wife:

And when he woke up in the night wondering where he was she held him tight and said it was all right he was at home, at home, she kept on repeating this and it sounded better than anything he had ever heard till then. He thought it was the best sound in the girl's language. And when he

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Paton (1995:153), and on changing patterns of Mozambican migration to Rhodesia/ Zimbabwe and South Africa, see also Crush, Jeeves and Yudelman (1991: 101-113).

cried later towards dawn and she said the words again to him, at home, at home he went with them, following them with something in himself, something that pleased him and he went to sleep for the first time in a long while and it was the first dreamless, most restful sleep of his life (Mungoshi 1980:175f).

The psychic transfer described in the attenuated second sentence is explicit: the trauma of losing his parents in Mozambique, the loss of his first home, is healed by her repeated words 'at home'. In 'following them [her words "at home"] with something in himself', Mhondiwa stabilises his sense of identity for the first time since the death of his parents. It is worth noting that as with Gardner, there is no internal focalisation of the wife, though (again as with Gardner) she has enormous power over Mhondiwa's condition, first conferring a sense of psychic unity, and then withdrawing it. The second positive identification, however, is dramatically undercut in the final reference to home. After Mhondiwa has killed Chitauro, the story concludes on a deeply ambivalent note: 'Wisps of cloud. A rainbow-haloed misty moon, the best sounds he had ever heard: rest now you are at home, at home, at home ... In the distance the river purred' (Mungoshi 1980:178). The associations of home in this final reference are extremely bleak: to feel at home once again, Mhondiwa has had to kill fellow worker Chitauro for cuckolding him. Mhondiwa's conception of 'home' in the course of the story therefore shifts: from his parents' hut in rural Mozambique before their death; to his wife's bed in a Rhodesian forestry compound when they first sleep together; and finally to the riverside near the compound immediately after he has killed Chitauro. As in the presentation of the pre-colonial past, and of labour relations on the plantation, the fragile and contradictory evocation of Mhondiwa's sense of home prompts questions about the extent to which national boundaries provide an adequate frame for understanding such literature.

What is most striking about 'The Flood' is that several of the key elements of the story rest upon social connections that transgress the boundaries of the nation: pre-colonial community; sexual and marital bonds; and collective ties forged between workers as a result of economic exploitation. To place the story in its historical context requires that the literary critic attend closely to pre-colonial social systems; to the migrant labour system in Southern Africa; and to the fraught nature of transforming gender roles and sexual relations. Fractured identities have resulted as the economies of countries like Mozambique have been subordinated to the needs of multinational companies in South Africa and Zimbabwe, and the term 'nation' forms but one element of emergent forms of subjectivity and collective identification.

### Nadine Gordimer: from Mozambique to South Africa

Born in 1923, Gordimer shares with Mungoshi a personal history strongly marked by the experience of migration. The daughter of a Jewish immigrant father from Latvia, many of Gordimer's early short stories explore the experiences of dislocation and displacement that assail first-generation migrant communities in apartheid South Africa. Gordimer's writing has of course enjoyed far more critical acclaim than Mungoshi's, though it is worth noting the contrast between the relatively poor sales of her books in South Africa and the rest of the world<sup>7</sup>. Characterised for much of her career as the liberal conscience of the apartheid state, Gordimer has continued writing since 1990<sup>8</sup>. She has published two novels (*None to Accompany Me* 1994 and *The House Gun* 1998), a collection of short stories (*Jump and Other Stories* 1991) and two volumes of essays (*Crimes of Conscience* 1991 and *Writing and Being* 1995). Although South Africa provides the backdrop for most of her writing, Gordimer has set one novel in a fictitious African country that resembles Zambia (*A Guest of Honour* 1970), and the collection of short stories *Livingstone's Companions* (1972) has a number of stories set in parts of Africa other than South Africa. In the collection *Jump* (1991), there are two striking stories that venture imaginatively beyond the borders of South Africa. The first story 'Jump' is set in the 1980s and concerns a troubled anti-government agent from Mozambique taking stock of his involvement in the violent destabilisation of his country. The second story, 'The Ultimate Safari' complements 'Jump' in that it recounts the journey across the Kruger National Park of a Mozambican family from their war-torn homeland to a refugee camp in South Africa. The actions of the agent in 'Jump' are part of the process that precipitates the flight of the family in 'The Ultimate Safari'.

Although the narrator of 'The Ultimate Safari' is a young Mozambican girl, there is an irony in the title that suggests a South African perspective. For South Africans the Kruger National Park is a game reserve, a safari park; for Mozambican refugees, it is murderous terrain between their war-torn country and the relative security of a South African refugee camp. The juxtaposition of impoverished black and privileged white experience is a standard of Gordimer fiction, and this story concludes with a familiar scenario of the well-meaning white character looking on uncomprehendingly at black suffering: 'I don't think [our grandmother] was going to answer the white woman. The white woman put her head on one side and smiled at us' (Gordimer 1991:46). However, there are several aspects of this story that represent new departures for Gordimer.

<sup>7</sup> For a useful overview of Gordimer criticism, see Driver (1998).

<sup>8</sup> For sympathetic commentaries on Gordimer's post-1990 output, see Lazar (1992), Collieran (1993) and Head (1996).

The first is that the pre-colonial ties between the indigenous communities of Mozambique and South Africa are registered. Once on the South African side of the border, the narrator recounts:

The people in the village have let us join their school. I was surprised to find that they speak our language; our grandmother told me, That's why they allow us to stay on their land. Long ago, in the time of our fathers, there was no fence that kills you, there was no Kruger Park between them and us, we were the same people under our own king, right from our village we left to this place we've come to (Gordimer 1991:44).

This passage conveys economically how pre-colonial communities on the eastern seaboard of Southern Africa were divided between the competing colonial powers of Britain and Portugal in the late nineteenth century. What it suggests—perhaps romantically given the harsh reception Mozambican refugees have often received in South Africa—is that such communal allegiances retain some residual force.

Whereas the impetus for migration from Mozambique to Rhodesia in the 1960s was caused by economic pressure, the influx of immigrants from Mozambique to South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s was accelerated by the civil war between the FRELIMO government and the apartheid-backed RENAMO forces<sup>9</sup>. In the post-apartheid era, the movement of migrants from Mozambique into South Africa has increased further<sup>10</sup>. Gordimer's story opens with descriptions of the devastation caused by the war: 'The people my father was fighting—the bandits, they are called by our government—ran all over the place and we ran away from them like chickens chased by dogs (Gordimer 1991:33). With the disappearance of the narrator's mother, the escalating civil war, and the lack of food, her grandmother and grandfather decide to undertake the journey across the Kruger Park to South Africa. The naïve voice of the narrator makes it clear that flight is the only option: 'We

<sup>9</sup> See the excellent political and economic histories of this fraught period of Mozambique's history by Hanlon (1986:131-150 and 1991), and also Finnegan (1992).

<sup>10</sup> Detailed statistical data and analysis on the movement of migrants into South Africa has been published by The Southern African Migration Project. Especially relevant in relation to Mozambican migrants are the publications by Fion de Vletter (1998), David McDonald *et al* (1998) and Belinda Dobson (1998). For a general overview of post-apartheid migration, see Jonathan Crush (1998). On how migrants have been and continue to be treated in the South African legal system, see Murray (1986), Klaarens (1996) and De la Hunt (1997).

wanted to go away from where our mother wasn't and where we were hungry. We wanted to go where there were no bandits and there was food. We were glad to think there must be such a place; away' (Gordimer 1991:35).

The trauma of the migration produces in the conclusion of the story a disagreement between the narrator and her grandmother over the location and meaning of 'home'. The white woman's question as to whether they want to return to Mozambique after the war produces the following response:

Our grandmother looked away from them and spoke—There is nothing. No home. Why does our grandmother say that? Why? I'll go back. I'll go back through that Kruger Park. After the war, if there are no bandits any more, our mother will be waiting for us. And maybe when we left our grandfather, he was only left behind, he found his way somehow, slowly, through the Kruger Park, and he'll be there. They'll be home, and I'll remember them (Gordimer 1991:46).

The grandmother's pragmatic notion of 'home', as opposed to the narrator's wishful fantasy, is based on a realistic appraisal of where her family's best chances of survival lie. Whereas the narrator still yearns for her Mozambican home, the grandmother says that she wants to remain in South Africa where her grandchildren have some opportunity 'to learn so that they can get good jobs and money' (Gordimer 1991:46). Given the irresistible forces of poverty and civil war, the claims of 'home' are rendered meaningless, and crossing the border into South Africa an imperative that supersedes all other considerations.

Much like Mungoshi's 'The Flood', Gordimer's 'The Ultimate Safari' exposes the limits of placing national boundaries between the literatures of Southern Africa. By drawing attention to the horrors of the Mozambican civil war, the histories of African communities divided by the colonial powers, and the instability of what we might call 'home', Gordimer confronts the reader with difficult questions. Not that Gordimer herself is immune from the growing xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa. In an interview with Karen Lazar in 1995, she speaks of the problems facing South Africa as follows:

NG: [W]ho would have thought that we would have the problem of illegal immigration which we have now—that we'd have Koreans selling watches in the streets, Zaireans talking French in the streets. Who would have thought this? It's something we couldn't possibly have imagined.

KZ: Why do you think this has happened? Is it that we are seen as a place of extreme bounty relative to these other countries?

NG: Oh absolutely, but we can't afford this. We must think of our own people first, and somehow this has got to be stopped. Of course this ill becomes somebody like myself who comes from immigrant stock. All of us who are whites here originally do. So who are we to say that the Koreans must be kicked out? (Lazar 1998:440)

Gordimer's contradictory response highlights an unresolved tension between, on the one hand, 'the new racism' of post-apartheid South Africa ('We must think of our own people first'), and, on the other hand, the more sympathetic sentiments that underlie 'The Ultimate Safari'.

### migrant literatures

Migration in the 1990s has continued to escalate globally, with the number of migrants in 1998 estimated at 100 million, and the number of refugees at 20 million. These figures include: 30 million migrants who have moved within their own countries; 10 million people who have left their homes since 1990 because they can no longer make a living from the land; 80 million migrants who have moved to cities in search of work; and 35 million people who work overseas. Certain cities in particular have experienced dramatic demographic changes, with increasing percentages of their population comprised of migrants: 42% in Toronto, 33.4% in Perth, 40% in Los Angeles, and 17% in Johannesburg, to cite but a few examples<sup>11</sup>. In the same period, literature dealing with themes of migration has enjoyed a greater degree of prominence in US and UK publishing houses and universities, and critical studies examining this literature have proliferated. There have been studies both of migrant literature in general<sup>12</sup>, and also 'area studies', focusing on South Asian writing<sup>13</sup>, US/Latin American border fiction<sup>14</sup>, European (including British) migrant literatures<sup>15</sup>, as well as even more specific case studies on the writings of particular

<sup>11</sup> *The New Internationalist* (1998:18). On contemporary patterns of migration globally, see Stalker (1994) and the websites of the International Organization for Migration (<http://www.iom.ch/>) and the International Labour Organization (<http://www.ilo.org/>).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. for example, Chambers (1993), Bromley (2000), Brennan (1997), Crane and Mohanran (2000), George (1996) and King *et al* (1995).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Rushdie (1991), Brah (1996), Kain (1997), Needham (2000) and Nelson (1992).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Kaminsky (1991) and Flores (1993).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Brinker-Gabler and Smith (1997), Hall (1992) and Gilroy (1993).

migrant or diasporic communities<sup>16</sup>

Exorbitant claims have been made for these recent migrant literatures, both by the writers themselves, and by critics championing their work. Salman Rushdie, for example, certainly expresses little sense of disadvantage on account of his migrant position when he reflects:

I have constantly been asked whether I am British, or Indian. The formulation 'Indian-born British' writer has been invented to explain me. But my new book deals with Pakistan. So what now? 'British-resident Indo-Pakistani writer'? You see the folly of trying to contain writers inside passports (Rushdie 1992:63).

Indeed, rather than as serving as any kind of impediment, Rushdie believes that the experience of migration affords the migrant writer unique insights into the modern condition, although his narrator in *Shame* concedes a certain pathos:

What is the best thing about migrant peoples and seceded nations? I think it is their hopefulness .... And what is the worst thing? It is the emptiness of one's luggage .... We have floated upwards from history, from memory, from Time (Rushdie 1984:71).

Rushdie's optimistic sense of the literary possibilities attendant upon the experience of migration is shared by Edward Said, who acknowledges that not all forms of migrancy are equal, but who argues nonetheless that the diasporic or migrant writer has unique insight:

And while it would be the rankest Panglossian dishonesty to say that the bravura performances of the intellectual exile and the miseries of the displaced person are the same, it is possible, I think, to regard the intellectual as first distilling then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity—mass deportation, imprisonment, population transfer, collective dispossession, and forced immigrations (Said 1993:403).

The majority of critics who write on migrant literature embrace the Rushdie/Said view, and make considerable claims about the capacity of this literature to challenge the assumptions of Western readers on a variety of political issues, but particularly

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ang (1994) on the Chinese diaspora and Parati (1999) on migrant literatures in Italy.



on the exclusive nationalism and systemic racism of the West. Roger Bromley (2000:16), for example, argues that migrant literatures 'can become a fundamental resource, not in connecting culture and imperialism, but in disconnecting and fracturing hegemonic relationships by giving shape to utterances which are outside the sentences of power and control'.

The few dissenting critics concede the general argument in favour of migrant literatures, but insist upon limiting and qualifying the ambitious claims made by the likes of Bromley. Elleke Boehmer (1995:237) points out that the writings of authors like Rushdie from the former colonies accord not only 'with the political and critical agendas of Western universities' but also with 'the global system of transnational information flow which so deeply informs late twentieth-century culture'. Furthermore, for Boehmer (1995:239), the much-praised 'hybridity' of these authors often lacks a political edge, and in their work 'hybridity ... remains primarily an aesthetic device, or a source of themes'. Timothy Brennan notes that the distinction Said draws between middle-class professionals from the Third World and the more numerous poor migrants fleeing poverty and civil war is but an empty routine, and is only rarely followed by any significant attention to the latter category of migrants. Brennan identifies James Clifford's version of the opposition as symptomatic, and argues that the general tendency to focus on the trope of 'travel' rather than 'displacement' contributes to the highly selective reading of migrancy and migrant literatures. Brennan (1997:17) suggests that "'travel" is the more theoretical term, and "displacement", far from being neutral, is designed precisely to force readers to remember the involuntary travel of deportation, migrations, and war'. Aijaz Ahmad emphasises the class divisions between different types of migrants, but, unlike Clifford, goes further in paying extended attention to the economic and political history of the late twentieth century as a preliminary to his critical assault on Rushdie and Said's self-aggrandising version of the migrant intellectual:

Needless to say, the ideological ambiguity in [Rushdie and Said's] rhetorics of migrancy resides in the key fact that the migrant in question comes from a *nation* which is subordinated in the imperialist system of intra-state relationships but, simultaneously, from the *class*, more often than not, which is the dominant class within that nation—this, in turn, makes it possible for that migrant to arrive in the metropolitan country to join not the working classes but the professional middle strata, hence to forge a kind of rhetoric which submerges the class question and speaks of migrancy as an ontological question, more or less (Ahmad 1992:12f).

Ahmad (1992:13) declares his primary interest to be 'the relation between the internal structure of such rhetorical forms [like migrancy] and the historical coordinates within which they arise', and accordingly makes every effort to contextualise both the rise of the postcolonial migrant intellectual and her/his writings.

## Conclusion

The three quotations heading this article—by Lindfors, Marechera and Bhabha—represent three stages in the contested and uneven shift from conceptualising literature in national terms to thinking of literature in terms of migration. Lindfors's 1975 inquiry into the existence of national literatures in sub-Saharan Africa now reads at best as a well-intentioned attempt to promote the work of anti-colonial and nationalist African writers, and thus provide a literary-critical correlative to the struggles for national liberation from colonial rule. At worst, it reads as a patronising and misconstrued aspiration at odds with the economic, political and social issues that were confronting emergent nations at the time, not least issues of economic migration. The short stories by Mungoshi and Gordimer, I have argued, demonstrate the limits of conceiving the literatures of Southern Africa in such exclusively national terms, as both stories dramatise the powerful allegiances that exceed the vocabulary of the nation, and demand an expanded frame of critical reference.

Marechera's impatient refusal of the kind of critical pigeon-holing undertaken by critics of the 'Commonwealth Literature' generation like Lindfors also attests to the limitations of corraling writers into national categories. Marechera's hostility towards being classed as an 'African writer' or 'Zimbabwean writer', derives in part from his experience of censorship in post-independence Zimbabwe, a phenomenon he associates directly with unchecked nationalism. Marechera (1992a: 39) declares that 'all nationalism always frightens me, because it means that the products of your own mind are now being segregated into official and unofficial categories, and that only the officially admired works must be seen'. However, his desire to exceed the category 'African' or 'Zimbabwean' writer is further fuelled by his experience of travelling between Zimbabwe and Britain, and by his aspiration to fly beyond all parochial literary-critical classifications. Marechera's 'fuck you' registers in particular his wish for his writing to escape the reflex condescension directed at all writers inhabiting what he sees as the literary ghetto of African literature, and for it to be accorded the same critical recognition as (the mostly Western) writers of universal Great Literature.

Finally, Bhabha's breathless celebration of migrant intellectuals from the periphery returning to 'rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis' represents



an optimistic view of how migrant writers might through their work articulate central social tensions inaccessible to writers more securely settled in the national canons of the West. The strenuous criticisms by Boehmer, Brennan and Ahmad of the metropolitan reification of the middle-class migrant intellectual, however, suggest that extreme caution is required when applying the pre-occupations and critical methods of Rushdie, Said and Bhabha to all forms of migrant literature. For critics like Boehmer, the displacement experienced by the vast majority of poor migrants—as opposed to the travels of the privileged professional classes—deserves prominence, and the ‘historical co-ordinates’ of migrations precipitated by poverty and war warrant detailed scholarly attention, rather than peremptory footnotes servicing formal literary analysis. The Mungoshi and Gordimer short stories discussed here answer these salient objections in that they focus on the experiences of poor migrants, and require a keen sense of Southern Africa’s recent economic and political history in order to appreciate their complexities.

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## **The UDW fees crisis of May/June 2000: A linguistic analysis**

**Richard Consterdine**

The fees crisis at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) started on 4 May 2000 and ended on 8 June 2000. However, a high level of tension and confrontational rhetoric relating to the implementation of the Government's transformational and educational policies pre-dated the start of the fees crisis.

UDW was closed for the Easter vacation from 22 April to 2 May 2000. Towards the end of this period, thirty-seven staff members (mostly academics) suddenly received redundancy notices. These were to come into effect immediately. The news provoked strong reactions from the staff unions, the Combined Staff Association (COMSA) and the Academic Staff Association (ASA), who immediately began making representations to management on behalf of their dismissed members. The SRC also protested on behalf of students who were left without teachers as a consequence of the redundancies four weeks before the end-of-semester examinations were due to commence. Consequently when UDW re-opened on Tuesday 2 April 2000 confrontation between management on the one side and staff and students—now united by a common grievance on the other—was already well under way.

On Thursday 4 May management deregistered nine hundred twenty-four students for failing to pay their initial registration fees, thereby exacerbating an already tense situation. The same day the deregistered students and their fellow-student sympathisers began demonstrating outside the administration block. After a very lively meeting the Student Representative Council (SRC) handed over a list of fifteen demands to management, among which were calls for the reinstatement of both the de-registered students and the dismissed staff members. Management gave the defaulting students another twenty-four hours to pay the outstanding registration fees but by the end of the next day (Friday 5 May) none of the defaulters had paid and, with the administration block beset by demonstrators, they would have found it extremely difficult if not actually dangerous to attempt to enter the building and pay their fees. The same evening the police were called onto campus to prevent demonstrators from carrying out their threat to disrupt a graduation ceremony.

On Monday 8 May the students resumed their protest demonstrations which soon deteriorated into serious rioting. Despite a written undertaking from the SRC not to disrupt lectures, militants invaded classes in progress, assaulted students attending them and forced those they could to join in the demonstrations and boycott classes. All academic endeavours at the university now virtually ceased.

The next day (Tuesday 9 May) management responded by calling in the Police Public Order Unit to prevent further vandalism and violence. Management attempted to hold talks with the SRC but these broke down and the demonstrations again degenerated into disorderly conduct. On the same day the ASA held an emergency meeting of concerned academics and later issued the following document addressed to all staff members and students of the University of Durban-Westville. The document is signed by the then president of the ASA Dr. M. Maharaj.

I give the document in full followed by an analysis of it, using the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) of Halliday (1995) and Hasan (1978)<sup>1</sup> and my own interpretation of the data produced by the SFG analysis.

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### **A Message to our University community from the Academic Staff Association**

Our University has once again been plunged into crisis by managerial ineptitude. The Students' Representative council has initiated a boycott of classes to express deep-seated grievances regarding the way in which Management has handled the issues that they (SRC) have raised in their communiqué of 8 May.

The situation on campus has become so critical that the ASA feel compelled to make public the views of academic staff members on the roots of the current malaise.

Senior Management has a long-standing history of failing to act in the best interests of our University Community. Current examples of this failure that have precipitated the present crisis are:

1. The Dentistry debacle: students who were registered for courses in February and to date have not yet received any instruction. This is despite our University having been aware of the situation from the outset. Management's glaring failure to rectify the situation timeously has laid our University open to possible legal action.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Butt (1995), Gerot & Wignell (1995), and Gerot (1995).

2. Fine Arts: the bizarre situation has arisen in which members of the Fine Arts Dept were retrenched in the middle of the teaching programme, leaving ten senior students without tuition four weeks before their mid-year examinations. This is despite representations by us in which we proposed a simple solution that would, at no extra expense to our University, allow these and students in other departments that have been closed to complete a full year of study. Our University's action to forcibly relocate some of these students not only has incurred extra expenses but has traumatised them to the detriment of their academic performance.
3. Retrenchments: loyal and in many cases long-standing staff members (several of whom have served our University for over twenty years) have been summarily retrenched. The manner in which the University proceeded has been fraught with irregularities. It has ignored Departmental plans to redress their financial problems (which Management themselves demanded), as well as ignoring the Council directive that staff be redeployed.
4. University council: we firmly believe that our University Council, as the highest decision-making body, has failed in its duties by abrogating control of and responsibility for the preservation of Management integrity. Council's repeated procrastination in addressing the deep concerns expressed by the academic community, and their disregard for established policies and procedures has led to a dictatorial management style that has lost the faith and support of all University stakeholders, as evident in the development of yet another campus crisis.

In order to urgently resolve these issues we call upon

1. The Minister of Education to investigate the underlying causes of the recurring crises at UDW.
2. The Management to immediately put into effect the Council directive calling for a meeting between students, staff and management to air and resolve the root causes of the present crisis.

We are gravely concerned that the continuing state of affairs at UDW will damage and tarnish our University's reputation, detrimentally affecting our rating in the new Shape and Size exercise undertaken by the Department of Education. The summary closure of certain UDW departments pre-empting the release of this report further exacerbates our situation.

## The Current Situation

In a meeting of concerned academics held today (09/05/2000) sympathy was expressed for several of the student grievances. Support was also expressed for the right of students to engage in peaceful protest and the Academic Staff Association therefore urges all parties to conduct themselves in a manner befitting an institution of higher learning. We caution all parties to act responsibly and refrain from any acts of violence or anything that could be considered intimidatory.

The academic staff is committed to programmes of study and modules presented at UDW and will endeavour to make up any study time lost as a result of the present crisis.

## document description

The ASA document contains 661 words and was internally generated by the UDW fees crisis. It is dated 9 May 2000, not in the heading, but only incidentally within the body of text, in the first line of the penultimate paragraph. The heading consists of one line typed in bold, lower case letters with all nouns and adjectives capitalised. The main body of text is slightly smaller than the heading and consists of seven main paragraphs. Paragraph 3 has four numbered paragraphs subordinate to it and paragraph 4 has two numbered sub-sections. There is one sub-heading. It stands before the sixth paragraph and is typed in the same format as the main heading at the top of the page. The entire text is on one side of a standard A4 white sheet of paper. The hand written signature (and designation as president of the Academic Staff Association) of M. Maharaj lies below the last paragraph of typed text. The document bears no official crest or letterhead.

## analysis of field

Process types. There are 45 main processes in this document. 20 are material processes (44.4%), 14 are projecting (31.1%) and 11 (24.4%) are relational processes. According to my analysis the main material processes at clause rank are: 'has been plunged, has initiated, were registered, has laid open, has arisen, were retrenched, has incurred, has traumatised, have been retrenched, has failed, has led to, to investigate, to put into effect, will damage, (will) tarnish, exacerbates, to conduct themselves, to act, (to) refrain from and will endeavor to make up'.

Similarly the main projecting processes are: a) verbal: *to express, to make public, have not ... received any instruction, proposed, demanded, call upon* (twice),

*was expressed* (twice), *urges, caution*. b) mental: *feel, has ignored, ignoring, believe*.

The relational Processes are: a) Identifying: *are* (4 times). b) Attributive: *has become, has been, are*. c) Existential: *is* (twice) in the phrase '*this is despite*'. d) Possessive: *has*.

Participants. The two most common Participants, which occur with equal frequency, are '*we*' and the noun *failure*. The latter always forms part of a large nominal group which is usually associated with the management of UDW (or one of its constituent branches) as the author of this failure, e.g. *Management's glaring failure to rectify the situation timeously*. Since, however, the document itself comes from the ASA (the Academic Staff Association of UDW), *we* and the Participants *The ASA, The Academic Staff Association* and *The academic staff* (twice) have the same meaning. So, in effect, *we* and its referents (9 times in all) constitute the main Participant as Actor, Sayer, Sensor, etc. *The situation/ the state of affairs* form another Participant grouping, as do *Senior Management, It* (i.e. the University), *Management themselves, our University Council, Students/the students' Representative Council* occurs three times as Participant but only once as Actor. *Members* appear twice as Goals. Most of the Material Processes in the text are attributed to *failure, Management* or *situation* as Actors. *We/the ASA/academic staff* as Participants are mainly Sayers and Sensors. Other Participants used as Goal or Identifier are: *boycott, grievances, debacle, our University, Fine Arts, solution, retrenchments, plans, University Council, dictatorial management style, situation, the underlying causes, the minister of Education, etc.*

Circumstances. Very few Circumstances in this text are placed before the Processes, so the position of the very first Circumstance, *once again*, must be intended to be highly emphatic. The only other two of note placed before their Process are *in order to urgently resolve these issues* and *In a meeting of concerned academics held today (09/05/00)*. These too must be emphatic, though less so than the opening Circumstance.

The majority of the Circumstances are placed after their Processes. They are mostly in the form of nominal groups, often containing embedded clauses, preceded by a preposition and express time, manner, place or reason for the actions given in the Processes e.g. *into crisis by managerial ineptitude*, which express both place and cause after the same Process.

Two types of Circumstance struck me as worthy of comment because of their awkwardness of expression. These are: 1. A Circumstance introduced by *despite* after the twice-occurring existential phrase *This is* and 2. The use of verbal forms ending in -ing to start Circumstances in: *leaving 10 senior students without tuition four weeks before the mid-year examinations* and *detrimentally affecting our rating in the new Shape and Size exercise undertaken by the Department of education*. In type 1 a material process would normally precede a Circumstance starting with '*despite*'. E.g. '*This failure occurred, 'Management did this*' or some such clause. In type 2 the ambiguity is inherent in Modern English because of the functional polyvalence of the -ing ending, which does duty as active participle (past and present) and verbal noun (gerund). In these specific incidences it is the anaphoric reference of '*leaving*' and '*affecting*' which is unclear. Does *leaving*, for instance, qualify one of the antecedent nouns *situation/members* or the Process *were retrenched*? It makes eminent sense with any of them, so much so that the syntactic ambiguities created here could be regarded as creating possibilities for greater richness of semantic implication.

Experiential domain. The document calls itself '*A Message*' from the academic staff to the rest of the university community of UDW, both workers and students. It does indeed give information in an account of the nature and origins of the UDW fees crisis (from the viewpoint of the ASA). Accordingly most of the material Processes are used in the narration of the actions of Management and to a lesser extent of those of the students and some staff members. Conversely, most of the projecting Processes are what the ASA thinks and says. One of these, the first use of '*we call upon*', is an appeal to an outside party not mentioned as an addressee in the heading, namely, the Minister of Education. Therefore the document is more than just an internal information pamphlet. It is an appeal for help to a higher, external authority in order to resolve the internal crisis.

Short-term goal. The document's purpose is to give an historical account of the UDW student fees payment crisis from an anti-management perspective. Hence most of the material Processes refer to the actions or failures to act on the part of management, while the projecting Processes express the judgements and advice of the ASA.

Long-term goal. This is not as readily apparent as the short-term goal. The condemnation of the actions and policies of UDW management and the appeal for outside intervention suggest that the future reduction of management's power over university staff and student affairs is a serious consideration. Also it was at the

Government's insistence that the University of Durban-Westville had initiated much more rigorous accounting policies than it had previously used. The subsequent closure of financially non-viable departments and the de-registering of students who had not paid their fees thus stem from Government. Therefore, a second long-term goal of the document is probably to influence government to relax its political control over tertiary institutions in general and UDW in particular.

### analysis of tenor

Political control of the Historically Black Universities (HBU's), through a strongly dominant management consisting of government appointees, had long been a common power strategy of the Apartheid regime, which staff and students at UDW had vehemently opposed for decades. The apparently even more energetic application of the same strategy under the new post-apartheid dispensation was widely regarded by many of the academic staff at the University of Durban-Westville as a betrayal of the anti-apartheid struggle and all it stood for. A professor of history (herself Soviet trained) referred to it in a Senate meeting as 'blatant stalinization'. In the Tenor analysis of the document I search for linguistic evidence of this attitude of staff resistance to Management's policies and actions.

Mood selections. All the Finites with one exception are in declarative mood. The one exception, *be in that staff be re-deployed*, is, in traditional grammatical terms, a third person jussive subjunctive, so it is an imperative mood finite. *Have not* in '*Students ... have not yet received any instruction*' is the only finite with negative polarity. There is some modality in the text: *would ... allow, will damage, (will) tarnish, could be considered and will endeavor*. The finite *be in be re-deployed* can, in my opinion, be regarded as both modulation and modalisation because although it is an indirect command, which makes it modulated, the context makes it clear that the action never occurred. So it could also be an example of impossibility, which would make *be* simultaneously modalised. I find the modality in *would allow* problematic. It appears in the clause complex: '*we proposed a simple solution that would, at no extra expense to our University, allow these and students in other departments ... to complete ... study*'. The wider context again makes it clear that this did not happen. At first I viewed this as a grammatical error by the author(s), i.e. they had used a type 2 conditional when a type 3 conditional, 'would have allowed', was required. If, however, at the time when this document was produced the authors were convinced that the matter was still negotiable, 'would allow' is easily understood as a *constructio ad sensum*. If so, the modality here is good evidence of the authors' attitude. They are not prepared to accept Management's actions as *faits accomplis*.

Attitudinal lexis and lexicogrammar. From my analysis I find that this document is replete with attitudinal lexis and lexicogrammar.

The use of declarative mood virtually throughout with only one negative polarity reveals strong conviction on the part of the author(s) concerning the truth of their narrative and the rightness of their opinions. Most of the document is an exposition of how the then current fees crisis arose and who is to blame. Hence of the 33 main finites, 13 are in the present perfect tense to indicate present results of past actions. There are another 7 present perfects in the embedded clauses. The present tense verbs either describe aspects of the resultant crisis or express the current thoughts, opinions and utterances of the ASA. The 20 present perfect verbs allow plenty of room to assign blame for the resulting situation and indeed the first 3 main paragraphs are devoted to a highly rhetorical, condemnatory exposition.

The first clause of the document illustrates well how the present perfect is used to assign blame. '*Our University has once again been plunged into crisis by managerial ineptitude.*' In addition the use of the passive voice makes it abundantly clear that *our University* is the victim and highlights it by its position first in the clause. The body of the monstrous perpetrator, namely management, is here attacked as a whole.

The impressive peroration of this invective (at the end of sub-section 4 of paragraph 3) makes a direct assault on the monster's head:

Council's repeated procrastination in addressing the deep concerns expressed by the academic community, and their disregard for established policies and procedures has led to a dictatorial management style that has lost the faith and support of all University stakeholders, as evident in the development of yet another campus crisis.

The use of the active *has led to* reverses the order of victim and perpetrator found in the opening clause of the invective, thus creating a wonderful chiasmus (i.e. ABBA). The last clause is in essence a repetition of the first. It even echoes the simple syntactical structure of the first clause in its use of the present perfect flanked by perpetrator and victim. It is the change of voice from passive to active which creates the chiasmus mentioned above. This echoing of content and structure and the far greater weight of the two long nominal groups in the last clause create a telling crescendo of sound, semantics and especially of affect.

Attitudinal lexis permeates the whole of this document, but it occurs most frequently in the speech of the first three paragraphs. I give some examples: *plunged into crisis, managerial ineptitude, deep-seated grievances, the roots of the current*

*malaise, The Dentistry debacle, Management's glaring failure, the bizarre situation, traumatizes, fraught with irregularities, we firmly believe, repeated procrastination, dictatorial management style.* The lexis alone clearly indicates the position the ASA takes towards the UDW fees crisis of 2000 and who it blames for it, i.e., management.

The remaining 4 paragraphs contain far less strongly affectual attitudinal lexis and this in fact decreases from paragraph to paragraph, thus creating a diminuendo of intensity, which prevents the document from being dismissed as a purely emotional, unconsidered and unprofessional outburst. At the same time the calmer tone of the last 4 paragraphs, realized by the avoidance of strongly attitudinal lexis, highlights the intensity of the previous invective by its contrast in tone.

The last paragraph is: *The academic staff is committed to programmes of study and modules presented at UDW and will endeavor to make up any study time lost as a result of the present crisis.* The comparatively bland reasonableness of this stands in stark contrast to the tone of the rhetoric of the first 3 paragraphs and leaves the reader with the impression that the document was penned by responsible, sincerely well-intentioned people.

I am of the opinion that the lexis also shows that the ASA sympathised with the student boycott (*deep-seated grievances*). It even holds back from condemning student violence explicitly, even though they were in fact the instigators of it in the first place. The rioting and intimidation of the militant students is only alluded to in the rather vague phrase *all parties* in '*we caution all parties to refrain from any acts of violence*'. Given the explicitness and vehemence of the anti-managerial invective this failure to condemn student violence must surely be significant. In the Apartheid era the staff and students of UDW had always adopted a joint stance against the management as representing the hated racist regime. I suspect that in this document the silence of the ASA concerning the students' behaviour partly reflects this traditional alliance of students and staff against management. It also reflects the need felt by the ASA to make overtures to any power group opposed to the management of UDW in the hope of forging an alliance, no matter how objectionable their behaviour might be. This in turn could indicate how powerless the academic staff felt themselves to be when faced with the power of the state-backed managerial juggernaut.

**Agentive roles and status.** The main Agent throughout the document is UDW management. It appears in the lexicogrammar as the Subject or part of the noun group forming the Subject of most active verbs and the Agent of many passive verbs. Other agentive roles are filled by students and members of staff, but they mostly appear as victims of management activity. Though the author(s) of the

document appear frequently in the text as *we, the ASA, academic staff*, they act only as observers, commentators or at best, advisers. This agentive role is admittedly characteristic of traditional Academia, but here the highly affectual attitudinal content shows this passivity to be of a different nature. The frequency of verbs in the Present Perfect tense with management as the Actor/Subject reveals the culprit who, in the ASA's opinion, caused the fees crisis. The first clause of the text is a good example. '*Our University has once again been plunged into crisis by managerial ineptitude.*' Nowhere does the ASA appear in an agentive role with this verb tense. It is a tacit admission of their own impotence and management's complete dominance. There is no trace of detached observation here or of the suspension of judgement so essential to the traditional academic *modus operandi*. The vehemence of the invective is perhaps as much an expression of frustration at the ASA's own marginalised position as it is one of anger at managerial incompetence.

The assessment of status relations in this document is made difficult by the ambiguous reference of the word '*university*' in this text. It occurs 12 times, either as Thing or Classifier, and is preceded by the deictic '*our*' 9 times. This strongly attitudinal use of '*our*' is completely clear when *university* functions as Classifier in the nominal group '*our University community*'. Its first occurrence is in the heading: '*A Message to our University Community from the Academic Staff Association*'. Here, the ASA is identifying all those who work or study at the University of Durban-Westville as members of one and the same Community of Practice<sup>2</sup>. *Our University* is contrasted strongly with *Management*, which is portrayed as lacking this sense of community membership to such an extent that it is actually hostile to it. The first 3 occurrences of *our University* have this contrastive meaning of '*we, the UDW Community versus the Management*'.

Then, in the first 3 sub-sections of paragraph 3, the meaning seems to change and actually become synonymous with *management*. E.g. 1: '*Our University's action ... has traumatized them [i.e. students] to the detriment of their academic performance.*' E.g. 2: '*The manner in which the University proceeded has been fraught with irregularities*'.

In the sentence following example 2 above the meaning seems to shift yet again: *It (i.e. The University) has ignored Departmental plans to redress their financial problems (which Management themselves demanded)*. This seems to imply that *management* here refers specifically to the Management Committee (MANCO), which is headed by the vice-chancellor and supervises the day to day administrative duties and decision-making involved in running UDW. MANCO derives its

<sup>2</sup> For community of practice theory see Wenger (1998) and Holmes & Meyerhoff (1999).



authority from the University Council, to which it is theoretically answerable for its actions.

The last occurrence of *University* (in paragraph 5) changes again and reverts to the original meaning of all staff and students together forming one Community of Practice: '... *the state of affairs at UDW will damage and tarnish our University's reputation*'. This semantic vacillation surely reflects a collective, internal *psychomachia* (battle of the soul) on the part of the author(s) of this document. They spent years fighting against Management because it was politically appointed by the Apartheid regime, had all the clout and in fact was the only part of the university which 'counted'. Subconsciously the author(s) still feel like outsiders in their own university even though consciously trying to free their self-identity from this deeply inculcated agentive role. The type of discourse emanating from Management shows little evidence of a similar struggle for inner transformation. This intransigence must also have done much to confirm the staff in their own sense of marginalisation. Thus the author(s) as *we*, *the academic staff*, etc. and the management appear as the main Agents in this document. The vehemence of the detailed invective suggest to me, once again, that the chief intended recipient is probably the Minister of Education, for the simple reason that most of the staff and students of UDW were already fully aware of the events and held similar views about management.

Social distance. Not a single person is mentioned by name in the document. This could indicate a great social distance between the authors and all the interest groups mentioned in the document. On the other hand this anonymity can be regarded as an ellipsis typical of Community of Practice discourse. Why mention the names when everyone on the inside knows who is meant? From my own insider status and from conversations with the author(s) of this document I know this to be the truth, at least in part. Another important factor is the desire to avoid legal action for defamation and libel. UDW management has taken its own staff to court frequently and spends large sums on litigation. The social distance is not as great as the lack of named individuals would suggest, but neither is it as close as one would expect in a functioning Community of Practice. The social distance springs from perceived ideological differences and the real imbalance in power relations.

### analysis of mode

Thematic choices. There are many unmarked topical Themes in the ASA document. E.g. *Our University*, *The Student Representative Council*, *Senior Management*, *the bizarre situation*, *we* (5 times), *The academic staff*, etc. There is only one clause as

Theme: *in order to urgently resolve these issues*, and only two Circumstances as Theme: *and to date* and *In a meeting of concerned academics held today (09/05/2000)*. These three are therefore the only clearly marked Themes, but in my opinion some of the topical Themes containing embedded clauses are so long and emphatic that they too should be considered as marked. E.g. *Current examples of this failure that have precipitated the present crisis*, *Management's glaring failure to rectify the situation timeously*, and *loyal and in may cases long-standing staff members (several of whom have served our University for over 20 years)*. The most noteworthy example of them all however must be: *'Council's repeated procrastination in addressing the deep concerns expressed by the academic community, and their disregard for established policies and procedures'*. This Theme is remarkable not only for its striking array of classifiers, epithets and qualifiers which accompany the two nouns in this complex grouping, but also for the mass of alliteration and assonance using the letter 'p'. According to classical rhetoricians this sound, when repeated, indicates exasperation and dismay. I think that is precisely the affect conveyed here at the end of the attitudinally highly charged expository invective of the first 3 paragraphs of the text.

Lexical cohesion and thematic progression. There are four main Themes pervading the entire text: 1) the 'victims' represented by staff and students, 2) the 'perpetrator' represented by Management and Council, 3) the fees crisis, and 4) the University itself, which is only erratically perceived as the entire body of people working and studying at the University. Sometimes *University* is used as a synonym for *Management*. As I discussed above, this is a symptom of uncertainty about personal identity and about the identity of a Community of Practice.

The lexical cohesion in this document is pretty good. E.g. *crisis* appears not only in the first and last clauses but also throughout the text, often as *the situation* and once as *the state of affairs*. Similarly: *The ASA*, *students*, *we* (5 times), *(academic) staff*, *members of the Fine Arts Dept*, *the academic community*. *Management* appears 8 times.

The role of language is constitutive and the type of interaction is a monologue. The medium is graphic. The rhetorical thrust is for the most part in the form of an exposition but towards the end of the document this changes to procedure. The lexical analysis shows that the last two paragraphs contain far fewer Classifiers and Epithets than the rest of the document. This creates more neutral, decontextualised affect.

Role and type of language. Apart from the proposals at the end, the focus of the document is kept consistently on management's sins of commission and omission.



The discourse style is thus very topic-centred. Transitions from one sub-topic to another are usually made explicit and the arrangement of material facilitates the smoothness of ideational flow. Elaborate noun groups clustered around grammatical metaphors carry much of the semantic load. All these features make the discursive style well written and the result of considerable skill in the use of 'main-stream' literacy. The occasionally awkward manner of expression is proof of unedited spontaneity, not lack of competence in 'schooled' literacy. In my opinion this document exhibits a high level of discursive skill.

### conclusion

The ASA document is a fluent and generally sincere outpouring of dismay and indignation at the perceived faults in policy making and incompetence in the expediting of those policies. The highly judgmental attitude of the document is revealed time and again in the lexis, particularly in the epithets, classifiers and qualifiers clustered around the nominalisations.

The aspects of formal procedure in drafting a committee motion are present in the numbered sub-sections and in the closing proposals. This supports the stated genesis of the document in 'a meeting of concerned academics'. The powerful, rhetorically very well structured invective of the first 3 paragraphs on the other hand must surely be from a single pen. Committees just cannot produce discourse with such strong, contextualised affect or such good internal structure. I have indicated above why I consider this discourse to be informed with sincerity. It clearly reveals, no doubt consciously, the abhorrence of the academic staff of Durban-Westville at the turn of events in the fees crisis of May 2000. Their complete inability to do anything about it is just as clearly portrayed. The SFG analysis successfully pinpoints the data which subconsciously conveys the fact of the marginalised position of the teaching staff in the power relations which dominate their institution<sup>3</sup>.

It is a sad fact that contemporary state-controlled tertiary education is far removed from the ancient gardens of Akademos, the medieval cloister and even the Muscovite Lomonosov university, places where the teachers were central to learning, not disposable peripherals. It is a world-wide trend, but political domination of universities, which was once condemned by the international community as a strategy typical of the racist oppression then being perpetrated in South Africa, now seems to be the norm in many parts of the global village. The only difference between the old and the new forms of academic tyranny in this

<sup>3</sup> See Geslin (1995) for a related account, and Janks (1992).

country at least is the excuse offered for it: then it was political ideology, now it is financial constraint.

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# The Language of the Other

Johannes A. Smit

The sound of the ph is not the same with that of the f, like in the European languages (Van der Kemp)<sup>1</sup>.

It is possible to account for intellectuals both in terms of their contributions to knowledge and as subjects of knowledge. However, one can challenge the narrative of ascendancy, progress and historical continuity that often accompanies the fable of individual genius or secular sainthood<sup>2</sup> by asking what conditions of possibility enabled an intellectual to produce a particular knowledge (and no other) at a particular time. This is a question of the 'positive unconscious' and 'historical *a priori*' of knowledge production. This article aims to focus this problematic onto J.T. van der Kemp's language research in South Africa (1799-1800). He stands as one of the founders of South African indigenous language studies. The challenge is to position his research in terms of the discourse on language prevalent at the time.

In this task I enlist the categories advanced in Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* in order to assess this perspective on the historical study of texts and the epistemic positioning of intellectuals<sup>3</sup>. And, even though *The Order of Things* attracted its own fair share of criticism<sup>4</sup>, it

<sup>1</sup> LMS IS 1800:443.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Johnson (1988) for a conservative and critical approach to this notion and Jennings (1997:64ff) on the Jacobin - rightist binary.

<sup>3</sup> My argument for the usefulness of Foucault in the analysis of colonialism runs counter to that of Kazanjian (1998) and, on the aesthetic - epistemic binary (cf. Carroll 1987), I follow the rationale of the latter.

<sup>4</sup> The general historical approach of *The Order of Things* drew criticism on mainly two fronts (Macey 1993:169-179). In the context of the ascendancy of Marxism in France and especially the political role of the Communist Party at the time, Foucault was criticised for denigrating Marx's analyses in favour of Ricardo's. In the process, he dismissed notions central to Marxism such as the 'contradictions between the forces and relations of production' and the 'class struggle'.

nevertheless stands as a significant historicising of the (human) sciences of the West<sup>5</sup>. Foucault's 'archaeological' exposition of the epistemes<sup>6</sup> of resemblance, representation and finitude provides one set of parameters within which Van der Kemp's texts on language and his references to the language of the other may be studied as to their conditions of possibility.

Equivalent to the distinctions between the Renaissance, the Classical Age (Rationalism) and Modernity, Foucault argued that the main interpretive and knowledge producing metaphors which characterise each of these epistemes are those of 'resemblance', 'representation', and 'time'. In the episteme of *resemblance*, the world is seen as an infinite domain of things in which science and magic, rational and esoteric knowledge, reason and the spiritual are all related in a variety of ways (Foucault 1982:17-45). The episteme of *representation* did away with resemblance, distinguished between reason and chimera, illusion or appearance, characterised the world in terms of sense data (things), and integrated it with representation. As such, it opened the way for the establishing of three distinct but related fields of study, viz. natural history, the analysis of wealth or value, and general grammar. These sciences shared the primacy representation played in their analytical procedures—the comparing of identities and differences through measurement and order. This event marks the dawn of the method of proof by comparison, the possibility of establishing a comprehensive finite encyclopaedia of nature, complete enumeration, the identification of the critical, judging and discriminating activity of the mind, and the separation of history and science. The dominance of writing in nature disappears and in its stead, arose a semiotics of the sign—finding its being in substance, its form in

<sup>5</sup> Concerning the position of the intellectual, the second criticism came from Sartre who as intellectual, has carved out a role for himself in the French intellectual scene. Foucault distinguished his approach from Sartre's as that between a focus on 'system' (as in the sciences) and 'meaning' (humanism). Sartre (together with de Beauvoir, Le Bon and others), therefore, criticised Foucault for erecting a new ideology against Marxian humanism.

<sup>6</sup> The 'episteme' is a term coined to capture the notion of the "science of the archive" of a given period'. It is the 'positive unconscious of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse ...'. This level of analysis allows for the study of sciences (or disciplines) in terms of the common rules they employ 'to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories'. 'In any given culture and at any given moment, there is only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice' (Foucault 1982:xif,168).

the relation to the thing it transparently refers to or names, and its consistency in both primitive designation and conventional arbitrariness (Foucault 1982:46-76).

The episteme of *time* broke the dominant perception of representation, separated pure forms of knowledge and pure (empirical and concrete) science, and introduced an internal time-dimension to things. Whereas classifying systems of thought sought their utopia in the primitive beginnings of things, it is now dialectically and teleologically sought in their end. This transformation, however derived from an event which simultaneously constituted the sciences of biology, economics, and philology amongst others. Philology appeared when history was introduced to language to separate language families according to their internal structural differences, when phonetics and sound became primary objects of analysis separated off from the theory of the sign and writing, when roots themselves became the primary objects of study together with their inflected time dimensions, and when the studying of the historical kinship and evolution of languages became the objective of linguistics. In all these disciplines this new order of time derives from the introduction of history to empirical science. Each discipline had its own density and depths, its own internal history, objectivity, and laws. The loss of representational being in language was compensated for by the fact that it had to remain the medium of scientific expression, that it became an object of study in itself with exegesis its excess (e.g. by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud), and that it constituted literature: the untamed word (Foucault 1982:250-302).

My hypothesis is that Van der Kemp's textual remains can be usefully historicised in terms of the age of representation (since c.1660) and, maybe, the transition to modernity (c.1800-1810)<sup>7</sup>. The challenge is to describe those perceptions in eighteenth-century language studies which made it possible for Van der Kemp to write these texts and produce this knowledge. The method is comparative<sup>8</sup>; to compare statements in the texts with their significance in epistemic

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Foucault (1982:57). If we follow Foucault (1982:236ff,282) by positioning even the Ideologues still in the age of representation, with Schlegel (1808), Bopp (1816) and Grimm (1818) providing the conditions of the new episteme, then Van der Kemp's attempts at breaking with it, may nevertheless indicate that his texts too, still formed part of this episteme. The best candidate for arguing that Van der Kemp was part of the transition to the episteme of time, comes from his rules for 'sound'. However, these rules too, did not include a sense of time as would happen with the arrival of the age of finitude (cf. Foucault 1982:235f; also the important exposition by Deleuze 1988:124-132).

<sup>8</sup> Foucault's (1982:x) approach compared the three sciences of natural history, the analysis of wealth and language to the philosophy of the classical episteme.

equivalents of the time (whether Van der Kemp had direct access to these sources or not), and to comparatively account for the epistemic significance<sup>9</sup> of Van der Kemp's two principle texts: *Specimen of the Caffra Language* and *Vocabulary of the Caffra Language* ([1800] 1804:442-446; 447-458)<sup>10</sup>. In order to analyse the significance of Van der Kemp's work within general or universal grammar and the emergence of comparative grammar, I first reflect on the significance philosophy and the classical languages had for Van der Kemp. This is followed by a study of Van der Kemp's South African writings, paying attention to 'the language of thought', 'isiXhosa and universality', 'being and naming', 'the primitive', 'the writing of sound', and the importance of the teaching of 'reading and writing'.

### philosophy and the classical languages

Van der Kemp attended the Latin (Erasmian) School in Rotterdam (1757-1760) and then moved to Dordrecht (1761-1763), pursuing a particular focus on classical languages, especially Greek. He concluded his basic schooling with an oration on Julius Caesar<sup>11</sup>. Intending to become a medical doctor, he mostly focused his university studies on Philosophy and Medicine, taking all his subjects in Latin at the Album Studiosorum, University of Leyden (1763-1767). In the process, he became disillusioned with the medical sciences—because they were not scientific enough—started to profess deism, and dropped out of university in his fourth year. He joined the army and committed himself to the 'study of militarism' from Latin and German sources. During his years in the army (1767-1780), he lived a 'debauched life'<sup>12</sup> and continued his interest in philosophy. He published a Latin text (1775) on 'the rational discrimination of good and evil' in which he combined a rational theological

<sup>9</sup> The question with regard to Van der Kemp's texts is therefore two-fold—to compare them with both this philosophy (representation) and the language studies of the time. And, since *Madness and Civilisation* (1982a) focused on 'difference' and *The Order of Things* on resemblance, sameness and identity (cf. Foucault 1998:282ff), the aim is to discover the degree 'similitude' played a role in Van der Kemp's thought.

<sup>10</sup> The abbreviations *Specimen* (1800) and *Vocabulary* (1800) are used in this article to refer to these two texts.

<sup>11</sup> 'Jurene an injuria C. Julius Caesar interfectus guerit?'

<sup>12</sup> Enklaar (1982:5ff, 11) feels that whether this way of life was influenced by the 'early romantic social ideals of Rousseau, fashionable at the time with Dutch intellectuals, remains an open question'. Cf. Sassen (1959) on the influence of Rousseau on Dutch academia at the time.

system with a cosmological one<sup>13</sup>. Assuming all humanity to have a tendency towards evil, he argued that it is only through Descartes' 'first principles' that rational knowledge of God is possible. When he continued and completed his medical studies in Edinburgh (1780-1782), he published two further studies in Latin—one on the pre-Socratic, Parmenides (1781)<sup>14</sup>, and the other, his dissertation in medicine (1782)<sup>15</sup>. The Parmenides text mainly drew on Leibniz and deistically aimed at arguing for the independent existence of God and a cosmos which does not share any commonalities with the divine.

Van der Kemp practised as medical doctor until 1791 when he lost his belief in the efficacy of medicine, left medical practice and decided to concentrate on philosophy and the comparative study of languages. After his wife and daughter died and his subsequent conversion experience, Van der Kemp planned to continue these studies, focusing on Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac and Ethiopian<sup>16</sup>. He also embarked on the writing of a Commentary on Romans (1799-1802)<sup>17</sup>. This commentary comprised of a Dutch translation of the text, a paraphrase, and a verse by verse exegetical and dogmatic exposition drawing on Greek, Hebrew, and Syriac. The latter sections also contain comparisons with Syriac, Latin, French, and Lutheran Bible translations and a variety of mainly Platonic philosophical works. He continued working on the fourth volume of the commentary in South Africa after his arrival as first London Missionary Society President in Africa, requesting a Syriac Lexicon from Holland in 1803<sup>18</sup>.

From this brief overview, it is evident that Van der Kemp enjoyed a

<sup>13</sup> *Tentamen Theologiae Dunatoscopicae Dei existentiam et adtributa, nec non generaliore universi naturam ex consideratione ejus, quod possibile est, deducendi methodum tradentis, et materiam ordine Geometrico dispositam.*

<sup>14</sup> *Parmenides, sive de stabiliendis per adplicationem principiorum dunatoscopiorum ad res sensu, et experientia cognoscendas scientiae cosmologicae fundamentis.*

<sup>15</sup> *Dissertatio Medica, exhibens cogitationes physiologicas de vita et vivicatione materiae humanum corpus constituentis.*

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Enklaar (1988:33). Even though Van der Kemp held Latin in some esteem—especially with regard to natural history—it was the more 'original' or 'primitive' languages which counted as more important for him in terms of universal grammar.

<sup>17</sup> *De Theodicée van Paulus, of de Rechvaardigheid Gods door het Euangelium uit het Geloof, aangetoond tot Geloof, in eenige Aanmerkingen op dezelfde Brief aan de Romeinen, met eene nieuwe Vertaling en Paraphrase.*

<sup>18</sup> This volume was completed at Bethelsdorp and sent to his publisher in Holland in 1804 but never published. Enklaar (1988:173) inspected it and found it 'faded and barely decipherable'.

classical education and that he also constructively contributed to the scholarship of his time, mostly in Latin. In epistemic context, we can surmise that he probably shared assumptions and practices related to Rousseau's romanticism, Descartes' first principles, neo-platonic and deistic perceptions of God and nature (the infinite and finite), Leibniz's optimistic theodicee argument<sup>19</sup>, and the comparative study of languages. Concerning the latter, Van der Kemp's interest in the comparative study of the classical languages—especially Hebrew, Arabic, Greek, and Syriac<sup>20</sup>—may indicate that he shared with fellow scholars the notion that Hebrew or Arabic<sup>21</sup> were closest in approximating the original and most primitive language prevalent in eighteenth century language studies (cf. Aarsleff 1982:65). Van der Kemp placed a prime on the importance of Latin; not only studying and writing in Latin but also taking fellow missionaries Kicherer, Edwards and Edmond for daily Latin lessons prior to their leaving London for South Africa in 1798 (cf. Enklaar 1988:65). He also reports that, while their ship docked at the Cape Verde Islands en route to the Cape, he not only 'conversed' in Latin but also 'was happy to leave with a [Capuchin Monk] a Latin translation of the New Testament'<sup>22</sup>. The significance of Latin was that it not only constituted the universal language in which philosophers, religious and medical scholars published their work—making it the universal European language for scholarly discourse—but that it was also the (universal) language Linnaeus chose for the scientific naming of plants and animals in natural history (cf. Sassen 1959). Moreover, Van der Kemp's general interest in education is also evident from his 1807 letter to the LMS from Bethelsdorp in which he requests:

Theological and Ecclesiastical works; Geographical and Travels; Description of Arts and Manufactures; Grammars and Dictionaries for instruction in Latin, Greek and Oriental languages; Classic authors, Greek

<sup>19</sup> Van der Kemp opposed the optimism in this philosophy because, both during the deistic and conversionist phases of his life, he held to the view that universal sin entered the world through Adam (cf. LMS I CC 1797:357). Whereas he formerly thought that this universal sin could be addressed by a 'rational theological system' of the 'knowledge of God', he later changed this for the Pauline 'grace of God through faith in Christ', but still expounded in a rational, neo-platonic system.

<sup>20</sup> Apart from the importance these languages had for language scholars, Sanskrit and—with the expansion of trade during the latter half of the seventeenth-century—Chinese also became part of this list.

<sup>21</sup> For Leibniz (1956:296), Arabic 'characters of arithmetic' occupied this place because 'they better express the genesis of numbers'.

<sup>22</sup> LMS I VC 1798/1799:365.

and Latin; A good general Map of the world, particular maps, Celestial planisphere, a pair of Globes. Nor would I despise any writings on other branches: Natural History, Chemistry, Anatomy, Surgery, Midwifery, Philosophy (in Enklaar 1988:172).

For Van der Kemp, 'mission' was not only concerned with the 'souls' of people. It was an educational vehicle aimed at introducing people to universal knowledge. Latin was the medium which provided access to universal scholarship as well as the medium in which constructive contributions could be made<sup>23</sup>. And, as the list above indicates, a general interest in his own continued learning and the education of others in the sciences, were some of Van der Kemp's main objectives.

Van der Kemp's interest in languages in general and even an obscure Scottish dialect—which he must have mastered during his stay in Scotland (1780-1782)—also points to his interest in contributing to the comprehensive description of all known languages<sup>24</sup>. The rationale<sup>25</sup> for this perspective is that it would allow for

<sup>23</sup> This interpretation corresponds to the general optimistic view of the desirability for and civilising effects of education. It was present in the cyclical historical view of the rise and fall of civilisations (cf. Vico [1725]1999 and Herder [1774]1891), in both religious and a-religious perspectives on education (Lessing [1780]1838 and the materialists) and in understandings of the education of the individual (Rousseau 1782). And, when scholars started to write in the vernacular (as in France and Germany)—for the education of the nation so to speak—it was still in a universalist and general paradigm. The focus on the vernacular had as aim its 'perfection' to the degree and in analogy to the classical (cf. Kristeva 1989:158f).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Foucault's reference to Bachmeister's (1773) study which aimed at providing 'an abstract of all the languages of the (Russian) Empire'. This was, Foucault (1982:233) says, in response to 'those great confrontations between various languages that we see appearing at the end of the century—in some cases brought about by the pressure of political motives'. See too his reference to the Petersburg study that aimed at accounting for 279 languages—171 in Asia; 55 in Europe; 30 in Africa; and 23 in America. The first edition (1787) was followed by a second revised edition in four volumes (1790-1791).

<sup>25</sup> It is a well-known fact that philosophers and scientists in Europe regularly read reports of travellers and missionaries in the 'new world', also making the latter consciously writing to meet the interests of this audience (cf. Aarsleff 1982:161; Rousseau 1973:53). Van der Kemp have read the publications of Le Vaillant (1791-1798), Sparrman (1786), Barrow (1801-1804) and Van Reenen ([1803]1937); (cf. LMS I R 1800:433ff,463,464 and LMS I L1 1800:505 respectively). Lichtenstein (1810-1812:290-296) and Di Capelli (1803:98-100) visited him on the frontier.

the comprehensive articulation of languages as part of the general and universal encyclopaedia, similar to the tabulated categorisations of natural history. In addition to developing an alphabet (with rules of sound) for isiXhosa and an isiXhosa vocabulary for prospective missionaries, this activity also shows him aiming at constructively contributing towards this universality.

### the language of thought

Concerning rationalism, and apart from his own deistic contributions to metaphysics, it is evident from his writings that Van der Kemp shared concepts and knowledge-systems constructs similar to those of the age of representation even after his conversion. This is evident when he says, neo-platonically, that people 'communicate ideas' to one another<sup>26</sup>; that acts of 'naming' which transparently referred to things or to their 'signification' were central to his academic endeavours<sup>27</sup>, and that isiXhosa and Dutch words for things are referred to as 'names' the people 'call' such things<sup>28</sup>. isiXhosa words in his *Vocabulary* are also presented as 'names' with their English equivalents<sup>29</sup> and the table for his isiXhosa alphabet in *Specimen* is divided into the four groups: 'figure' (the letters of the alphabet); 'names' (isiXhosa words referred to); 'signification' (the English equivalent of such words); and 'the sound of the consonants' (comparing the pronunciation of the isiXhosa consonant with its equivalent in either English or Dutch). Moreover, Van der Kemp also uses concepts derived from the 'sign' for both gestural and written communication<sup>30</sup>. From this evidence, it appears as if Van der Kemp shared conceptual schemas concerning language central to the episteme of representation; principally the relationship between 'thought' (or the 'idea'), language, and the 'thing' named or signified and this episteme's semiotics<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> LMS I SA 1799:409; TVDK 1801:495; EL1 1802:501f.

<sup>27</sup> LMS SA I 1799:400; LMS I TVDK 1800:418; LMS R 1800:432; LMS S 1800:442, 445; LMS I TVDK 1801:483,485,493f; LMS II AR 1804:239.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. LMS R 1800:432,433,434,435,436,438; LMS I S 1800:442,443; LMS I V 1800: 447; and especially LMS I Ve 1800:459f; LMS I Q 1800:460f; LMS I B 1800:463f; LMS I Ins 1800:464.

<sup>29</sup> LMS V 1800:447ff; LMS I Ve 1800:459f; LMS I Q 1800:460f; LMS I B 1800:463f; LMS I Ins 1800:464.

<sup>30</sup> LMS I TVDK 1801:483,485,493f; LMS II AR 1804:239. Cf. Aarsleff (1967:21f) on Warburton's ([1737/1741]1755) identification of such 'gestural' communication as the 'language of action' in his *Divine Legation of Moses*. Condillac (1798) followed Warburton and popularised this notion.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Leibniz (1896:285ff). On Port-Royal, cf. Harris & Taylor 1989:94-109).

The idealist understanding of language dates back to John Locke who borrowed some of his insights from Descartes<sup>32</sup>. Fundamental to the classical conception of language is that it functions to ascribe names to things. Acts of naming meant representing the 'being' of things. Scientifically, the naming of things universally meant articulating them in grids and tables in terms of their identities and differences. Since both philosophy and science, however, derive from language, the 'being' of things captured in the name and their distribution over the table did not exclude one another. The thing represented in the name was that name, and the name captured in the table that thing, rendering the relationship between name and thing representationally transparent (cf. Foucault 1982:65,82). As for the nature of truth, Locke distinguished between 'verbal truth' and 'real truth' with the former not articulated with nature and therefore not acceptable as 'knowledge'. This view is present in his argument that 'real Truth is about Ideas agreeing to things' (Locke 1689:357; cf. also Harris & Taylor 1989:110-121):

Yet it may not be amiss here again to consider that, though our words signify nothing but our ideas, yet being designed by them to signify things, the truth they contain when put into propositions will be only verbal, when they stand for ideas in the mind that have not an agreement with the reality of things. And therefore truth as well as knowledge may well come under the distinction of verbal and real; that being only verbal truth, wherein terms are joined according to the agreement or disagreement of the ideas they stand for, without regarding whether our ideas are such as really have, or are capable of having, an existence in nature. But then it is they contain real truth, when these signs are joined as our ideas agree; and when our ideas are such as we know are capable of having an existence in nature; which in substances we cannot know but by knowing that such have existed<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. especially Descartes' (1637:229) definition of 'ideas', dating from 1670—twenty years before Locke's book. Here he says: 'By the word idea I understand that form of any thought, by the immediate perception of which I am conscious of that same thought; so that I can express nothing in words, when I understand what I say, without making it certain, by this alone, that I possess the idea of the thing that is signified by these words'.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Book III in Locke (1977:256ff) for further elaboration on the issues addressed here. See Kristeva (1989:160f) on how semiotics was re-introduced in the study of language. Nearly two centuries later—but then a protagonist of philology—Max Müller (1864:334-337) still referred to Locke's expositions with approval.

Despite differences of opinion, detail and further developments, this perception was shared among philosophers and language scholars of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century<sup>34</sup>. Van der Kemp appears to conform to the broad outline of this tradition<sup>35</sup>.

The most concise exposition of Locke's various observations concerning the 'sign', comes from his categorising of the 'division of the sciences' into 'physica' (or 'natural philosophy'), 'practica' (or 'ethics') and 'semeiotike' (or 'the doctrine of signs'). Here, 'semiotics' is explained in terms of his exposition of the articulation of ideas, things and words (cf. Locke 1689:443). Semiotics was the main heading for the study of 'logic' and language in the eighteenth century, and Van der Kemp not only studied logic in his undergraduate years but also, later in his life, it was this subject which drew his attention away from medicine and medical practice. The semiotic shaped his focus on philosophy and the study of languages. I now turn to the question of how this episteme shaped his interpretation of isiXhosa.

### isiXhosa and universality

Van der Kemp's interest in the languages of the eastern Cape frontier involved much more than the study of language for mission purposes. The intended outcome was to contribute to the universal study of languages (influenced by the universality inherent in natural history) which included the comparative study of all known languages (likewise influenced by the significance of the table as analytical instrument in natural history). In his description of conditions at the Cape Van der Kemp suggests that the LMS directors should consider sending missionaries to

<sup>34</sup> Berkeley (1710:57-63) criticised Locke's 'abstract ideas' in so far as language and names may have more than one signified and that ideas are not perfectly communicated from one mind to another. For Hume (1739:2), Locke's understanding was too wide 'in making it stand for all our perceptions'. In his explication of the origin of language Smith (1762:7) draws similar relations between 'substance', 'substantives', 'objects', 'signs' and 'ideas'. They all, however, still worked in the same framework. Cf. also Rousseau's (1762) use of 'ideas' in his 'Preface' to *Emile*.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. also Lichtenstein's (1810-12:473-500) six page introduction to his isiXhosa Vocabulary in his 'Appendix': 'Remarks upon the Language of the Koosas, accompanied by a Vocabulary of their Words'. In this section he uses similar phrases and expressions—e.g. the relationship between the 'ideas' and 'words' of a language; the 'combinations and inflexions' 'through which people arrive at a reciprocal exchange of ideas'; and the 'signs of language'.

Madagascar. If they did indeed decide to embark on such an enterprise, the missionaries could come to Cape Town to learn Malagasy languages:

At the Cape they will find sufficient opportunity to be perfectly instructed in the Madagascar languages. Mr. Truter, member of the judicial court of this town, lived in Madagascar, and will always be ready to inform our Directors of particulars necessary for [such prospective missionaries] to know<sup>36</sup>.

This is one instance where there is reference to the acquiring of another language (and other 'particulars') for missionary purposes. But this interest in acquiring the other's language went much further.

For September 22, 1799, the third day after having met Ngqika for the first time—Van der Kemp reports that 'the king visited, and instructed us in the [isiXhosa] language' and for the sixth day—September 25, 1799—that Ngqika again 'instructed me in his language' after having 'received his messengers from the theatre of war, and heard their reports in our tent'<sup>37</sup>. On May 2, 1800 he started receiving instruction in the Gonaka language from Piet Prinslo and two of his Khoi companions<sup>38</sup>. One year and three months later he reports in his journals (July 29, 1801) that he had decided to establish a mission for the Khoi rather than the Xhosa.

Drawing on typically eighteenth-century language analysis, his text *Specimen* constitutes the beginnings—or 'birth'—of indigenous language analysis in South Africa. If one has to put a date to it, then it must be the year 1800 or even more specifically, the day he reports that he, now, 'taught [Ngqika] the [isiXhosa] alphabet': April 23, 1800. When Ngqika visited Van der Kemp on April 23 1800, he not only attended Van der Kemp's catechism for the children, but Van der Kemp also 'taught Ngqika the [isiXhosa] alphabet'. This event was precipitated by Ngqika requesting Van der Kemp to instruct him in isiXhosa, on February 8, 1800. On this occasion Van der Kemp promised to do so, once he had 'attained his language', which we may assume he had already achieved to some degree by April 23, 1800<sup>39</sup>. By this time he must have worked out his isiXhosa alphabet at least.

Van der Kemp was not just interested in the acquisition of indigenous languages but also in teaching indigenous people either Dutch or English, and his interest here, again, reveals his primary focus on the alphabet. For his entry for June

<sup>36</sup> LMS I VC 1799:369.

<sup>37</sup> LMS I FA 1799:386f.

<sup>38</sup> LMS I TVDK 1800:418.

<sup>39</sup> LMS I TVDK 1800:416,414.

11, 1800, he mentions that he taught one of Captain Tagga's Khoi the Dutch alphabet<sup>40</sup> and promised an English spelling book to William, one of the English deserters (February 20, 1801). For June 24, 1801, he writes that he and Read had printed four hundred copies of a 'spelling table' for the instruction of the children in the school at Graaff Reinet<sup>41</sup>, and, accompanying their settlement at Botha's Place (March 7, 1802), he reports the printing of a 'spelling book containing 3138 monosyllables'<sup>42</sup>. From an archival perspective, Van der Kemp's endeavour to learn the other's language<sup>43</sup> went beyond the purposes of communication or missionising. It came about due to the exigencies of more general epistemic conditions, that of general grammar. These derive from what Foucault saw as the representational significance of 'rhetorical' and 'grammar' studies. With regard to 'rhetoric', it is not tropes<sup>44</sup> but the 'figure' and the 'monosyllable' which indicated spatiality for Van der Kemp in his *Specimen*. 'Figure', here stood for the consonants in the table where he distinguished between 'figure', 'name', 'signification' and 'sound of the consonants'. The monosyllables indicated the units of language. In this sense Van der Kemp's *Specimen*—with its alphabet, rules, and comparisons of sound—

<sup>40</sup> LMS I TVDK 1800:419.

<sup>41</sup> LMS I TVDK 1801:475,481.

<sup>42</sup> LMS II EJPB 1802/1803:82. This 'spelling table' and especially the 'spelling book containing 3138 monosyllables' must have been in the Khoi (or Namaqua) language since he switched his objective to establish a mission among the Xhosa for the Khoi on July 29 1801 already. Moreover, there is no evidence that there were any significant numbers of isiXhosa in his group both at Graaff-Reinet and Botha's Place.

<sup>43</sup> So far I have not been able to find extant copies of either the 'spelling table' or the 'spelling book' of 'monosyllables'. The same is true for Van der Kemp's catechism in Khoi—*Tzitzika Thuickwedi miko Khwekhwenama—Principles of the word of God for the Nama speaking nation* (LMS II AR 1804:239). If these texts could be found, they would be significant not only for their contents but also for their historical value, since it appears that the first printed text in South Africa was Van der Kemp's *BRIEF van het ZENDELINGS GENOOTSCHAP te LONDEN* ..., printed on his arrival in Cape Town in 1799 (cf. Bradlow 1971).

<sup>44</sup> The virtual absence of any reference to rhetoric in Van der Kemp's texts in distinction to 'grammar' and 'sound', means that, within representational thought, he linked up more with the Platonic strand of thinking (represented implicitly by Leibniz—cf. Loemker 1956:27) than with the Ciceronian (represented by Smith 1963 and the prevalence of the study of 'style' and 'belles lettres'—cf. Sassen 1959:220).



contains the rudimentary conditions in terms of which he attempted to provide a relationship with universality<sup>45</sup>; a total representation of the Xhosa world for both his isiXhosa *Vocabulary* in terms of the internal order of isiXhosa rather than its historical dependency on other languages<sup>46</sup>.

With regard to a link to universality, Van der Kemp's alphabet treated isiXhosa in the same way he would any other language, making it part of the universal attempt to study individual languages with regard to a common alphabetical system<sup>47</sup>. The same is true of his development of 'rules of sounds'. According to Foucault the universal attempt in the representational study of languages was to provide 'adequate signs for all representations ... and establish possible links between them':

In so far as language can represent all representations it is ... the element of the universal. There must exist within it at least the possibility of a language that will gather into itself, between its words, the totality of the world, and inversely, the world as the totality of what is representable, must be able to become, in its totality, an Encyclopaedia (Foucault 1982:85).

On the possibility of providing a total representation of the Xhosa world, Van der Kemp's isiXhosa *Vocabulary* constitutes a comprehensive analysis of all possible kinds of 'names' in the language<sup>48</sup>. Representationally, the 'speech' present in this text 'orders' or analyses the order of the language. It links 'language and knowledge', thereby providing the possibility not only for learning to speak the language, but also of discovering 'the principles of the world's system or those of the human mind's operations' (Destutt de Tracy in Foucault 1982:86). Contrary to the Renaissance's preference for the text above language,

<sup>45</sup> For the articulation of 'figure' with the common, universal writing system as well as with representational thought, see Warburton (in Derrida 1982:285).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Foucault (1982:84-92). This latter approach would only arrive with Philology and 'finitude'. In representational thought, the greater attention to synchronicity rather than diachronicity was decisively influenced by natural history and its methodology of the analytical table—which was similar to the way in which 'language analyses' (cf. Foucault 1982:115).

<sup>47</sup> For this universality, see the quotation from the article 'Language' in the Encyclopédie (in Kristeva 1989:189-192).

<sup>48</sup> *Specimen* contains twenty-one sections, dividing into phenomena (which treat human beings as just one other category amongst others), the syntactical parts of isiXhosa and 'phrases'.

[i]n the Classical age, knowing and speaking are interwoven in the same fabric; in the case of both knowledge and language, it is a question of providing representation with the signs by means of which it can unfold itself in obedience to a necessary and visible order (Foucault 1982:88).

I would suggest that Van der Kemp's texts derive not only from the older general grammar but also from the comparative grammar that came into being during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Whereas the latter compared languages in order to discover 'peculiarly grammatical laws common to all linguistic domains' the former,

... does not attempt to define the laws of all languages, but to examine each particular language in turn, as a mode of the articulation of thought upon itself. In every language, taken in isolation, representation provides itself with 'characters'. General grammar is intended to define the system of identities and differences that these spontaneous characters presuppose and employ. It must establish the taxonomy of each language (Foucault 1982:91)<sup>49</sup>.

Taken together *Specimen* and the *Vocabulary* along with Van der Kemp's other descriptions<sup>50</sup> constitute his contribution to general grammar. The goal was to open up the possibility for the Xhosa to become part of the universal order, and, vice versa, for this 'nation'<sup>51</sup> to be treated and viewed as one nation alongside all others

<sup>49</sup> It is in this sense that Van der Kemp's reference to the 'oriental c, which in this language occurs, may be expressed by ng' ... as a 'character' must be understood—also showing that he viewed the other 'sounds' in isiXhosa in similar fashion. ('Character' was modelled after natural history—cf. below.)

<sup>50</sup> Including *Specimen* and *Vocabulary*, these descriptions are divided into sixteen sections, comprising the headings, 'Religion'; 'Customs'; 'Population'; 'Government'; 'Mode of living and means of subsistence'; 'Clothing'; 'The Nature of the Country'; 'Fossile Productions'; 'Vegetables'; 'Quadrupeds'; 'Birds'; 'Insects etc.'; 'History'; and 'Crimes and Punishments'.

<sup>51</sup> He described the isiXhosa world in the way in which he would describe that of any other 'nation', but also that, with regard to the Khoi—who by now have lost their land, government, and autonomy (cf. Elphick 1977)—he advocated that they be treated on an equal footing with the 'Christians', i.e. as English subjects (LMS I TVDK 1801:494).

universally speaking<sup>52</sup>.

Under the theme of universality additional perspectives show the impact of natural history on Van der Kemp's understanding of language. With regard to this science he states explicitly,

[Xhosaland] might be looked upon by a botanist as his paradise; but as I have no taste for that science, nor indeed for natural history in general, my knowledge of the characters of a few most obvious plants is too scanty to present you with them; nor do I suppose that you would look even upon a more complete collection as much interesting. When I first came into this country, I took down the characters of ten or twelve, and drew their figures, but want of time soon hindered me from going on. I observed, that though the pentandria class ...<sup>53</sup>

Despite this disclaimer, he nevertheless often refers to natural history 'names' (in Latin) and use descriptions derived from this universal science, using the notion that 'names' 'distinguish' or 'analyse' phenomena<sup>54</sup>. His *Vocabulary* starts off with the heading 'Names of Animals, and their Parts' and then treats 'Quadrupeds', 'Birds', 'Reptiles, Insects, etc.' and 'Parts of Animals'. The second section, 'Of Mankind', continues the previous and stands for 'Names of Mankind, and their Parts'. Moreover, humanity is treated as just one category amongst all the phenomena and is not installed at the top of the pyramid as would happen in the nineteenth century and later evolutionism. Therefore, despite his disclaimer—and related to especially the synchronic practices of the tabulating of observable phenomena 'and their parts'

<sup>52</sup> It needs to be noted that Lichtenstein got much of the information for his 'Appendix' as well as his information on isiXhosa and Xhosa history in 'Book Three' from Van der Kemp during the latter's year-long stay at Cape Town (1805-1806), and not as the 'Prefatory Note' states, from Van der Kemp's publications in the *Transactions of the London Missionary Society* (cf. Lichtenstein 1810-1812:296,478). Cf. also Lichtenstein's (1810-1812:360f,402,482,484,492,498) references to Van der Kemp, in some instances pointing out that all the information he presents comes from the missionary and always regarding him as a more reliable informant than Le Vaillant and Barrow. If this was the case, then Lichtenstein's understanding of the rationale for studying the other's language was certainly shared by Van der Kemp, showing that the latter's interest went beyond the mere developing of a medium for missionising purposes.

<sup>53</sup> LMS R 1800:460.

<sup>54</sup> LMS I Q 1800:462.

in natural history (cf. Foucault 1982:97)—it was the model of universality arising from both natural science and general grammar which provided the conditions of possibility for Van der Kemp's texts<sup>55</sup>.

### being and naming

Van der Kemp's texts abound with phrases like 'it is/was ...' plus an affirmation, negation or a description as well as phrases in the form, 'this is that'. Closely related are his use of expressions starting with 'I think ...' and his explanations of a 'cause' of a 'name' (including proper names). Moreover, his presentation of 'verbs' are either in the infinitive form ('to ...') or in the form 'it is ...'<sup>56</sup>. These all highlight the propositional form or the central importance the verb 'to be' had in representational thought. 'Being' had to do with truth and falsity, with the ability to 'judge' truth and error and compare evidence to arrive at the true relationship between idea, name and thing or fact. The importance of the verb 'to be' derived from the view that it was this verb which had language appear, making a distinction between the incoherent 'cries' in nature and the emergence of mutually understood communication (Foucault 1982:92-96). And, if primitivity was not the point of emergence, then, in

<sup>55</sup> Leibniz's notion of 'universal language' (cf. footnote 91) had as complement, the developing of vernacular languages. The main rationale—and critical of scholastic philosophy which developed cumbersome 'technical terms' [in Latin]—was that the developing of a people's 'own tongue', would allow philosophical thought in 'popular terms'—'common people, and even women, have become able to judge ...' he says. Taking German as example, he says too, '[w]hoever wishes to retain or to twist Latin terms into German will not be philosophizing in German but in Latin' (Leibniz 1956:191-194). Furthermore, since this 'ethic' was to also impact on 'morals, politics and law', Leibniz's ethic can be said to underlie this focus on both the universal and the indigenous language. In his discussion of 'natural law', for example, he says: 'Justice will therefore be the habit of loving others (or of seeking the good of others in itself and of taking delight in the good of others), as long as this can be done prudently (or as long as this is not a cause of greater pain)' (Leibniz 1956:194,214; e.i.o.). Since both the comparative study of language as well as the developing of isiXhosa are central to Van der Kemp's texts, this Leibnizian perspective—also since he was mostly influenced by the latter philosophically—I take to be the ethic which inspired him. This ethic—at least as it articulates with the vernacular—dates back to the time of Dante who purportedly was the first scholar in Europe to publish in an indigenous language.

<sup>56</sup> LMS I R 1800:432-468.

Lockean terms, the truth of the proposition contrasted with the merely 'verbal'.

It was the appearance of the link between name and thing, and subject and predicate which constituted knowledge and language. The importance of this perception in representational thought explains why Van der Kemp did not bother to develop a syntax related to time and tense for isiXhosa. On this level, *Specimen* works only with the adjacency of syllables and monosyllables and the comparison of sounds, in terms of which 'tense' would not be anything more than an affix added to a monosyllable or a number of syllables. *Vocabulary*, again, treats only the syntactical parts of isiXhosa and, similarly, have the isiXhosa 'phrases' mostly in propositional form. According to Foucault (1982:96) this 'being in language' would be refracted when the 'purely grammatical' was founded and the proposition became nothing but a syntactical unit. If propositional thinking deriving from the verb 'to be' was central for Van der Kemp, the flipside is that the 'name' and the 'adjective' were too. I have noted that Van der Kemp's language usage in which acts of 'naming', the 'signification' of 'names', the relationship between a 'thing' (observed) and its 'name' or what it is 'called', were central to his academic endeavours. We also saw that the isiXhosa words in his *Vocabulary* are presented as 'names' with their English equivalents, and that the table for his isiXhosa *alphabet* in *Specimen* is divided into four groups: 'figure'; 'names'; 'signification'; and 'the sound of the consonants'. Thus Van der Kemp did not only construct the tools for his act of nomination (the alphabet), but nomination was also his central concern in reporting on his own acts of naming, acts of naming by the isiXhosa, and 'names' in Dutch or English. Adjectives mainly played a role of description and observation, representing the 'thing' in all its clarity and visibility in language.

If the propositional form allowed for the act of judging truth, then the name and the thing designated in the proposition were the *judicandum* and *judicatum* respectively. As such, names—proper names, substantives, but also all other parts of speech—had a meaning and truth element attached to them (cf. Foucault 1982:96-103). Horizontally, such names could be presented in analogy to natural history from the individual to the general (individual to species ... to genus ... to class) as in *Vocabulary* or vertically from substance to quality. In the vertical table, 'substance',

... distinguishes things that subsist by themselves from those—modifications, features, accidents, or characteristics—that one can never meet in an independent state: deep down substances; on the surface, qualities .... At their point of intersection stands the common noun; at one extremity the proper noun, at the other the adjective (Foucault 1982:98).

Van der Kemp's main focus on the 'name' is best understood in this sense of 'substance' rather than in terms of Locke's notion. However, as with Locke, Van der

Kemp's nominations do designate things existing in nature, and nature's being in language. His identification of 'adjectives' (which include colour) and 'qualities, dignities, etc.' (which include adjectives) in *Vocabulary*, 'customs' (which he recognises as being distributed throughout all his descriptions)<sup>57</sup>, and 'manners'—all relate to surface, observation, and adjectival description. This practice, then, Van der Kemp shared with representational thought. But with regard to primitivity, he apparently had a different opinion<sup>58</sup>.

### the primitive

Foucault (1982:100-103) describes this difference over the status of the primitive as 'the point of heresy that splits eighteenth century grammar'. This fissure came about due to the ascription of primitive values (or meanings) to even individual letters<sup>59</sup>. In Van der Kemp's text *Specimen*, letters of the alphabet are mainly referred to as

<sup>57</sup> LMS I R 1800:434.

<sup>58</sup> This level of 'opinion' is the level of which Foucault held that, at archaeological level—in this case the episteme of representation—there was no distinction between scholars propagating one discourse in conflict with another. See his explanation of the distinction between 'physiocrat' and 'antiphiysiocrat' as well as 'the model of knowledge' and 'the primacy of the subject' for example (Foucault 1982:200; 1979:28).

<sup>59</sup> Take for example Court de Gébelin who, to his 'perishable fame', claimed that 'labial contact, the easiest to bring into play, the gentlest, the most gracious, served to designate the first beings man comes to know, those who surround him and to whom he owes everything (papa; mama)' (Foucault 1982:102). He further argued that since 'the teeth are as firm as the lips are mobile and flexible', the 'intonations' coming from the latter 'are strong, sonorous, noisy'. It is through dental contact that the ideas behind verbs were supposed to be expressed—*tonner* (thunder); *retintir* (to resound), *étonner* (to astonish); but also *tambours* (drums); *timbales* (timpani) *trompettes* (trumpets). For Rousseau, vowels indicated primitive meanings in names—A for *possession* (*avoir*); E for *existence*; I for *puissance* (power); O for *étonnement* (astonishment); and U for *humidité* and *humeur* (mood). He distinguished between the forming of the singing vowels—speaking passions—and the rough consonants—representing human needs. And, influenced by climate, the gutturals of the Northern countries indicated hunger and cold; and the Southern languages, that of vowel languages 'born of early morning encounters between shepherds when the first fires of love were bursting from the pure crystal of the springs' (Foucault 1982:102f).

'figures', his 'sound' and 'rules' of the vowels mainly used for sound comparisons and his 'monosyllables' mainly to indicate 'composition, conjugation, and affixion'. There is not much evidence of the primitive designation of vowels or syllables in his texts—at least not in the senses of G  belin and Rousseau. Nevertheless, the ideas and practices which related syllables and nomination were shared by these scholars. *Port-Royal* called these the 'accessory' words—like syllables, and letters—as present in *Specimen's* alphabet and Van der Kemp's departure from the 'monosyllable' in his language education. On the monosyllable in isiXhosa, he reported:

Monosyllables, and words of more than three syllables, are but few in this language: some however occur, as *le*, that—*p  *, give—*thou  *, it is gone—*Thokol  se*, Devil—*izand  udou*, check—*izibouba*, breast: but composition, conjugation, and affixion, increase the number of syllables beyond this number, e.g. *Izitim  le*, pleiades—*diaz  nzile*, I did it—*inkvinkwanalame*, my sin—*Baokkatina*, our father, &c.<sup>60</sup>

This focus on the monosyllable derived from the view that it too—like nouns themselves—had a representational function, giving access to thought. This centrality was refracted with the founding of syntax and philology.

While there is no convincing evidence of primitive designation with regard to nomination deriving from the monosyllable in Van der Kemp's texts, there are signs of shared assumptions related to primitive designation. This comes from his references to proper names, the 'cry', and the sounds in language and the depicting of the Xhosa as 'passionate'. Shortly after his first meeting with Ngqika, Van der Kemp was given names by people—names which did not have a signified shared by all, because, it is explained, only the one who gave it, knew it. Hoby, the king's sister, called him 'Haniza!' (which she had introduced, though 'the king and the most part of the people called me Tink'hanna')<sup>61</sup>. In his entry for October 5, 1799, Van der Kemp also mentions that he observed that

many of the people called my name T'Chefoe; and asking for the reason, they told me that I had already several names; that it was the custom among them, when they received some benefit of a friend, which excited their love and gratitude, to give him a *new* name, by which they expressed their feelings; that they knew not what T'Chefoe signified; and that he who

<sup>60</sup> LMS I S 1800:446.

<sup>61</sup> LMS I SA 1799:396.

invented this new name only knew what he meant to express by it<sup>62</sup>.

Van der Kemp also acquired other names. When he camped at the kraal of Khanja, son of Langa, he reports that, after prayer, Khanja 'repeated my four names Tink'hanna, Goboossi, Tabeka, Keleze! as sign of approbation, though he understood not a word of it'<sup>63</sup>.

On June 22, 1799 Van der Kemp reported:

We had a restless night, as the wolves, kwaggas, and other animals, disturbed our sleep, and more so, the perpetual barking of our dogs, mingled with the cries of our people<sup>64</sup>.

The journal reports resound with the 'cry':

Last night the wolves made such an uncommon noise as we had never heard before; some of them imitating the shrieks of women crying for assistance; others the cries of children, others the laughing of men. I, supposing that the cries proceeded from some [Xhosa] girls of Apollonia's kraal, who, being insulted by Valentine, called for help, ran to assist them; but their breaking out into the most horrid howlings (somewhat analogous to the notes which cats make in their nightly pursuits), convinced me of my mistake<sup>65</sup>.

In addition to the proper name without signified and the cry, we also notice the importance of 'sound' in Van der Kemp's text *Specimen*. He makes a distinction between the sounds of the consonants and vowels, identifies one sound for each of the nineteen different consonants, develops two rules for the five vowels and their conjunctions and gives another eight rules comparatively explaining the sounds of the vowels and monosyllables. The following two references may serve as examples of Van der Kemp depicting the Xhosa and Khoi as 'passionate'.

It appears that Hoby attempted on a few occasions to come and sleep with Van der Kemp, but that he did not accept her<sup>66</sup>. More to the point, he reports that the evening after Ngqika married his third wife (October 3 1800), a similar incident took

<sup>62</sup> LMS I SA 1799:400.

<sup>63</sup> LMS I TVDK 1800:418.

<sup>64</sup> LMS I JC 1799:375.

<sup>65</sup> LMS I SA 1799:403.

<sup>66</sup> LMS I SA 1800:396.

place. One of Ngqika's captains,

... came in with two girls, begging us to accept them, and to come with them and make merry with the king, and the rest of the company. This we [Van der Kemp and Edmond] declined<sup>67</sup>.

With regard to Read's marriage to a Khoi woman, Van der Kemp reports on the Khoi's 'inconstancy' in their 'matrimonial connections', which, he says, 'subjects us to great irregularities'. This is further qualified:

[W]e exhort, as much as possible, those who are still heathen, to abide with their wives, and not to leave or change them, as their custom is; and those who believe in Christ, we oblige with consent of the unbelieving moiety, publicly to bind themselves to each other in the inviolable ties of matrimony<sup>68</sup>.

These four references indicate the role primitive designation played in knowledge (cf. Foucault 1982:104-110). The references to Van der Kemp's 'names' and the 'cries' of people and animals are examples of the assumption that these were not 'language' or 'signs' as yet. They are indications of the common animality<sup>69</sup> of all people prior to the emergence of a socially shared convention which established common assumptions with regard to meaning<sup>70</sup>. It is in this context that Rousseau asked the question as to what came first—the conventions on which signs depend or the community which make these conventions?

<sup>67</sup> LMS I SA 1800:398.

<sup>68</sup> LMS I AR 1803:166.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. especially Leibniz's (1956:199ff) discussion of the proposition, 'every man is an animal'. In the argument, he criticises Nizolius' inductive procedure—which leads him to the proposition, 'every animal is a man'—but affirms the first.

<sup>70</sup> The complement of this view is that of the study of 'roots'. Apart from one comparison with regard to the similarity of one 'substantive' in Khoi and isiXhosa, there is no evidence that Van der Kemp attempted to study 'roots'. It appears as if he was more concerned with primary designation and convention and the adding of 'syllables' than root studies (cf. LMS I VC 1798/1799:370). Even so, Van der Kemp's identification of more than three thousand monosyllables in Khoi may be seen as equivalent to such root studies. Cf. also Foucault (1982:284) with regard to the distinction between the syllabic—e.g. Chinese—and root languages—e.g. Sanskrit.

Rousseau's point of departure was to show that many scholars make a mistake when putting forth arguments based on ideas derived from 'a state of society' and not 'a pure state of nature'. If the latter is the focus, he argued that there was only one possibility for the origin of languages—i.e. from 'the simple cry of nature' (Rousseau 1973:60)<sup>71</sup>. Van der Kemp's extensive development of 'sounds'—especially with regard to the vowels, dental and palatal clicks and diphthongs—and his references to possible intercourse refer to the assumption that the Xhosa and Khoi were seen as passionate. This thematic motif can be traced to Rousseau's distinction between the European languages and the languages of the South and East. The latter, he averred, were more primitive, more given to singing and passion whereas the former were more rational, rough and enslaved due to the civil forms of government and life. In his analysis, however, it was the Southern languages which were closer to nature<sup>72</sup>.

### the writing of sound

In *Specimen* Van der Kemp developed an alphabet for isiXhosa. Moreover, he distinguishes between the 'writing', 'sound' and 'pronunciation' of letters and monosyllables as well as developed a number of pronunciation and orthographic rules for especially the vowels. He introduced his 'Alphabet' by saying that '[isiXhosa], which is totally different from that of the [Khoi language], may be

<sup>71</sup> Rousseau (1973:60f) explains: 'But as this was excited only by a sort of instinct on urgent occasions, to implore assistance in case of danger, or relief in case of suffering, it could be of little use in the ordinary course of life, in which more moderate feelings prevail. When the ideas of men began to expand and multiply, and closer communication took place among them, they strove to invent more numerous signs and a more copious language. They multiplied the inflexions of the voice and added gestures, which are in their own nature more expressive, and depend less for their meaning on a prior determination. Visible and moveable objects were therefore expressed by gestures, and audible ones, by imitative sounds .... [with the latter replacing the former, when] men at length bethought themselves of substituting for them the articulate sounds of the voice, which, without bearing the same relation to any particular ideas, are better calculated to express them all, as conventional signs. Such an institution could be made by common consent, and must have been effected in a manner not very easy for men whose gross organs had not been accustomed to any such exercise'. Cf. also Rousseau ([1781]1998:11-17).

<sup>72</sup> Rather than following Rousseau's argument from primitivity, it appears that Van der Kemp followed Leibniz's (1896:285ff) on language derived from community.

expressed in Writing by making use of the following Alphabets'. He also refers to the 'writing' of the palatal and dental 'clacks' as well as the 'lispingsound which sometimes affects the pronunciation of the *l* and *z*'. For this 'writing of sound', he also developed the following orthography<sup>73</sup>.

( ' ) Shews that the syllable above which it is placed, is to be pronounced with an accent.

( ~ ) Indicates that the consonant above which it is written is to be pronounced with a certain circumvolution of the tongue, which only can be learned from the living voice; it is almost confined to the *l*, and *z*, as in *Kl<sup>3</sup> o`go*, the head, *Loaenz`e*, the sea.

( ^ ) Is the mark of a nearly silent letter, which is to be pronounced so short, as scarcely to be heard at all, as in *Umfä`zi*, a woman.

( ' ) Following a consonant, in the middle of a word, shows that consonant is to be pronounced by itself, as if it were animated by a moveable scheva.

( <sup>1</sup> ) Placed at the top of a letter indicates the labial clack of the tongue, e.g. *khaka*, cheese or thick milk.

( <sup>2</sup> ) Denotes the dental clack, e.g. *inn<sup>2</sup>ani*, a little.

( <sup>3</sup> ) Signifies the palatal clack, e.g. *ing<sup>3</sup>oula*, the great Fish-river<sup>74</sup>.

Following from the 'writing of sound' such writing provides the possibilities for correct pronunciation, which, again, is augmented by 'rules' for pronouncing especially the vowels, for example:

#### RULE 1.

All these vowels have their short sounds whenever a consonant follows immediately after them in the same syllable; in all other cases they are to be pronounced long.

<sup>73</sup> Compare 'Jones' alphabet'; 'Müller's alphabet', the 'Missionary Alphabet' and the 'Church Missionary Alphabet' in Müller (1987:158f). So far, I have not been able to trace the institutional distinctions between the latter two alphabets, nor whether Van der Kemp's orthography was taken up or recognised by any institution. There is also no correspondence between these phonetic alphabets and Van der Kemp's semiotic and representationally configured one. See further Hastings (1994:280) on the explosion of indigenous language studies in missionary circles in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Along with Van der Kemp's *Specimen and Vocabulary* (1800) Henry Brunton's *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Susoo Language* published in 1802, must count as firsts.

<sup>74</sup> LMS I S 1800:444f.

The ê sounds always like the English *a* in *make*, *lady*, &c. or *ay*, *say*.

The ē sounds always like the English *a* in *spare*, or the first *e* in *where*, *there*.

The ô sounds always like the English *o* in *bone*, *stone*, etc.

The ö sounds always like the English *o* in *cloth*, *both*, etc.

The sound of the English *y* and *i*, as in *tide*, is wanting in [isiXhosa]<sup>75</sup>.

What then is the significance of Van der Kemp's development of the isiXhosa alphabet?<sup>76</sup>

According to Condillac it is the alphabet which introduces people to 'reason'. Foucault (1982:112) summarises the argument as follows:

With alphabetic writing, in fact, the history of men is entirely changed. They transcribe in space, not their ideas but sounds, and from those sounds they extract the common elements in order to form a small number of unique signs whose combination will enable them to form all possible syllables and words. Whereas symbolic writing, in attempting to spatialize representations themselves, obeys the confused law of similitudes, and causes language to slip out of the forms of reflective thought, alphabetical writing, by abandoning the attempt to draw the representation, transposes into its analysis of sounds the rules that are valid for reason itself. So that it does not matter that letters represent ideas, since they can be combined together in the same way as ideas, and ideas can be linked together and disjoined just like the letters of the alphabet.

*Specimen* fits this description. If the rationale for Van der Kemp's alphabet and the writing of sound—as well as his spelling table of more than three thousand monosyllables for the Khoi—were to introduce the Xhosa and Khoi to rational and reflective thought, the same is true for his elaborate 'rules' for the vowels and the monosyllables. If this is so, then the question arises as to the opposite of this 'reason' which he sought to inculcate in not only the Khoi and Xhosa but also all other

<sup>75</sup> LMS I S 1800:444.

<sup>76</sup> Van der Kemp's alphabet is not a physiological alphabet nor a phonetic one (cf. Müller 1987:150-152 on what letters are made of, how they are made, and where they are made—physiology). Therefore, if one considers his sound orthography with its seven signs indicating different pronunciation formations and 'clacks', it has to be positioned more with assumptions similar to Rousseau's about the 'music' of speech (cf. Derrida 1982:192ff) than the physiology of speech or phonetics proper.

'illiterate' Dutch and English people beyond and on the frontier<sup>77</sup>.

According to Foucault (1982:111), 'superstition' and 'credulity' shadow reason, and are integral to the dominant view of how writing developed among graphically-orientated peoples. There are three phases: 1) when a graphic people used writing to represent not the thing but one of its elements (synecdoche—e.g. a bow represents battle); 2) when a thing was related to the (habitual) circumstances or environment in which that thing was found in nature (metonymy—e.g. the all-seeing eye which resembles God); 3) when one thing resembled another in at least one of its (climactic) traits (catachresis—e.g. the crocodile's eyes resembling the rising sun). These explanations found this process and kind of writing wanting because of the fact that it eventually led to 'superstition'. Such people(s) forgot the origins from which writing emerged and then proceeded to transform original conventionalised language usage into first poetry, then tradition, and in time, superstition. Foucault (1982:111) says about these three figures that

... they became endowed, little by little, with poetic powers; their primary nominations become the starting points for long metaphors; these metaphors become progressively more complicated, and are soon so far from their points of origin that it is difficult to recall them. This is how superstitions arise whereby people believe that the sun is a crocodile, or that God is a great eye keeping watch on the world; it is also how esoteric forms of knowledge arise among those (the priests) who pass on the metaphors to their successors from generation to generation; and it is how allegorical discourse (so frequent in the most ancient literatures) comes into being, as well as the illusion that knowledge consists in understanding resemblances.

The problematic which arises here is that superstition, credulity and resemblance alienated from originary writing, and brought empirical reflection and reason to a

<sup>77</sup> Apart from Van der Kemp's identification of nineteen 'sounds of the consonants', he also developed two *rules* distinguishing between 'long' and 'short' sounds of the vowels and eight additional rules for the vowels and monosyllables. This idea of a rule governed language—which indicates rational language and therefore rational thought—is also the context for Di Capelli's (1803:135) assertion that isiXhosa does indeed have 'rules', and that, even though it is quite 'arbitrary', the fact that it does display these rules, makes it a language (and a nation) already far 'developed' in 'civilization'. Moreover, Van der Kemp's elaborate focus on the identification of rules for vowels—which were regarded as the most suspect to change—confirms this perspective (cf. also Lichtenstein 1810-1812:173ff).

halt. This is compounded with the appearance of graphic writing because, as it is handed down from one generation to the next, the original representative significance of script was clouded by subsequent imagistic developments and overlays. Even worse, the learned (the priests and healers themselves) could only retain a 'superstitious respect' for the tradition and uncritically hand it on. In Classical scholarship, this was for many the distinguishing mark between 'East' and 'West', and also the context in which the politics of the figurative was seen to have faltered—in its exclusion or erasing of originary history.

Van der Kemp's arbitrarily developed alphabetic writing, his elaborate rules, and his *Vocabulary*—as representative of representational thinking—can be seen as attempting to counter such tendencies. These texts intended to pre-empt and do away with 'superstition' and 'credulity'. This credulity/ rational binary also accounts for Van der Kemp's introduction of his text (including the description of the 'customs' of the Xhosa as well as *Specimen* and *Vocabulary*) with an assessment of the 'Religion' of the Xhosa. This is the famous (or notorious) text in which he advances an argument concerning the fact that the Xhosa were both 'without religion' and 'credulous' and that 'credulity and unbelief go hand in hand, as well in [the eastern Cape] and in Europe'. Here he discusses the famous examples of 'witchcraft'; 'medical operations [which] are also for the greatest part magical'; the 'saluting' of the anchor near the Keiskamma; the 'man dressed in green' who appears during great thunder-storms; and the throwing of stones on graves<sup>78</sup>. This introduction on religion heads the whole text and frames his research.

To account for the song-orientated peoples, it was believed that alphabetic writing liberated people from superstition and those traditions which have forgotten the origins of words, their own primitive pictographic 'writing', and caused them to fall back into superstition. With the alphabetisation of sounds, the history of people was changed from superstition to history, opening the way for a move from a superstitious tradition within one particular language to the universal rational domain where the work for the comprehensive encyclopaedia, the absolute table of all knowledge, and universal history was in the process of being conducted—and in which travellers, missionaries, and governance officials in the colonies participated. These perspectives shaped Van der Kemp's pedagogical insistence on the teaching of reading and writing too. Reading as well as writing were the first steps towards advancing the rationality of people or forming them into rational human beings—as the philosophers of the time understood reason as the ultimate human characteristic people share with God, or in neo-platonist terms, that God communicated to humanity. In this equation, to therefore introduce people to reading and writing, was

<sup>78</sup> LMS I R 1800:432-434.



divinely sanctioned—for both philosopher and missionary. Reason had a divine origin<sup>79</sup>.

### reading and writing

Van der Kemp's language teaching activities did not only relate to the proposition, nomination, primitive designation and writing. Prior to his meeting with Read, we learn that he taught 'reading and writing' in both isiXhosa and Dutch (December 17, 1799) at the place he shared with Buys across the Keiskamma<sup>80</sup>. For June 24, 1801, after meeting up with Read, he further reports that he and Read started to 'keep ... a reading and writing school for the instruction of the [Khoi]' (June 2, 1801) at Graaff Reinet<sup>81</sup>. In their 'Annual Report' for 1804, Van der Kemp and Read write:

As there are several of the baptised, besides others among our people who understand no other language than [Khoi], we have drawn up and printed in that language, the outlines of the Christian religion in the form of a catechism, under the title of *Tzitzika Thuickwedi miko Khwekhwenama* (Principles of the words of God for the [Khoi])<sup>82</sup>.

If they did this, then, obviously, they must have developed a system similar to that for isiXhosa—which included the 'writing of sound'—in Khoi. Such a 'grammar

<sup>79</sup> In analogy to this perspective, this is also the context of Van der Kemp's change from 'a scientific system of divinity' to 'an historical system of the ways of God with mankind, derived from Scripture'; the history of the passion account in the gospels; and his request for '[s]ome books of instructive histories' and a teacher who 'could teach reading and writing and to give instruction in the history of the Bible' (LMS I TVDK 1800:412; LMS I TVDK 1800:420; LMS II EL 1803:93). His general focus on history is further borne out by his attempt to trace the history of the Xhosa rulers (LMS I H 1800:464-467)—a common practice among the 'travellers'. Such requests indicate that Van der Kemp felt himself at a loss in his eastern Cape context. His 'scientific' approach did not have the optimistic results he thought it would have. But, he also did not have the 'historical' background to address a need he perceived. In many ways, this is a sensibility which has not been fulfilled—i.e. despite, as Foucault would say, the introduction of the history of finitude into the sciences.

<sup>80</sup> LMS I SA 1799:410.

<sup>81</sup> LMS I TVDK 1801:480; cf. also LMS II EL2 1804:152.

<sup>82</sup> LMS II AR 1804:239.

book' would have been mastered first before the Khoi could have started to read the catechism<sup>83</sup>. In this regard, the 'little spelling book of 3138 monosyllables' Van der Kemp and Read 'printed' at Botha's Place in 1802 must have been for this purpose. This issue of reading and writing, however, would become a point of discontent between him and the frontier farmers, and later Janssens.

One of the complaints of the three hundred farmers who congregated and threatened to attack Graaff Reinet in June 1801, was that the missionaries were instructing the Khoi in reading, writing and religion, thereby elevating them to 'an equal footing with the Christians' (June 30, 1801)<sup>84</sup>. In his letter of April 6, 1803 to the Dutch Missionary Society, Van der Kemp also requested a printing press—after his was presumably lost or broken—and a teacher who 'could teach reading and writing and to give instruction in the history of the Bible' from Holland<sup>85</sup>. And in his letter of April 23, 1803, he reports on Governor Janssens' prohibition on the missionaries' education activities; that they would not be allowed to teach 'reading and writing, chiefly the latter'<sup>86</sup>. It is significant that he not only assumed that such prohibition had come about due to the request of the colonists (an 'illnatured people')—a fact borne out by other documents—but that it was explicitly to prevent the Khoi from being raised to 'an equal footing with the Christians'. It also appears that part of his face-to-face argument with Janssens about the prohibition of the teaching of writing must have included his argument that denying the Khoi access to writing would be 'unworthy of the rights of a free nation'<sup>87</sup>. Contrasted with Janssens' argument that the teaching of writing was 'not absolutely necessary in the commencement of [the Khoi's] cultivation'<sup>88</sup>, it is evident that Van der Kemp's understanding had deeper roots within eighteenth-century philosophy and a far more 'scientific' representational rationale than the Governor's attempt to keep the Khoi in a state of illiteracy, making them fit for nothing but farm labour.

<sup>83</sup> This is important for the significance of Van der Kemp as intellectual, and in distinction to Le Vaillant (1791-1798), Barrow (1801-1804:173f), Alberti (1807:44-49), Di Capelli (1803:135-139) and Lichtenstein (1810-1812:478-500) who jotted down Khoikhoi and isiXhosa words and phrases mainly for the benefit of Europeans—travelers and scientists. Van der Kemp developed his alphabet for the benefit of the Khoi and isiXhosa themselves—i.e. in addition to doing so for the benefit of future missionaries.

<sup>84</sup> LMS I TVDK 1801:482.

<sup>85</sup> LMS II EL2 1803:94.

<sup>86</sup> LMS II EL2 1803:94.

<sup>87</sup> LMS II EL2 1803:94.

<sup>88</sup> LMS II PJ 1805:236.

The background of the argument concerning Van der Kemp's alphabet and the writing of sound, and his commitment to teach all people writing, must be understood in the representational context of 'progress', 'civilisation or 'enlightenment'. Progress or 'civilization' was to start not with the transcription of traditional ideas into language—because they would be contaminated by 'superstition' as they had become dislodged from their primal representational origins—but with sounds. And this point showed not only the significance of *Specimen's* focus on sounds, vowels and their representation in writing, but also Van der Kemp's critique of 'superstition'—both in South Africa and Europe—with which he introduced the sequence of texts in *Religion, Customs, Population, Government, Language, History, and Natural Productions of Caffraria*<sup>89</sup>. On Foucault's reconstruction of the argument of the time, the initial break with superstition came about only when people transcribed sounds into space. From these sounds, they then extracted common elements which formed a unique number of signs. From variable combinations of these signs, people then formed a variety of possible syllables and words. These written syllables and words in historical context, then, allowed for reflection on them. Most crucially, this reflection was seen to be of the form of the transposing of rules valid to reason, into these sounds. This effected the break with superstition, resemblance and, in a (neo-)platonic or even Lockean sense, with 'credulity'; a convincing explanation for the rationale behind the Van der Kemp texts.

What Van der Kemp then intended, was to engineer a break from 'superstition', with his texts on language<sup>90</sup> as well as his teaching. This break meant not only the establishing of a new rational beginning for isiXhosa—and therefore for the people—but also a beginning which would enable them to abandon their 'superstitious traditions' and attach themselves to their rational language, and also to 'rational religion' (in this context, Christianity). This assumption also underlies Van der Kemp's report that

[a] Mahometan Hindoo, called Damin, came to me, desiring to be instructed in reading and writing. I asked him whether he liked to be instructed in

<sup>89</sup> LMS I R 1800:432ff.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Di Capelli's (1803:135) suggestion on the relationship between religion and how the level of religious development can be read off from a language: 'Het zoude veelicht belangryk genoeg zyn uit deze vocabulaire licht te scheppen nopens de godsdienstige vorderingen en stelzels dezer natie, dan dit zoude my te wydluftig zyn' ('It would be too demanding to enlighten someone on the religious development and systems of this nation from this vocabulary ...— a.t.).

[isiXhosa] or ... Dutch. He answered, that his only object was to know God and his word, and that he, therefore, wished to be instructed in that language which I should think most conducive to this end. I then took him into the Dutch class<sup>91</sup>.

Such strategies formed part of the rationale behind the universal encyclopaedia. This is captured in Foucault's (1982:112) explanation—derived from Condillac and Smith—that

... it does not matter that letters do not represent ideas, since they can be combined together in the same way as ideas, and ideas can be linked together and disjoined just like the letters of the alphabet. The disruption of the exact parallelism between representation and graphic signs makes it possible to bring language, even written language, as a totality, into the general domain of analysis, thus allowing the progress of writing and that of thought to provide each other with mutual support. The same graphic signs can break down all new words, and hand on each new discovery, as soon as it is made, without fear of its being forgotten; the same alphabet can be used to transcribe different languages, and thus to convey the ideas of one people to another<sup>92</sup>.

This process which brings about the spatialisation of language—especially as it is engineered—constituted the conditions of possibility for 'progress' because it allowed analysis and reflection, i.e. fabrication of rules in space. Even so, this historicisation of 'progress' was understood by some not as 'development' in time

<sup>91</sup> LMS TVDK 1800:412. On how languages differ with regard to how people think, cf. Condillac in Harris and Taylor (1989:122-137; also Aarsleff 1974:93-156).

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Di Capelli (1803:135) on how meaning in a language is communicated by its words—allowing for the view that language is the prime medium through which the significant in another culture can be accessed: 'Ik heb dus een veel nauwkeuriger en meer uytgebreyde verzameling van woorden kunnen maken ... omdat men er woorden voor beteekenissen in zal vinden, die vry zonderling zyn, uythoofde de zelve ten bydrage kunnen strekken tot dat de trap van vernuft en eenigsints beschaafde denkebeelden dezer Natie. Is het byvoorbeeld niet bewys van opgeklaarde geest ...' (I could have made a more copious and elaborate collection of words ... because you will find here meanings for words which are quite unique and which can contribute towards assessing the level of skill and civilised imagination of this nation. For example, is it not a confirmation of an enlightened spirit ...— a.t.).

but as the recovery of primal origins—not merely of each individual people but ultimately of the human race<sup>93</sup> (following Jacob Boehme, the ‘Adamic Language’ or ‘*Natursprache*’ in Leibniz 1956:340)<sup>94</sup>. By others, including Van der Kemp, ‘progress’ was understood in the sense of ‘development’, ‘civilization’, and ‘enlightenment’ and that the mastery of reading and writing formed a crucial nexus in this process.

## conclusion

No intellectual functions in a vacuum, and we are always conditioned by an episteme. Every epoch has its ‘positive unconscious’ and ‘historical a priori’ of knowledge. For Van der Kemp, the situation was not different. His rationalist philosophical education and writings ensured that he remained an intellectual determined by representational thought even after his religious conversion. He saw his researches in South Africa as contributions to general grammar but also to early comparative language studies. In addition to his various journal reports on language,

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Derrida’s (1982:291–295) study of Rousseau’s parallel distinctions between the three systems of writing, forms of social organisation, and types of passion as well as his critical articulation of the alphabet with civil society and negative views on writing—especially Leibniz’s idea of the universal mathematical language—in *Emile*.

<sup>94</sup> An even clearer example comes from Leibniz (1956:340) when, in 1679, he referred to the notions of ‘the Adamic language’ or ‘*Natursprache*’, saying that it would be ‘some kind of language or universal characteristic by which all concepts and things can be put into beautiful *order*, and with whose help different nations might communicate their thoughts and each read in his own language what another has written in his ...’ (e.a.). This ‘thought’ was also the basis of his *Dissertation on the Art of Combinations* (1666) which he said derived from the thought to develop ‘a kind of alphabet of human thoughts ... and that everything can be discovered and judged by a comparison of the letters of this alphabet and an analysis of the words made from them’ (Leibniz 1956:342). This interest in the variety of languages which may contribute towards the one universal language, remained one of his life-long interests. More than thirty years later, Leibniz (1956:1063) wrote in a letter of 1714 that he would like ‘to create a kind of universal symbolistic [*spécieuse générale*] in which all truths of reason would be reduced to a kind of calculus. At the same time this could be a kind of universal language or writing, though infinitely different from all such languages which have thus far been proposed, for the characters and the words themselves would give direction to reason ...’.

his texts *Specimen* and *Vocabulary* are prime examples of both comparative grammar and comparative language studies. However, his sound comparisons of isiXhosa with Dutch, French, English, Greek, Hebrew and Chinese, and the fact that he developed his alphabet for isiXhosa and a spelling book with more than three thousand monosyllables for Khoi, clearly show that his attention to language was not merely determined by the episteme of his time. He challenged orthodoxies and authorities and followed his own unique path.

Concerning Van der Kemp’s attention to sound, the rules he developed for the vowels, the monosyllable and the writing of sound, two concluding inferences can be made.

Firstly, these rules and comparisons (of sound and monosyllables) were not merely for the benefit of future missionaries who intended to study isiXhosa. It was part and parcel of a rational and rationalising agenda. Similar to the view that people become more ‘civilised’ when they attend to their ‘ideas’, that they acquire the habit of consciously ‘reflecting’ on their ideas, and develop skills to communicate their ideas (through speech as well as writing), the rules and sound comparisons showed isiXhosa to belong to the rational languages of the world. As indicated, these views are also present in the writings of travellers who were in contact with him in South Africa.

Secondly, the rationale for Van der Kemp introducing his text *Religion—An Account of the Religion, Customs, Population, Government, Language, History, and National Productions of Caffraria* with a section on the question whether a ‘nation’ can be both ‘superstitious’ or ‘credulous’ and ‘without religion’ (in Africa and in Europe), is that this is the context in which Van der Kemp’s rational approach had to affect change—‘progress’ and ‘civilization’. *Specimen* and *Vocabulary* and especially his attention to sound, the rules he developed for the vowels, the monosyllable and the writing of sound—and that he taught all these to Khoi, Xhosa, Dutch and English in their different languages—had an equally rational, ‘civilising’ aim.

Despite the fact that there is a host of evidence that we can position Van der Kemp within the eighteenth century episteme, on the level of opinion, it appears that, to some degree, he did not share all the assumptions related to primitive designation. One side of the dividing line of this ‘point of heresy’ shared key assumptions with Rousseau; that even each syllable of a language carries a primitive significance, and that writing is a degradation of primeval presence. Independent of whether Janssens as Batavian Governor and Commander in Chief shared Rousseauan presuppositions or not, and irrespective of whether it was also this fissure which separated his views (for not allowing the teaching of writing) from Van der Kemp’s, the latter’s opinion appears to be in direct opposition to Rousseau.

And, even though this perception shared assumptions with Rousseau concerning primitive designation, it differed fundamentally in being allied to an optimistic belief in the rational education of people, especially through the study of language and the teaching of writing.

Yet I would caution against having Van der Kemp stand as a beacon of non-alliance, confrontational truth, irrepressible justice and an unqualified identification with and facilitation of the aspirations of peoples of African descent. His function and legacy are more ambivalent—as, of course, is ours. At a level different from Foucault's epistemic archive, at the level of opinion, the question remains open as to the nature, quality, and formative (if not epistemic) effects of our own more modest intellectual endeavour. In his order of similitude, Van der Kemp, it appears, had a clear notion of his.

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## Abbreviations of the Writings of J.T. van der Kemp

Texts from the *Transactions of the London Missionary Society. Volume I.*  
London: London Missionary Society.

- B—'Birds'—in *Religion*  
CC—*The Conversion and Call of Dr. Vanderkemp to the Missionary Work*  
EJBP—*Extracts from the Journals of Dr. Vanderkemp and Mr. Read, after their Settlement at Bota's Place*  
FA—*First Attempt to Enter Caffraria*  
H—'History'—in *Religion*  
Ins—'Insects, &c.'—in *Religion*  
JC—*Journey to Caffraland*  
L1—*Letters of Van der Kemp in 1800.*  
PJ—*Proclamation of 1905 by Governor John William Janssens*  
Q—'Quadrupeds'—in *Religion*  
Religion—*An Account of the Religion, Customs, Population, Government, Language, History, and National Productions of Caffraria. By Dr. Vanderkemp.*  
R—'Religion'—in *Religion*  
S or Specimen—*Specimen of the Caffra Language—in Religion*  
SA—*Second Attempt to Enter Caffraria in the year 1800*  
TVDK 1800—*Transactions of Dr. Vanderkemp, in the year 1800*  
TVDK 1801—*Transactions of Dr. Vanderkemp, in the year 1801*  
VC—*Voyage to the Cape*  
Ve—'Vegetables' in *Religion*  
Vo or Vocabulary—*Vocabulary of the Caffra Language—in Religion*

Texts from the *Transactions of the London Missionary Society. Volume II.*  
London: London Missionary Society.

- AR 1803—*Annual Report of the Missionaries at Bethelsdorp, South Africa, for the year 1803, From the Missionaries Vanderkemp and Read.*  
AR 1804—*Annual Report of the Missionary Establishment Bethelsdorp, Near Algoa Bay, South Africa. For the year 1804.*  
EL2—*Extracts from Letters of Van der Kemp from Transactions II.*

## Re-conceptualising English Language Teaching at an HWU

Emmanuel Mgwashu

Since the 1980s the number of black (including Coloureds and Indians) students in the Historically White Universities (HWUs) has proportionally increased. At the University of Natal, Durban (UND), Black (African) students now constitute 47.4%, Indians 29.6%, Coloureds 2.7%, Chinese 0.1, and Whites 20.2% of students population. Approximately 17 % of Black students enrol for courses that are in the faculty of Human Sciences. In terms of academic staff composition in the Faculty of Human Sciences, approximately 15% is black, 0.1% is Indian, and 84.1% is White. Among many things, this indicates that transformation processes still have room to bring about changes which are no longer an option but a necessity. Like all institutions of learning in this country, the UND experiences pressures that can only be solved through careful engagement and critical thought. However, the pressure exacted by educational authorities and market forces on higher education poses a threat to formative degrees (degrees that expose students to epistemologies that enrich their general cultural and social understanding and critique). This threat is felt particularly by the traditionally non-vocationally specific disciplines, a description that has come increasingly to characterise English Studies with the national decline in the training of secondary educators.

The growing exposure of tertiary education to the market forces referred to above pressurises institutions of higher learning into placing more emphasis on the development of courses that are seen as economically viable because of their vocational specificity. The effect of this on English Studies in the southern African context is, among other things, to raise the profile of the previously minor place (at English medium universities) of *English language teaching*. Since English Studies has historically focused on developing students' skills in discursive critique (by *discursive critique* I mean forms of analysis drawing on literary analysis, but taking as its subject a range of cultural and social phenomena), a move towards attending to

students' language needs should avoid relinquishing this focus. Today's professionals need to be able to utilise language, not only for the writing of business letters and reports, but also for solving problems and generating ideas. Our students would not attain to these fundamental abilities if our language teaching focuses on mere internalisation of grammatical structures and skills in sentence construction, and ignores the importance of teaching language through a focus on language as a discursive entity. Mere internalisation of grammatical structures and skills in sentence construction is not how we should, as a discipline, conceptualise language teaching.

In the 1960s in Britain the emphasis in English language teaching to mother tongue speakers was on developing their ability to identify and name grammatical forms (parts of speech) and to analyse the clause structure of sentences. The examples for practice were constructed for the purpose and decontextualised. The swing to teaching communicative skills and creative writing in the 1970s and early 1980s was motivated in part by resistance against the traditional equation of standard English grammar with good behaviour (Carter 1995; Mgwashu 1999). The result was a generation of children who lacked the tools to talk or write about language, or to evaluate critically their own use of it. The Language in the National Curriculum Project (1989/1990) reaffirmed the importance of explicit knowledge *about* (as opposed to *of*) language for both teachers and learners (cf. Carter 1990). Research into additional and foreign language teaching and learning has charted a similar path (cf. Polias 2000).

Recent debates about the reintegration of formal grammar into the English language syllabus hinge on conflicting research conclusions about second language acquisition. Krashen (1992:410) insists that a second language is acquired by obtaining comprehensible input, and that 'the effect of grammar is peripheral and fragile', and limited to 'monitoring' what has already been acquired. Sharwood Smith (1988:57), on the other hand, argues for the notion of the interface between learned (explicit) knowledge and acquired (implicit) competence, and claims that 'there is every reason to accept the older, intuitively attractive version which says explicit knowledge may aid acquisition via practice'. Ellis (1993:99) supports a 'weak interface' position, and accepts that grammatical instruction can convert learned (explicit) knowledge into acquired (implicit) knowledge 'under certain fairly stringent conditions'. These conditions can be met, he suggests, if the goal of the syllabus is either to facilitate comprehension rather than production, or, and this is the crucial point for the argument here, if the goal is learned (explicit) rather than acquired (implicit) knowledge (Ellis 1993:105). Supporters of both strong and weak interface theories therefore agree that the introduction of grammar, either by means of getting the learner to 'notice' grammatical forms or by 'conscious-raising'

activities, promotes explicit knowledge.

Cummins (1984) distinguishes very usefully between what he terms Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). He defines the former in terms of 'the manifestation of language proficiency in everyday communicative contexts', and the latter in terms of 'the manipulation of language in decontextualized academic situations' (Cummins 1984:136-7). While BICS continue to play a role in professional life, CALP is becoming increasingly necessary, partly because of socio-political, economic, and educational changes in the country, on the one hand, and demands accompanying the globalisation process on the other. Teachers of English language are therefore faced with the challenge of developing students in both aspects of language proficiency. Of course there is a distinction between BICS and CALP, but a *simultaneous* development of our students in both skills remains crucial.

The distinction has central pedagogic implications for the teaching of language. Since proficiency can be measured, it may be argued, by a learner's ability to use language for both basic communication purposes and for academic communication, teaching students to master specific grammatical elements (BICS) has to be accompanied by development in skills of discursive critique (CALP). Experience has shown that students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) often appear fluent at the interactive communicative level, but they do not have the more advanced language skills necessary for developing conceptual understanding in the academic context. Carol Macdonald's Threshold Project (1990) and my own study (1999) carried out *in* and *about* the former DET schools respectively, show the detrimental effects that this kind of education can have on the development of CALP skills. The findings by these language practitioners showed that linguistic competence cannot be separated from the cognitive demands of the task, and, therefore, an explicit focus on language needs to be accompanied by raising students' awareness of the relationship between language choices and social positioning. Speaking of the nature of language, Halliday and Matthiesen (1999:602) state that 'language is not a second order-code through which meanings created in some higher-order realm of existence are mysteriously made manifest and brought into light'. According to the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory that informs such thinking, language is able to create meaning because

... it is related to our material being in three distinct and complementary ways. In the first place, it is a part of the material world .... In the second place, it is the theory about the material world .... In the third place, it is a metaphor for the material world ... (Halliday & Matthiesen 1999:602)



SFL claims that, since we use language in physical space and time, language operates as a theory about our physical existence and experiences, thereby capturing the environment in natural and social processes. In the process, language is able to expose the contradictory aspects of our existence. It is this aspect of language that English Studies exposes students to through the analysis of literary and cultural texts. The approach to language teaching in English Studies, then, has to equip students with the understanding that 'descriptions of language [structures] are completely interconnected with descriptions of the contexts in which language is used' (Unsworth 2000:1). If thought of in this way, language becomes an interdisciplinary phenomenon.

First person pronouns in different contexts, for instance, can be used to convey a range of subtly differentiated indications of the relationships between speakers and audience. 'We', for example, may include the speaker and the listeners. In the family context this will convey closeness and solidarity. But in a job interview the interviewer's use of 'we' suggests the weight or authority of the organisation of which he or she is part. 'We' may not refer to the speaker at all, as when a doctor says to a patient: 'Well, how are we today?' The doctor may be trying to put the patient at ease, but often this usage is seen as condescending and reflective of an asymmetrical power relationship. In a BP advertisement, on the other hand, the reference to 'we' shifts from including the readers or listeners with the company in the statement 'Only we can save the earth' to the company alone in 'We've been doing it for over 15 years by supporting a wide range of conservation programmes'. Only a close critical reading of these texts will reveal that the shifting reference is part of a strategy to appeal to a presumed solidarity with the target audience and persuade them to 'save the earth' by buying BP.

Sensitivity to the shades of meaning in these examples is dependent upon the audience knowledge of *communicative* as well as the *formal structures* of the language, and also of *the context* in which these utterances are made. This teaches us, among other things, that the acquisition of both grammatical structures and CALP skills are bound up with context-specific social practices, and that it is possible to teach both simultaneously. As a language practitioner, I am aware, however, that this possibility has not been fully explored. This has been due to, among other things, the fact that racial and/or linguistic (even school background) categorisations have traditionally been used as indicators of language proficiency. My personal experience, and I think most would bear me out on this, proves that these are no longer good yardsticks by which we may measure language proficiency. Given these changes in higher education, students' educational, linguistic, or school backgrounds, it seems, need not be regarded as fundamental variables on the scope and focus of language development.

The demands on Higher Education that are impacting on the scope and focus of language development can be thought of in two broad categories. The first cluster of demands concerns accommodating students' diversity. Student intake in South Africa has become increasingly diverse, in terms of cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds and, critically, their level of preparedness for traditional Higher Education programmes. The second cluster of demands concerns meeting rapidly changing global educational needs. Higher Education institutions, not just in South Africa, but around the world as well, are under pressure to produce graduates with the kind of knowledge and skills called for by contemporary social and economic conditions. There is an increasing need for graduate flexibility, strongly developed 'generic' skills linked to a firm knowledge base, life long learning skills, and problem solving ability.

In the South African context language development work is central to meeting both key sets of challenges referred to. First, language related issues are a principal factor of educational disadvantage, and effective language development work is therefore essential for meaningful equity and redress, and for ensuring that epistemological access is made available to all students. Secondly, language development is clearly also central to the development of key skills such as effective communication, critical reasoning, and life long learning. Thirdly, the expertise of language development staff in crosscutting issues such as assessment and evaluation is a crucial resource for effective programme planning and implementation. Language development courses have potential to assist mainstream structures in developing more effective means of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse and non-traditional student body.

Given the way universities were ordered, not only along racial, but also language lines, the South African experience of managing change in higher education is complex; and the challenge of transformation has required different strategies in different institutions. The UND Faculty of Human Sciences responded by introducing, among other things, courses that attempt to meet students' language needs. These courses, however, tend to teach either basic communication skills (in a form of grammar teaching), or academic writing and academic critique, with little, or no initiative to teach both of these skills simultaneously. The proficiency required by graduates for basic communication purposes (basic understanding of grammatical structures), in other words, tends to be developed discretely from the kind of proficiency required for academic study and for knowledge creation through writing. This is clear from the way in which specific first level courses approach linguistic proficiency. Academic Learning in English (ALE), the Computer Aided Multimedia Editing Skills in English (CAMESE), the Writing Place Project, and the English Language Course (ELC) represent some of the attempts at improving linguistic

proficiency.

ALE focuses 'on themes such as Language and Identity [which] provide the focus for various activities and tasks around which academic writing practices arise' (ALE advert 1999). This approach to improving language proficiency assumes that all students enrolled for the course already possess basic understanding of, and the ability to use, language structures, and so are able to construct sensible arguments around issues pertaining to language and identity. CAMESE, on the other hand, while it aims 'at teach[ing] language users to identify and edit, out of their writing, a range of grammatical features that adversely affect, either the intelligibility or acceptability of much student writing' (Geslin & Wade 2000), is limited by the fact that 'there is no one-to-one interaction between the learner and the teacher and, as a consequence, very few students actually benefit from this computer programme' (Mgqwashu 1999: 54). The Writing Place Project aims at assisting students with essay writing skills by offering them tutoring based on their own written work. The limitation with this programme is that the tutors, most of them undergraduates, have a very limited understanding (in some cases none at all) of how languages are taught and learnt.

Unlike other courses mentioned so far, the ELC, an initiative by the Programme of English Studies (PES), does explicitly attempt to teach students basic language structures. The course states that it intends to 'introduce learners to basic grammatical concepts and encouraging the development of grammatical competence with specific reference to writing in English' (Balfour 2000). My concern though, is that the theory that informs this course does not pay attention to the importance of teaching language through a focus on language as a discursive entity. Since discursiveness is the central focus of the discipline, one would expect that a language course mounted by the PES should be informed by such an orientation. As a teacher who has participated in initiatives of this nature, and who has followed students that passed such courses at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) and at the University of Natal, Durban (UND), I have noticed that the essays that students produce (regardless of linguistic, educational, or school backgrounds) 'display poor mastery of language as [they] seek to reproduce academic discourse, but find themselves constrained by writing in a poorly understood *language* (language as a basic communication tool and as used in cognitively demanding tasks)' (Mgqwashu 2000:64). On these bases I would define such students 'as academically illiterate, since they are unable to use and understand the language of instruction in a form and register appropriate to academic context. Most of such students, as I have mentioned, have either gone through courses that have tended to focus on remedial instruction in the second language, or 'how to' courses in academic reading and writing skills.

As most of you will agree, a low rate of skill transference is cited as one of

the reasons for students failing to apply the skills developed and practised in 'language' courses to mainstream learning. While students may be successful in using language processing strategies to access the generalised meanings which are the currency of many language development courses, they are likely to be less successful when trying to construct a complex web of unfamiliar meanings in a mainstream discipline. I shall argue that, to a large degree, students' failure to transfer the skills learned in language development courses to mainstream disciplines is a consequence of the division between courses that attend to BICS and those that teach CALP skills. According to Gee (1999:2), English language teaching 'ought not to be about teaching English, or, for that matter, about teaching language, at least as these are traditionally construed'. For him (and this is the position I adopt in this paper), language teaching needs to engage students with cultural and social settings within which language production occurs to serve specific purposes. The *challenge* in teaching language is, then, to draw attention to grammatical forms through *stimulating* and *enriching* exploration of their functions.

To formalise the kinds of ideas that this paper has presented so far, Widdowson's (1990:101-104) distinction between 'systemic' and 'schematic' knowledge is helpful. He describes systemic knowledge as the knowledge of the formal structures of a language, 'which it is the traditional business of linguists to account for' and, I would add, language teachers to teach. 'But', he points out, 'this knowledge alone is usually inadequate for interpreting linguistic forms in various individual contexts of use' (Widdowson 1990:104), hence the need for 'schematic knowledge'. Part of schematic knowledge has to do with modes of communication: how linguistic and organisational choices are affected by whether the communication is written or spoken, and the relationship between speaker and audience. According to Widdowson, it is through the *interplay* of systemic and schematic knowledge that we learn language and negotiate meaning. This has implications for the UND Faculty of Human Sciences, where language development initiatives have tended to develop systemic knowledge (formal structures of language) separate from schematic knowledge (modes and contexts of communication).

In addition to students' failure to transfer the skills that they supposedly learn from courses geared towards improving their language proficiency in our faculty, as a result of this *artificial* separation, competition over resources further complicates issues. Given the fact that higher education globally has come under general pressure to do more with less, to massify on a shrinking resource base, and to be increasingly responsible for learning outcomes, the UND Faculty of Human Sciences would not benefit from allowing a proliferation of courses that attempt to achieve the same goal. This time demands innovation like never before as we are

experiencing an unprecedented competition for resources. ALE, for instance, is running short of lecturers to teach the course and, as a consequence, lectures had to be abolished. It has been claimed that the latter had to occur because the lecture material is now provided to students through the website. So while it is taught through tutorials and practicals, which breaks with all the early planning of faculty-wide courses, the web forms part of the teaching tool as well. The initial decision has been to require qualified members of staff, but recently revised by requiring graduate students with specific qualities to tutor in the course. As most disciplines sacrificed their 1A courses in order to give way to transformation processes in the faculty, several colleagues focus their energies on developing and improving 1B courses that have to, first, introduce and, secondly, integrate new students into the specificities of their disciplines. Whether ALE will get enough qualified members of staff as tutors, and whether the move to abolish lectures and replace them with the website as pedagogically sound, remain to be seen. What it teaches us though is that the scale of the need and the scarcity of resources demand both creative responses and critical evaluation.

Perhaps we need to ask: are we really supposed to have four unrelated initiatives trying to address themselves to one problem in the faculty? Do we need ALE, ELC, CAMESE, and Writing Place, all of which require financial and personnel backing, to deal with students' language problems in the faculty? Given the challenges and the resultant shortages alluded to in the example above with regard to one of the courses, it would seem absurd to insist on the status quo. I would argue for a new Language Development Course that would incorporate the teaching of BICS and CALP skills simultaneously. And instead of running the course for a semester (in fact it's three and half months) as it is the case with ALE and ELC, I would argue for a one year course. Furthermore, unlike the ALE and ELC which are seen as 'foundational' and 'compensatory' respectively (see the *bosberaad* report), and thus always recommended for students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) or have particular schooling backgrounds (quite a number of students were discouraged, and sometimes told to de-register from, ALE and/or ELC because of their linguistic and school backgrounds, and were advised to enrol for Language Text and Context (LTC) ), this course needs to be designed in such a way that both native and non-native speakers of English benefit from it.

Arguments for formal grammar instruction in a course designed for both native speakers of English and EAL students are provided by research on students' writing available through the Writing Place. Support for formal language teaching to both groups of students has to be seen, however, as a means to the end of good communication rather than an end in itself. With this end in view, grammar will have to be approached through its use in different types of text and context in such a

course. Since linguistic competence cannot be separated from cognitive demands of the task, explicit focus on language needs to be accompanied by raising students' awareness of the relationship between language choices and social positioning. In this way language teaching would become an activity aimed at helping students to understand language as interdisciplinary and not just an entity made up of words and phrases that indicate particular tenses and situations.

Should we have a Language Development Course designed along the lines suggested above, the place for CAMESE and the Writing Place Project would need to be thought through carefully. According to data I collected in 1999 for my Masters research, it was clear that very few students actually used CAMESE. Out of 75 students who were first year students at the time, only 11 students actually kept on using CAMESE until the end of the semester. 64 students never continued with the programme after the first week of their introduction to the programme. Reasons ranged from 'I have too much work to do' to 'the programme does not meet my needs'. In fact, out of 11 students that continued with CAMESE, 7 were from ex-model C schools.

The Writing Place Project, on the other hand, is faced with a degree of responsibility that is in fact above its capacity. Too many students end up unable to meet a tutor because of the limited time allocated to tutoring. Most of the tutors are undergraduates who, in my view, are not necessarily qualified to offer professional assistance appropriate to students' writing needs. Moreover, there is no proper co-ordination between the Writing Place Project and the rest of the faculty. As a faculty we are faced with a challenge to co-ordinate all these initiatives in order to improve the quality of service we give to our students.

With the approach to language teaching set out in this paper as a background, I would argue for a one year Language Development Course integrated with CAMESE. CAMESE would then officially become part of the course and have a slot in the timetable. The Writing Place Project would then be free to work across the various programmes in the faculty to improve teaching and assessment of writing in specific fields of study. This is important because when marking students' written work, lecturers from different programmes vary from penalising students heavily for mechanical and grammatical errors to looking through the linguistic surface and marking on content and organisation. Beyond first year level, skills such as writing and communication should be integrated within the teaching and assessment of the disciplinary content, and my argument is that grammatical errors, content, and organisation have to be looked at during the marking process. Focus on either grammatical errors to looking through linguistic surface or marking on content and organisation, without combining both in assessment is detrimental to students' holistic development in language. The job market has already complained about the

English language proficiency of the students from this university, as the dean's letter to Programme Directors in this faculty points out:

An increasing difficulty for the university executive has been to encounter the perception of the employment market that graduates of this university are not necessarily proficient in the spoken and written language of the professional workplace (Internal Memorandum: July 2000).

I would argue that this observation is a result of our incoherent marking procedures that consequentially produce students with little, or incomplete understanding of the relationship between language choices and the context of language production. The Writing Place is well positioned to help the faculty assessment procedures to be more effective and developmental in nature. Language, after all, is *central* to concept development, and therefore a central issue in teaching and learning.

The approach to language teaching suggested here has the potential to assist mainstream structures in the faculty in developing more effective means of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse and non-traditional student body. The disadvantage of structuring a course along the lines suggested here is that systematic teaching of the structures of grammar, from, for example, the least complex to the more complex, has to be sacrificed. Students may be left with gaps in their systemic knowledge. However, since research indicates that there is still uncertainty as to the order in which grammatical forms are acquired by language learners, structured grammar teaching is at best founded on a tenuous theoretical base (see Ellis 1993). The compensations of the approach spelled out in this paper are an increased awareness of the relationship between language forms and the functions they can serve, of ways in which context shapes language use, and the means by which we may escape from the traditional resistance to 'the grammar grind'.

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## W.H.I. Bleek and *Black Athena*

Shane Moran & Elizabeth Greyling

This essay attempts to include the South African research of the German philologist W.H.I. Bleek within the issues raised by volume 1 of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. In addition we offer for the first time a translation of supplementary passages that appeared in Bleek's *Reinecke Fuchs in Afrika. Fabeln und Märchen der Eingebornen* (Weimar 1870), the German version of his earlier *Reynard the Fox in South Africa: or Hottentot fables and tales* (London 1864). In these passages Bleek addresses his German readers on the topic of the linkage between African languages and Egyptian languages - the very subject of Bernal's provocative thesis.

In *Black Athena* Bernal (1991:239) argues that between about 1830 and 1860 'a new principle of ethnicity pervaded all areas of life and scholarship'. What he terms the Egyptian-based 'Ancient Model' was destroyed and the racist Indian-based 'Aryan Model' of linguistic and cultural development was erected:

The Ancient Model had no major 'internal' deficiencies or weaknesses in explanatory power. It was overthrown for external reasons. For 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romantics and racists it was simply intolerable for Greece, which was seen not merely as the epitome of Europe but also as its pure childhood, to have been the result of the mixture of native Europeans and colonizing Africans and Semites. Therefore the Ancient Model had to be overthrown and replaced by something more acceptable (Bernal 1991:2).

By the 1840s Egyptian language and culture were seen as the products of a categorically inferior and more backward race, inherently incapable of having made contributions to the great Aryan civilisation and the noble languages of India, Greece and Rome. Bernal argues that this change in the valuation of Egypt between the Ancient Model and the Aryan Model was linked to the rise in Egyptian imperial power under Mohamed Ali. Egypt supported the Turks against the Greeks and raised the possibility of a Mediterranean under the control of non-Europeans. The death of Byron in the Greek cause heightened the perception of a heroic Christian Greece besieged by Muslim Turks and Egyptians. 'By the 1830s Egypt was second only to England in its modern industrial capacity' (Bernal 1991:247). Bernal champions a revised Ancient Model that gives the

place of origin to Egypt, and so by implication to North Africa, over the Eurocentrism of an original Greek source<sup>1</sup>.

A key figure in Bernal's account is Christian K. J. Bunsen who argued in his *Egypt's Place in Universal History* (1848-60) that Egyptian was an African version of the common linguistic root of both the Aramaic (Semitic) and Indo-Germanic races. Bunsen did not perceive the Egyptians as African. In this he followed others like Herder who saw them as essentially an Asian people and Blumenbach who placed the Egyptians, Arabs and Jews in the category of the Caucasian race, but Egyptian functioned as a common root between Semites and Aryans. Bunsen appeared to advocate the Ancient Model (identifying Egypt with Africa) against the emerging Aryan Model, but Bernal (1991:238) notes that his 'ambivalence about Egypt was agonized'. Bunsen was a friend and sponsor of Bleek, introducing the young philologist to Colenso in London. Reviewing Grout's *Zulu Grammar*, Bleek (1860:246-7) included 'Chevalier Bunsen' in that group of 'men worthy of the highest respect', even if 'the latest discussions show that philology needs that some refuse be brushed off from its rules and proceedings'. If Bleek articulates the Aryan Model then either Egypt will be demoted as 'African' and African languages will be severed from essentially Semito-Aryan Egyptian languages, or Egypt will be purged of its Africanness and Africa will be seen to have no connection with Egyptian languages and civilization.

What follows will show that Bleek's African-centred comparative grammar presents an anomaly *vis à vis* Bernal's thesis, and marks the persistence of an ambivalence associated with Bunsen that was integral to the sub-genre of the colonialist ideology constructed in Southern Africa<sup>2</sup>. While Said's (1978:99) general contention that 'the Aryan myth dominated historical and cultural anthropology at the expense of the "lesser" peoples' is indisputable, there were tensions and crevices within the ideologeme. Bleek's South African comparative grammar is one such moment. It can be read as a prescient warning against the strategy of stressing the antiquity of Africa as an antidote to its marginalisation. Acknowledging the venerable antiquity of Africa's contribution to human progress can serve to demote African peoples. Our first step is to sketch the broad outline of Bleek's universal philology.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (1995) for a critique of Bernal's argument.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of the dispute regarding the origins of the ruins of "Great Zimbabwe" - the largest prehistoric structure in sub-Saharan Africa - Egyptian meant non-African. Henrika Kucklick (1991) shows how the supposition of Egyptian or Phoenician builders for the Zimbabwe ruins was part of a racist ideology designed to devalue the 'civilization' of indigenous Africans.

## beyond the Indo-European circle

In a review of Grout's *Zulu Grammar* Bleek commits himself to the following global theory of language development:

To the sagacity and research of Bunsen and Max Muller [*sic.*] mainly we owe a magnificent hypothesis, intended to constitute a theory of the development of languages in time successively, and their diffusion in direction and extent over the world ....

The Chinese and other monosyllabic languages of Asia went off from the main stock while it was yet in a rude or inorganic state. These languages have been called *family* languages. Some cause, to us unknown, seems to have stereotyped these languages in this early stage of their existence, and to have prevented their further development.

At a subsequent period, when the main stock had assumed somewhat of an organic character, the Tartar or Turanian languages detached themselves on one side, and Hamatism, or the language of Egypt, on the other; the former with a slight tincture of Iranianism, or tendency to Indo-European character, and the latter with a tincture of Shemitism. These languages are called nomad languages, as having advanced further than the family languages.

At a still later period the Shemitic and Iranian or Indo-European languages developed themselves in opposite directions. These are called *political* or *state* languages, as exhibiting the highest degree of refinement.

To complete this view, the languages of America and Oceania are thought to be connected with the Tauranian; and the African are united conjecturally with the Hamatic or Coptic, and perhaps, far southward, with the Tauranian (Bleek 1860:248-9).

The genderless Tauranian stock of languages share a 'tendency to the Indo-European character' while 'the language of Egypt' forms another branch 'with a tincture of Shemitism' (from Noah's son Shem, the ancestor of the Jews). Following Bunsen, Egypt, although sharing a common origin, is set off from the 'Indo-European character' (Tauranian) and identified as Hamatic with 'a tincture of Shemitism'; African languages being united, conjecturally, with the latter. Thus 'Hottentot gender forms' are related to 'the Coptic' and to 'the sexual gender of the Semitic tongues' (249)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> James Orpen (1908:33) recalls: 'as Dr. Bleek told Sir G. Grey and he told me, the grammars of these two languages ['Bushman' and 'Hottentot'] are totally different, that of the Hottentots being akin to an early Egyptian language, which Dr. Bleek called ancient Coptic'. Cf. Westphal (1962) and Cole (1971) on the classification of African languages.

Bunsen's idea of a common origin for the Aryans and Semites informs this picture of the divergence of language families, and South African languages are articulated in terms of a theory of gender or noun classes.

Part I of *A Comparative Grammar of South African Languages*, "Divisions and Affiliations of Southern African Languages", distinguishes three classes according to 'their structure and origin': 'As representatives of these three classes we may name the languages of the Kafir, the Hottentot, and the Bushman' (1862:1). 'Kafir' language belongs to an extensive family of languages that are called the *Bâ-ntu* family:

Malay, Polynesian, and Papuan families are to be considered as members of the Oceanic section of the same class.

6. The chief characteristic of this class of inter-tropical languages is that the *pronouns* are originally borrowed from the *derivative prefixes of the nouns*, whilst in that class of languages to which the Hottentot, Egyptian, Semitic, and Aryan or Indo-European families belong, the *pronouns* are originally borrowed from the *derivative suffixes of the nouns*.

7. The former class is, on this account, called that of *Prefix-pronominal Languages*, and the latter the class of *Suffix-pronominal Languages*; both classes together are included in the group of *Pronominal Languages*.

8. Their main distinctive feature is a concord of the *pronouns* and of every part of speech, in the formation of which pronouns are employed (e.g. adjectives and verbs) *with the nouns* to which they respectively refer, and the hereby caused *distribution of nouns into classes or genders*.

9. This concord is evidently produced through the original identity of each pronoun with the respective derivative particle (prefix, or suffix) of the nouns which may be represented by it.

10. The different classes or gender of nouns are, in the only family of Suffix-pronominal languages which has as yet been clearly made out, brought into some reference to the distinction of sex as seen in nature. They are, therefore, termed *Sex-denoting Languages* (Bleek 1862:2-3).

Point 10 refers to the 'Hottentot' language that is of 'North African origin' and part of the 'Sex-denoting languages' that include 'Semitic and Aryan nations' (viii-ix). In this taxonomy the genderless 'Bushman' languages are very near the bottom:

The *Bushman* tongue is as yet too insufficiently known to allow us to assign to it its proper place in a general classification of languages; but it seems to be clear that its relationship to the Hottentot language is, at least, very remote. In fact, the probability is that it will be found to belong to what may be called



The sex-denoting or gender aspect makes 'Hottentot' the most interesting of the South African languages. Unlike the Bâ-ntu languages, 'Hottentot' is suffix-pronominal and sex-denoting. Although in 'Hottentot' 'the regularity in the numerical correspondence (as singular, plural, and dual) of the different classes or genders to each other has been far more strictly carried through', this only serves to make the etymology of the derivative suffixes 'even more obscure than that of the prefixes in the Bâ-ntu languages' (1869:133-4). Bleek rejects the hypothesis of some grammarians possessed by what he calls 'a mania' (104; see also 133) that the suffixes of the nouns of 'Hottentot' were originally pronouns. The sex-denoting character of nouns in the Hottentot language

was evidently imparted to it, after a division of the nouns into classes had taken place. It probably arose, in the first instance, from the possibly accidental circumstance that the nouns indicating (respectively) man and woman were formed with different derivative suffixes, and, consequently, belonged to different classes (or genders) of nouns, and that these suffixes thus began to indicate the distinctions of sex in nouns where it could be distinguished (Bleek 1869:122).

The evolution of sex-denoting grammatical capacity and poetic personification is an essential passage for the stimulation of imagination and the development of consciousness:

It is clear that the presence of nouns representing impersonal objects in classes (or genders) to which a sex-denoting character had become attached, must naturally have favoured their personification, thereby frequently leading the mind to ascribe to these objects the most obvious attributes of the respective sexes. But this does not prove that the suffix, which now indicates the gender, had not originally quite a different meaning. In fact, in many masculine nouns in Hottentot there is no doubt that the suffix of the masculine singular has a sort of local meaning, and this meaning seems also to influence the character of this gender, even in some of the most advanced Sex-denoting languages (Bleek 1869:297).

The following example is given:

If the word for 'man' were formed with one suffix (-p), and the word indicating 'woman' (be it accidentally or not) by another (-s), then other nouns would be formed with the same suffixes, in analogy with these, until the majority of the nouns of each sex were formed with certain suffixes which would thus assume a sex-denoting character .... The classes of the nouns in Hottentot thus possessed no naturally inherent sex-denoting character,

but were (so to speak) merely coloured by a sex-denoting dye, which has only thoroughly pervaded the nature of the classes in the most advanced of our Sex-denoting languages (Bleek 1869:298-9).

Bleek inserts a long footnote in German from Krönlein, the translator of the New Testament into Namaqua, arguing for the primacy of personification as a basic intuition or '*Geschlechtsbestimmung*'. Bleek comments: 'The gender may have to a certain extent the import which Mr Krönlein ascribes to it; but this is clearly a derived faculty, and can by no means be said to apply to all, or even to the majority of nouns indicating inanimate things or ideas in Hottentot' (1869:121 note). Still, the poetic faculty of the 'Hottentots', if not of the 'highest order', is more developed than prosaic Bâ-ntu, and the gender classification more regularised. However:

425. It may be assumed that the original meaning of the derivative suffixes of the nouns in Hottentot has been impaired and modified, and that they by no means impart as full a meaning as some of the prefixes in the Bâ-ntu languages, and are, therefore, still less equal in value to the derivative suffixes of modern languages (Bleek 1869:122).

Although 'their origin is similar' (122), the Bantu and Hottentot languages have subsequently developed to different degrees and the etymology of their prefixes and suffixes 'may be said to be as uncertain as that of the most ancient derivative suffixes in our own language' (137). There may be 'a sort of correspondence', 'points of analogy', between those languages and European languages, 'although none of these analogies are so extensive as to allow us to identify the meaning of any Bâ-ntu derivative particle, with that of our own' (137-8). As for Hottentot suffixes, the masculine and feminine singular that delineate 'various shades of meaning' would 'seem to place them almost in analogy with some case terminations in the Aryan languages' (139):

It is true that many philologists, and even some comparative philologists, whose opinion is otherwise entitled to much respect, deny *in toto* any relationship between such languages as Hottentot and our own, - the Aryan or Indo-European .... but when languages pass through successive stages of development, it is clear that their material may become so different as to render its comparison impossible with that of other members of the same family which have travelled in different directions. Yet these very languages may show unmistakable proofs in their whole structure that they have issued from one common stock, and have originally possessed the same grammatical features (Bleek 1869:271).

These are suggestive analogies rather than specific discoveries. The vital point is the linking of imagination to grammatical structure.

In "Scientific Reasons for the Study of the Bushmen Language" (1873), Bleek emphasises that the 'Hottentot' language is related to the languages of the most cultivated nations:

For the general science of comparative grammar, the languages spoken within or on the borders of this Colony are of the highest importance; - Kafir, as giving us the key to the great mass of kindred Negro (Prefix-pronominal) languages which fill almost the whole of South Africa, and extend at least as far to the north-west as Sierra Leone; - and Hottentot, as exhibiting the most primitive form known of that large tribe of languages which is distinguished by its Sex-denoting qualities, which fills North Africa, Europe, and part of Asia, which includes the languages of the most highly cultivated nations on earth, and which may be even of far greater extent than we have any idea of at present (Bleek 1873:150).

Although 'Hottentots' and 'Bushman' may share a distant common origin - as is evidenced by 'the outward aspect of the two races, in many of their habits and customs, and, lastly, in their mythologies' - they constitute two distinct 'nations' (1873:151). 'Bushman' language is not a degraded form of Hottentot language, despite what some of Bleek's contemporaries surmised<sup>4</sup>. The priority of the Indo-European and Semitic languages is not rejected. Rather the argument here is that this priority can be adequately grasped only by looking beyond the Aryan linguistic circle, and beyond the work of the 'mere Indo-European scholar' (Bleek n.d.:lxxxiii)<sup>5</sup>. Completeness and inclusiveness is a pre-condition of accuracy and translative understanding.

So we have the following typology: Bâ-ntu (prefix-pronominal; African, as far north as Sierra Leone), 'Hottentot' (suffix-pronominal and sex-denoting; North African, Asian and European)<sup>6</sup>, and 'Bushman' (genderless or Tauranian; North African,

<sup>4</sup> Bleek wrote the following in a letter published in the *Natal Witness*, on 9.11.1855: 'That Chevalier Bunsen - whose name I cannot pronounce without feelings of the deepest respect and gratitude - should have fallen into such a mistake, speaks sufficiently of the confused ideas generally entertained' (Bleek 1855:24).

<sup>5</sup> Reference is to "The Concord, the origin of Pronouns, and the Formation of Classes or Genders of Nouns", a paper read before the Ethnological Society and mentioned by Bleek in a letter of 1871. The copy in the Don Afrikaner Library, Durban, has no publication date. Spöhr (1962:64) also gives no date for this text.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Whitney (1868:381): 'What a pregnant fact in African ethnology will be, if fully and irrefragably proved, the relation of the Hottentot dialects with the ancient Egyptians!'

European, Asian, American). What exactly, then, is the meaning of gender - the distribution of nouns into classes or genders brought into some reference to the distinction of sex as seen in nature - for Bleek?

### gender and imagination

Part II of the *Comparative Grammar* (The Concord. Section I. The Noun) draws once more on Bleek's doctoral dissertation of 1851 to expand on the importance of 'classes (or genders)' (1869:93) in the development of language. The link between gender and sex is not one of simple identity for Bleek:

This use of the term *gender* has been objected to. In explanation I beg to state that in investigating the origin of the grammatical gender of nouns it will be found that the further we go back, the more it loses the apparent identity which it has at present in the English language, with the distinctions of sex. It is, therefore, necessary to divest one-self of the idea that gender must imply sex, and to treat the genders of nouns as that which they originally were, - namely, classes; thus giving to the term *gender* a wider meaning, having no necessary reference to sex (Bleek 1869:93).

Gender is not to be limited to distinctions of sex. It is a 'common characteristic of the so-called Pronominal Languages that a concord exists between nouns and certain other parts of speech':

Through this, a distribution of the nouns into classes (or genders) takes place, which does not exhibit a strict analogy with any natural distinction, except in some of the most advanced of these languages, - particularly in English, and with modification in Danish. But in all the more primitive types of the Pronominal Languages, the classes of nouns do not correspond exactly to the distinctions observed in nature, though they may have a certain reference to them (Bleek 1869:93).

Noting of the Southern African languages that '[n]one of these dialects has any other culture than that which it has received under missionary auspices in the most recent period', Whitney (1868:344 note) refers to the authority of Bleek's subdivision of the South African languages: 'See Lepsius's General Table of Languages, already referred to; and Dr. Bleek's Catalogue of Sir George Grey's Library, at Capetown, 1858'. Cf. Lang (1885:197ff) on 'Hottentot' mythology. Cf. A. Werner's (1915) *The Language Families of Africa* (1915), and the overtly racist C.G. Seligman, *Races of Africa* (1930), for the influence of Bleek's typologies.

A comparison of the 'different Aryan languages' shows that those languages 'in which the division of the nouns into classes (or genders) is rendered visible' through the concord 'may prima facie be expected to exhibit the most primitive structural features' (94). The South African languages exhibit 'this curious structural arrangement' in a way that is more 'discernible' than in 'our (European and other Aryan) languages' (95-6). The limited extent of the concord between nouns and other parts of speech in 'the more logical arrangements of the Dutch and English tongues' indicates they 'are of modern origin' (94): '400. We all know that a comparison of the kindred languages, - , nay, a mere retracing of the English to its Anglo-Saxon parent - shows that the German has in this case preserved the more original conditions of the language' (94).

Bleek (n.d.:lxxix) explicitly engages in another telling demotion discussed by Bernal, that of Chinese 'civilisation', when he speculates that the Chinese once had a sex-denoting language: 'But the deficiencies of Chinese civilisation, and their national faults of character (apparently arising from want of the higher imaginative faculty) are to us a new proof how much men need that poetic stimulus which the ancient structure of our languages has given to our minds. The thirst for science must already very strongly have seized upon the spirit of a nation when it can do well without that lever which the sex-denoting form of language affords the mind'<sup>7</sup>. Imagination, development, grammatical structure, and aesthetic stimulus are seamlessly interwoven. This power is the power of imagination to perceive similarities and metaphorical correspondences. Bleek singles out the poetic power of the 'Hottentot' languages that endows animals and inanimate things with human characteristics, and in turn greatly stimulates the imagination.

This raises the central ethno-aesthetic question advanced in *Reynard the Fox in South Africa*:

But we may well ask why it is that, so far as we know, the Kafir imagination seems not at all inclined to the formation of this class of fictitious tales

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bernal (1991:238ff) on the negative stereotyping of the Chinese in the middle of the nineteenth century, the period of the Opium Wars. Humboldt and Whitney also express negative judgements on the Chinese. Of the dependency of 'human development' on the 'development of representation', Taine (1873:14) comments: 'If the general conception in which it results is a mere dry notation (in Chinese fashion), language becomes a sort of algebra, religion and poetry dwindle, philosophy is reduced to a kind of moral and practical common sense, science to a collection of utilitarian formulas, classifications, mnemonics, and the whole intellect takes a positive bent. If, on the contrary, the general representation in which the conception results is a poetical and figurative creation, a living symbol, as among the Aryan races, language becomes a sort of delicately-shaded and coloured epic poem'.

[Fables], though they have otherwise a prolific Native literature of a more or less historic and legendary character .... This is the real origin of almost all those poetical conceptions which we call *Fables* and *Myths*. Both are based on the personification of impersonal beings - the former by ascribing speech and reason to the lower animals, whilst the latter substitute human-like agencies in explanation of celestial and other elementary phenomena in place of their real cause (Bleek 1864:xx-xxi).

The 'almost' in the following citation carries an immense burden:

As the grammatical structure of the languages spoken by the latter [the Kafirs and other black tribes of South Africa] does not in itself suggest personification, these nations are almost, as a matter of course, destitute of myths as well as Fables. Their literary efforts are, as a general rule, restricted to narrating the doings of men in a more or less historical manner - whence we have a number of household tales, and portions of a fabulous history of these tribes and nations; or their ancestor worship and belief in the supernatural give rise to horrible ghost stories and tales of witchcraft, which would be exciting if they were not generally told in such a long-winded, prosy manner, as must make the best story lose its interest (Bleek 1864:xxv, ea.)

What is at stake here is the correlation between grammatical structure and form of thought: 'It has been seen that nations who speak Prefix-pronominal languages, in which the division of the nouns into classes has no reference to the distinctions of sex, possess no true mythology, but are merely addicted to ancestor-worship, which is probably the most ancient form of human religion' (Bleek 1874:98).

The 'higher flight of the imaginative faculty which the Sexdenoting (*sic*) nations possess (through the stimulation of this personification of impersonal things, consequent upon the grammatical structure of their languages)', produces myths and 'higher religious ideas' (1864:xxv). Myth is not a culmination but rather a bridge or transition from superstition to religious thought:

Mythology is, in its origin, most generally either a mere figure of or a poetical explanation suggested by the grammatical form or etymological meaning of words, indicating certain striking natural phenomena. In the primary stage of their production, Myths may be supposed to have been always understood in their true original character; and it is only when in the course of generations their real origin has been obscured, and they have become merely the petrified excrescences of a traditionary creed, that their apparent absurdity makes them at first sight almost inexplicable, particularly when found among nations

of a high intelligence (Bleek 1864:xxii).

While fables 'outlive' myths and 'their simple usefulness as moral teachers ... and salutary elements of the best national literatures', the 'more transitory existence' of myths lead mankind 'on to higher abstract ideas' (1864:xxii)<sup>8</sup>. Bleek (1864:xvii) reports that as early as 1850 he had noticed 'a striking similarity between the Hottentot signs of gender and those of the Coptic language', and this hypothesis formed the basis of his doctoral thesis. By 1864 he concludes that the similarity between European fables and Hottentot fables

shows a much greater congeniality between the Hottentot and European mind than we find between the latter and any of the black races of Africa. This similarity in the disposition of nations can in itself hardly be considered as a valid proof of common ancestry; but if there be other grounds to make us believe that the nations in question, or at least their languages are of common origin, it may render us more inclined to assume that such a similarity in their literary taste is derived also from the same source (Bleek 1864:xiv).

So, what is the relation between 'Hottentot' and Indo-European, Egyptian, and Semitic language families? Bleek posits, in accordance with Bunsen, a common origin and then a process of divergence: 'I have here assumed as a fact that the languages of the most civilised nations of the world have derived their *sex-denoting* character from the same source as the HOTTENTOT language' (Bleek n.d.:lxxix). Linking an African language group to Egyptian, and configuring these in relation to the Indo-European or Aryan would appear to run counter to the Aryan Model that tended to de-Africanise Egypt or marginalise its influence on Greek and European culture. Bleek proposes the 'congeniality between the Hottentot and European mind' and, given the influence of the theory of the North African origin of the Khoikhoi, recognises an affinity between Africans and Europeans. In his reminiscences Joseph Orpen offers the following extrapolation of Bleek's theory 'of the [language of the] Hottentots being akin to an early Egyptian language, which Dr. Bleek Called ancient Coptic'; This is just what we should expect to happen if a strong race from the north, akin to the most ancient Egyptians, took to themselves, either by force or otherwise, wives from a weaker race like the Bushmen, the progeny retaining the mother language's consonants, but the strong father language's grammar.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Tylor's (1865:10-11) discussion of Bleek's *Reynard the Fox in South Africa*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Barnard (1992) on the classification of the 'Hottentots', and the historical controversy of their North African origin (the 'Hamatic Theory'); also Wright (1996), Elphick (1977), and Dubow (1995:74-119).

Thus the strongly received conviction is on these and other grounds that the Hottentot race has been a crossbreed which has acquired a permanent type and originates in a large Northern white race allied to the old Egyptian, taking Bushmen wives (Orpen 1908:33).

Orpen shows the triumphant success of the racialising Aryan Model. If Bleek maintained a more nuanced approach, the question of complicity with the Aryan obsession he often criticised remains.

We offer the following translation from the 1870 German version of *Reynard the Fox* (1864) in the hope of clarifying this issue. In this supplement to the English text Bleek addresses his readers in order to defend himself against his German detractors. As we shall see, this reaction appears to hinge on the proximity of the relation between 'Hottentots' and Egyptians.

In the following translation roman numerals indicate the translator's notes to be found at the end of the essay. Asterisks are Bleek's footnotes.



Dr W.H.I. Bleek, 1862, (copied from Pippa Skotnes (ed),  
*Miscast. Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*.  
Cape Town: U.C.T. Press, 1996:125)

# Meine Fuchs in Afrika.

Diabeln und Märchen der Eingebornen.

Nach

Originalhandschriften  
der Grey'schen Bibliothek in der Kap-Stadt und  
andern authentischen Quellen.

Von

**Dr. W. H. I. Bleek,**

Gurator von Sir W. Grey's Bibliothek in der Kap-Stadt.

Weimar,

Hermann Böhlau.

1870.

## — Vorrede. —

Die obige Vorrede ist größtentheils eine Uebersetzung der englischen, die meinem „Reynard the Fox in South Africa; or, Hottentot Fables and Tales“ (London 1864) vorausgeschickt war. Das hier dem Publikum dargebotene deutsche Werk enthielt nun außer den hottentottischen auch eine bedeutende Anzahl von solchen Fabeln, deren Originalexte sich in Sprachen Nord-Afrika's finden, namentlich in der Haussa-, Bornu-, Wolof-, Akra-, Temne- und Bullom-Sprache. Von diesen gehört nur die Haussa-Sprache\*) zu derselben Familie wie das Hottentottische, die andern sind aber nicht sexuell, daher erklärt sich der Besitz von Fabeln unter den sie Sprechenden Völkern allerdings nicht aus dem Charakter ihrer Sprachen. Freilich ist es nicht unmöglich, daß der abgeschliffene Zustand der Bornu-Sprache\*\*) von einer Sprachform abstammt, in der das Geschlecht ähnlich wie in unseren Sprachen unterschieden wurde. Aber die anderen oben genannten nord-afrikanischen Sprachen gestatten eine solche Hypothese, betreffend ihres Ursprunges nicht. Denn die woloffische (in Senegambien gesprochen) und die Akra-Sprache (in einem Theile der Goldküste zu Hause) gehören unverkennbar zu der Vor-Familie, das Temne und Bullom (beide in Sierra Leone) zu der Bantu-Familie, und diese beiden Sprachfamilien sind Glieder der Classe der Präfix-Pronominalsprachen, unter denen die Beziehung des Classenunterschiedes auf den natürlichen Geschlechtsunterschied (wie wir ihn bei den Suffix-Pronominalsprachen antreffen) sich nicht findet. Die Bullom- und Temne-Sprache namentlich als Glieder derselben Sprachfamilie, zu der auch das Kasirische, die Setschuana,

\*) Siehe Sir G. Grey's Library, Vol. I, Part II, p. 239.

\*\*) Sir G. Grey's Library, Vol. I, Part II, p. 247.

The above introductory remarks are to a large extent a translation of the English which preceded my “Reynard the Fox in South Africa, or Hottentot fables and tales” (London 1864). The work in German which is offered to the public here, now contains, apart from the Hottentot section, also a considerable number of such fables, the original texts of which are to be found in the languages of North Africa, namely in Hausa, Bornu, Wolof, Akan, Temne and Buli. Of these, only the Hausa language\* belongs to the same family as the Hottentot<sup>1</sup>. The others are sex-denoting, which does not explain the possession of fables amongst the native speakers of those languages from the character of the language. Of course it is not impossible that the refined state of Bornu\*\* comes from a form in which gender was differentiated in a similar way to our own languages. However, the other above-mentioned North African languages do not permit such a hypothesis with regard to their origin. For the Wolof (spoken in Sene-Gambia) and the Akan languages (at home in part of the Gold Coast) belong unmistakably to the Gur family<sup>ii</sup>, Temne and Bulu (both in Sierra Leone) to the Bantu family and both these language families are members of the class of prefix-pronominal languages in which the relationship of class difference to the natural gender difference is not to be found as is the case in the suffix-pronominal languages. The Bulu and Temne languages, as members of the same language family as Kafir<sup>iii</sup>, Setswana, Herero and Damara and other African languages of

\* See Sir Grey's Library, Vol. I, Part II, p.239.

\*\* Sir G. Grey's Library, Vol. I, Part II, p.247.

## — Vorrede. —

das o Tyi-heroró oder die Damara-Sprache und andere Neger-Sprachen Süd-Afrika's gehören, würden an und für sich für die Fabelbildung wenig mehr Anlaß geben als diese Sprachen. Dabei ist aber in Betracht zu ziehen, daß die Völker und Sprachen im Norden des Äquators, die nicht zum sexuellen Stamm gehören, doch in gar anderer und viel eingreifenderer Weise unter dem Einfluß der sexuellen Fabelbildung stehen.

South Africa, would actually give little more cause for fable formation than these languages. Thereby one must take into account that the peoples and languages to the north of the equator which do not belong to the sex-denoting branch, come under the influence of the thought processes of sex-denoting languages in another and much more profound way than in



## — Vorrede. —

— rung eines Sprichworts ist. \*) — Die Betschuanen (eine die Kaffern an ursprünglicher, einheimischer Civilisation bei Weitem überragende Nation) sollen eine größere Anzahl von Fabeln besitzen, von denen auch einige von dem Missionar T. Arbouffet, zusammen mit Uebersetzungen europäischer Fabeln, in seiner „Choix de Fables et Proverbs, publié en Sessouto“ (Ville du Cap. 1847, Nr. 258 von Sir George Grey's Library, Vol. I.) herausgegeben worden sind. Leider kann ich dem Leser hier nur eine Sessuto-Fabel darbieten, die ich Casalis nachgezählt \*\*)

Von Madagaskar würde ich etwa ein Duzend liefern können, wenn uns eine Uebersetzung der von Eingeborenen im Malagassischen veröffentlichten Angano (Nr. 723 von Sir George Grey's Library, Vol. I.) zu Gebote stände. Zwar hat mir Revd. W. C. Cousins die zwei ersten dieser Fabeln (der Wolf und das Lamm, die Frösche, die sich nach einem Herrscher umsehen) freundlichst überseht, aber diese stimmen so sehr mit weltbekannten europäischen überein, daß mir ihre Mittheilung hier nicht am Ort zu sein schien.

\*) Die inzwischen in Callaway's Märchensammlung (Nursery Tales, Traditions, and Histories of the Zulus, Vol. I, Natal and London 1868) publicirten Fabeln sind auch zu unbedeutend, als daß auf sie hin man den Natalischen Kaffern oder Zulus eine Neigung zum Fabelerzählen zuschreiben könnte.

\*\*) Eine Sessuto-Fabel, die ich dieser Sammlung nicht einverleibt habe, ist von Christian Schrumpf in der Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Band 16, S. 471—474, veröffentlicht worden. In gleicher Weise habe ich auch eine Zulu-Fabel, die vom Bischof von Natal in einem seiner Peseblicher gegeben ist, der Uebersetzung nicht werth gehalten. Im Allgemeinen ist, was sich von Fabeln unter den Süd-afrikanischen Bantu-Stämmen gefunden hat, zu unbedeutend, um besondere Rücksicht zu verdienen.

an explanation of a proverb.\* The Bechuanas, (a much more advanced nation than the Kafirs with regard to their origins and indigenous civilisation) apparently have numerous fables some of which have been published by the missionary T. Arbouffet together with his translations of European fables in his “Choix de Fables et proverbs, publié en Sessouto” (Ville du cap, 1847, no. 258 from Sir George Grey's Library, Vol. I). Unfortunately I can only offer the reader one Sesotho fable here, which I retell according to Casalis.\*\*

I could offer about a dozen from Madagascar, if there were an available translation of Angano which was published by the natives<sup>iv</sup> in Malagasy (no. 723 from Sir George Grey's Library, Vol. I). Indeed the Rev. W.C. Cousins was kind enough to translate the first of these fables (The Wolf and the Lamb, The Frogs which were looking for a King), but these are so similar to world-renowned European fables that it didn't seem to be the right thing to do in this instance.

\* The fables which have been published in the meantime in Callaway's Fairy Tale Collection (Nursery Tales, Traditions and Histories of the Zulus, Vol. I, Natal and London 1868) are also too important for one to attribute a tendency by the Natal Zulus to tell fables.

\*\* A Sesotho fable which I have not included in this collection has been published by Christian Schrumpf in the Journal of the German Oriental Society, Vol. 16, pp.471-474. In the same way I have not thought it worthwhile to translate a Zulu fable which is in the reading book of the Bishop of Natal. On the whole, what has been found of fables of the South African Bantu tribes is too unimportant to deserve special attention.

## — Borrede. —

Der Zweck dieses Buches gestattet es auch nicht, von den Märchen, Sagen und Erzählungen der afrikanischen Völkerschaften mehr als ein paar Proben mitzutheilen. Sonst würde hier gerade eine besonders reiche Ausbeute ergeben, da ja der Geist der meisten dieser Nationen auf diesem Gebiete höchst thätig gewesen ist. Manche solcher Märchen scheinen übrigens Gemeingut vieler Völkerschaften, ja manchmal vielleicht von ganz Afrika zu sein. So finden wir die Damara-Fabel „Was geschenkt ist, bleibt geschenkt“ (Nr. 42) nicht nur bei anderen süd-afrikanischen Völkern, wie bei den Zulu's (Uthlakanyana, Callaway a. d. I, 37—40), sondern auch in Nord-Afrika in dem Temne-Märchen vom „Unverständigen Knaben“ (Nr. 36) und selbst auf Madagaskar wieder. Da das malagassische Märchen merkwürdiger Weise mit dem otjhereroschen Berührungspunkte darbietet, so gebe ich hier eine Uebersetzung desselben. Der malagassische Originaltext befindet sich nebst einer englischen Uebersetzung in den werthvollen malagassischen Handschriften, die der Herr James Cameron der Sir G. Grey'schen Bibliothek zugestellt hat.

Ikotofetsi ging einst in den Wald und holte sich etwas Laingo,\*) das er in eine Schüssel that, die Rafotsibe (der großen schönen Dame) zugehörte. Er ging dann weg, und erst nach einiger Zeit kam er wieder in's Haus der Rafotsibe, und frug: „Wo ist mein Laingo?“ Rafotsibe gestand, sie habe es gebraucht. Ikotofetsi sagte dann:

„Wie kann ich zugeben, daß Du mein Laingo gebrauchst,  
Aus dem Walde brachte ich mir das Laingo,  
Und nun ist das Laingo von Rafotsibe verbraucht,  
Dabei kann ich's nicht bewenden lassen.“

\*) Laingo (Sprich: Laingu) ist eine Pflanze, mit deren zartem Stengel die Zähne tüchtig gerieben werden. Sie werden dann erst ganz schwarz, aber nach ein oder zwei Tagen wird der schwarze Ueberzug mit ungeschälten Reiskörnern abgerieben, und die Zähne gehen schneeweiß aus diesem Prozesse hervor.

The purpose of this book does not permit more than a couple of examples of the fairy tales, sagas and stories of the African peoples to be told. Otherwise there would be here an especially rich yield as the spirit of most of the nations has been extremely active in this area. Many such fairy tales appear to form part of many peoples, indeed sometimes perhaps the whole of Africa. Thus we find the Demara fable "That which is a gift, is always a gift" (no. 42) not only in other South African tribes, as with the Zulus (Uthlakanyana, Callaway I, 37-40) but also in North Africa in the Temne fairy tales of "Ignorant Boys" (no. 36) and even in Madagascar. As the Malagasy fairy tale has, strangely enough, similar points to the Herero one, I have given a translation of it here. The original Malagasy text as well as an English translation is to be found amongst the valuable Malagasy manuscripts which Mr James Cameron gave to the library of Sir G. Grey.

Once upon a time, Ikotofetsi went into the forest and fetched some laingo\* which he put into a bowl that belonged to Rafotsibe (the beautiful large lady). Then he went away and only returned to Rafotsibe's house after a while. Then he asked, "Where is my laingo?". Rafotsibe admitted that she had used it. Ikotofetsi then said:

"I can never admit, that you are using my laingo,  
I brought the laingo from the forest for myself,  
And now the laingo has been used by Rafotsibe,  
I cannot be content with that."

\* Laingo (pr. la:ngu) is a plant whose tender stalks are used to rub the teeth with. First of all they become completely black, but after one or two days the black coating is rubbed off with unpeeled rice grains. Through this process the teeth become snow white.

## — Vorrede. —

Rafotsibe antwortete: „Wenn Du's nicht dabei bewenden lassen kannst, so will ich Dir eine kleine Nähnadel statt des Laingo geben“. Und sie that so.

Ikotofetsi nahm die Nadel, und ging zu einem Fischfänger. Der frug ihn, ob er seine Nadel gegen einen kleinen Fisch austauschen wolle; Ikotofetsi antwortete: „Am Ende gibst Du mir ihn (den Fisch) gar nicht?“ Der Fischfänger sagte: „Ich will ihn geben“, und er gab ihm den Fisch.

Ikotofetsi nahm den Fisch und kam mit ihm zu Waldbewohnern, mit denen er den Fisch gegen ein Beil vertauschte. Dann kam er zu Todtengräbern, die ihn fragten: „Sage mal, wo ist denn Dein Beil? Wir wollen damit Ochsenfleisch in Stücke hauen“. Ikotofetsi sagte: „Ja, wenn aber mein Beil zerbrechen sollte, so müßt Ihr nicht vergessen, daß ich dafür entschädigt werden muß.“ Die Leute willigten ein, und er ließ sie dann das Fleisch zerhauen. Dabei zerbrach das Beil und Ikotofetsi sagte: „Nun muß ich das Rindfleisch haben“. Und die Leute mußten ihm ein recht großes Stück Fleisch geben.

Ikotofetsi ging dann seines Weges und kam zu einem sehr alten Mann. Der Greis sagte zu ihm: „Können wir nicht etwa einen Tausch machen, und Du mir Rindfleisch für meine Trommel geben?“ Ikotofetsi sagte: „Du gibst mir doch wohl nicht Deine Trommel!“ Der Greis sagte: „Ich will sie schon geben“.

Ikotofetsi nahm die Trommel und ging damit nach dem Markte zu. Auf dem ganzen Wege, bis er auf den Markt kam, schlug er die Trommel, und die Leute riefen: „O der Tausend! Seht nur 'mal, was der Ikotofetsi für eine Trommel hat“, und alle Leute auf dem Markte schlugen dann abwechselnd die Trommel, bis sie zersprang. Dann sagte Ikotofetsi:

„Aus dem Walde bracht' ich das Laingo,  
Das Laingo wurde von Rafotsibe verbraucht,  
Rafotsibe gab mir die Nadel,  
Die Nadel kriegte der Fischer,  
Der Fischer gab mir den Fisch,  
Den Fisch kriegten die Waldbewohner,  
Die Waldbewohner gaben ein Beil,  
Das Beil zerbrach der Todtengräber,  
Der Todtengräber gab mir Ochsenfleisch,

Rafotsibe answered, „If you can't be content with that, then I will give you a little sewing needle instead of the laingo“. And that she did. Ikotofetsi took the needle and went to a fisherman. He asked him if he would exchange his needle for a little fish. Ikotofetsi answered, „But will you give it (the fish) to me in the end?“. The fisherman said, „I will give it“, and he gave him the fish.

Ikotofetsi took the fish and went with it to the forest dwellers with whom he exchanged the fish for a hatchet. Then he came upon gravediggers who asked him, „Tell us, where is your hatchet? We want to cut up ox meat with it“. Ikotofetsi said, „yes, if, however, my hatchet should break then you mustn't forget that I must be compensated for it“. The people agreed and he then let them cut up the meat. Whereupon the hatchet broke and Ikotofetsi said, „Now I must have the beef“. And the people had to give him a really big piece of meat.

Ikotofetsi went on his way and came upon a very old man. The old man said to him, „Can't we make an exchange: you give me beef for my drum?“. Ikotofetsi said, „You wouldn't really give me your drum!“. The old man said, „I will give it to you“.

Ikotofetsi took the drum and went with it to the market. He beat the drum the whole way until he came to the market and the people cried, „Goodness! Look at Ikotofetsi's drum“, and all the people at the market beat the drum in turn until it burst. Then Ikotofetsi said:

„I brought the laingo out of the forest,  
The laingo was used by Rafotsibe,  
Rafotsibe gave me a needle,  
The fisherman got the needle, (the needle was given to the fisherman)  
The fisherman gave me the fish,  
The forest dwellers got the fish (the fish was given to the forest dwellers)  
The forest dwellers gave me a hatchet,  
The hatchet was broken by the gravediggers,  
The gravediggers gave me ox meat,

## — Vorrede. —

Das Ochsenfleisch kriegte der alte Mann,  
Der alte Mann gab mir die Trommel,  
Die Trommel zerbrachen die Marktleute,  
Dabei kann ich's nicht bewenden lassen,  
Die Leute müssen deshalb mir zugehören."

Als die vornehmsten Marktleute dies hörten, gingen sie zu dem König und berichteten ihm, was vorgefallen. Der König sagte aber: „Ja! Wenn Ihr sein Eigenthum zerstört habt, was ist da zu machen? Ihr müßt eben ihm zugehören.“

Die malagassische Sprache gehört bekanntermaßen zu der großen malaisch-polynesischen Sprachfamilie, die meiner Meinung nach gleich der Bantu-Sprachfamilie Afrika's mit zu dem Präfix-Pronominalsprachstamm zu rechnen ist. Dies würden aber unendlich alte Beziehungen sein, die nicht wohl so bedeutende Uebereinstimmungen im Märchengebiete erklären. Diese werden neueren Bemühungen zuzuschreiben sein, denen die malagassische Sprache auch manche spezielle Bantu-Wörter (wie den Namen des Ochsen, Hundes etc.) verdankt.

Am Ende dieser Vorrede muß ich mich noch gegen die mir in Deutschland untergeschobenen Behauptung wahren, als wenn ich einen besonders nahen Zusammenhang des Aegyptischen und des Koptischen mit dem Hottentottischen annehme. Dies ist nie meine Meinung gewesen. Was ich behauptet habe und wofür ich die Beweise theilweise schon veröffentlicht habe, theilweise aber am Schluß der zweiten Abtheilung des zweiten Theiles meiner vergleichenden Grammatik der süd-afrikanischen Sprachen veröffentlichen werde, ist folgendes. Das Aegyptische und viele andere nord-afrikanische Sprachen bilden zusammen mit der semitischen und der indogermanischen Sprachfamilie einen großen Sprachstamm, der dadurch gekennzeichnet ist, daß die Nomina in Classen oder sogenannte Geschlechter zerfallen, die mit den natürlichen Geschlechtsunterschieden in eine gewisse

The old man got the ox meat (the ox meat was given to the old man)

The old man gave me the drum,  
The drum was broken by the market people  
I cannot be content with this,

Therefore the people must belong to me."  
When the noblest market people heard this they went to the king and told him what had happened. The king said however, "Yes! If you have destroyed all his possessions what can I do? You just have to belong to him".

It is well-known that the Malagasy language<sup>vi</sup> belongs to the large Malay-Polynesian language family which, in my opinion, belongs to the prefix-pronominal language branch as does the Bantu language family. However this could be due to age-old relationships which would not explain important correlations in the area of fairy tales. These are attributed to more recent efforts to which the Malagasy language owes the acquisition of some special Bantu words (as the names of ox, dog etc.).

At the end of this introduction I must defend myself against the claim placed at my door in Germany that I thought there was an especially close link between Egyptian, Coptic<sup>vii</sup> and Hottentot. This has never been my opinion. What I have claimed and about which I have already published in part, but will publish at the conclusion of the second section of the second part of my comparative grammar, is the following. Egyptian and many other north African languages form, together with the Semitic and Indo-Germanic language family a large language branch which is characterised by the fact that the substantives are divided into

## — Vorrede. —

Beziehung getreten sind, obschon sie sich ursprünglich jedenfalls mit diesen nicht decken. Das Hottentottische nun gehört auch diesem Sprachstamm an, den wir dieser Haupteigenschaft wegen den sexuellen (im Englischen sexdenoting) genannt haben. Daß das Hottentottische nun zu einer dieser Sprachfamilien in einer ganz besonders nahen Verwandtschaft stünde, ist nicht zu beweisen. Es hat die allgemeinen Charaktere einer sexuellen Sprache, und hat unter dieser wahrscheinlich die ursprünglichste Art der sexuellen Classeneintheilung der Nomina am besten bewahrt. In der Form der Zeichen dieser Geschlechter stimmt es allerdings mehr mit dem Alt-Aegyptischen und Koptischen überein als mit den andern uns bekannten sexuellen Sprachen: aber in vielen andern Einzelheiten scheinen ihm die letzteren wieder näher zu stehen, so das Semitische in der Bezeichnung des Genetivs und Accusativs durch die Suffixe -a und -i (-di im Hottentottischen). In die semitischen Sprachen haben auch darin wie das Hottentottische die ursprünglichsten Verhältnisse beibehalten, daß sie meistens im Singular und Plural verschiedene Zeichen für die beiden Geschlechter haben, während das Aegyptische und das Koptische (wie das neuere Englische) im Plural nur ein Geschlecht unterscheiden, die indogermanischen Sprachen hingegen den Singular und Plural in jedem Geschlecht in ein Geschlechtszeichen zusammenfallen ließen. Selbst das Indogermanische hat manche Alterthümlichkeiten beibehalten, die sonst nur noch im Hottentottischen klar zu sehen sind.

Dies sind eben nur Andeutungen. Die Erklärungen und Beweise zu liefern ist Aufgabe des obengenannten Buches, das hoffentlich bald erscheinen wird. — Bis dahin muß ich nur bitten, nicht als meine Ansicht darzustellen, was es gar nicht ist. Uebrigens gibt es auch in

classes or so-called genders, which have a certain relationship to the natural gender differences, although originally they did not tally with this. Hottentot belongs to the language branch which we call in English the sex-denoting branch because of this main characteristic. It cannot be proved that Hottentot is especially closely related to one of these language families. It has the general character of a sex-denoting language and probably, with this, it has maintained the original way of gender class divisions of the nouns best of all. However in the form of these gender signals, it is more in agreement with old Egyptian and Coptic than with the other sex-denoting languages known to us. In many other details, however, the latter appear to be more closely linked to it as in Semitic with the genitive and accusative indicators of -a and -i (-di in Hottentot). Indeed, with this, the Semitic languages have, like Hottentot, so retained the original relationship that they usually have different signals for both genders in the singular and the plural whilst Egyptian and Coptic (and also the more recent English) only show one gender in the plural, whereas the Indo-Germanic languages allowed the singular and the plural in each gender to have a gender signal. The Indo-Germanic languages have retained some archaisms which are otherwise only still to be found in Hottentot.

These, however, are only suggestions. The purpose of the aforementioned book, which will, I hope, appear soon, is to give explanations and evidence. Until such a time, I must request that my opinion should not be portrayed as that

— Vorrede. —

Asien vereinzelte Glieder dieses sexuellen Sprachstammes, die weder zur semitischen noch zur indogermanischen Sprachfamilie gehören, z. B. das Kassia oder Khasi. Und wie viele Sprachen mögen nicht wie das Neu-Persische ursprüngliche Geschlechtseinteilung der Nomina ganz abgestreift haben. In ähnlicher Weise gibt es ja in West-Afrika z. B. viele Sprachen, die offenbar zum Bantu-Stamm gehören, aber alle Spuren der noch viel reichhaltigeren und complicirteren Classeneinteilung der Nomina dieses Stammes beinahe oder ganz verlustig geworden sind. Der Analogie nach muß erwartet werden, daß bei vielen Gliedern des sexuellen Sprachstammes ähnliche Reductionsprozesse stattgefunden haben. Doch das sind Ansichten, die, wie unwiderstehlich sie auch das Studium der afrikanischen Sprachen uns aufdrängt, doch so vielen bisher gang und gebe gewordenen Betrachtungsweisen entgegenstehen, und eine so vollständige Revolution in lieb gewordenen Theorien verlangen, daß ich mich nicht wundern darf, wenn sie bedeutenden Widerspruch nicht bloß von Seiten der gedankenlosen Verächter bestehender Ansichten finden.

Bonn, den 26. August 1869.

W. H. I. Bleek.

which it is not. By the way, there are also individual branches in Asia of this sex-denoting language tree which belong to neither the Semitic nor to the Indo-Germanic language families e.g. Kassia or Khasi<sup>viii</sup>. And many languages may have completely wiped out the original gender classification of nouns e.g. new Persian<sup>ix</sup>. In a similar way, for example in west Africa, there are many languages that apparently belong to the Bantu branch but have almost or completely lost the still very extensive and complicated class division of nouns of this branch. According to the analogy, it must be expected that similar reduction processes have taken place with many limbs of the sex-denoting language branch. However, these are opinions which, however irresistibly they impose the study of African languages on us, are on the whole opposed to many given opinions and demand such a complete revolution in much-loved theories that I would not be surprised if important contradictions were not only found from thoughtless champions of existing views.

Bonn, 26 August 1869

W.H.I. Bleek

(Translated by Elizabeth Greyling)

## conclusion

Writing from South Africa, Bleek never lost his impatience with the 'thoughtless champions of existing views'. While Indo-European languages also bear traces of earlier forms of grammatical structure, it is in South Africa that 'pure' examples of the sex-denoting grammatical form are found. In rejecting the Indo-European obsession he challenged the idealisation of Sanskrit as the *Ursprache* of the Indo-European languages associated with the work of Herder, Frederick Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Grimm, and Bopp. However Bleek's qualified and ambivalent defence of a version of the Ancient Model - refining the connection between 'Hottentot' and Egyptian and Coptic - registers in muted fashion the force exerted by the installation of the Aryan Model. He mobilises a modified or weak version of the Ancient Model that acknowledges the African presence in Egypt and the influence of Egypt on Europe after the 1860, the date that for Bernal marks the achieved hegemony of the Aryan Model.

Somehow, as Bernal acknowledges, the Ancient Model can itself function in a way that assures, albeit indirectly, Euro-supremacy. While Bleek does not see the 'Hottentots' as 'a crossbreed which has acquired a permanent type and originates in a large Northern white race allied to the old Egyptian' (Orpen 1908:33), he does effect an equally powerful demotion of Africa. Egypt forms a link between the mind of Europe and that of the 'Hottentots', a privilege that sets the latter apart from the 'other black races of Africa'. The African connection of the sex-denoting language family is attenuated, and deposited as a remnant of a form of noun classification that has been superseded. The connection between 'Hottentot' and Egyptian Coptic is mediated but not broken, and shifted to the past. African languages are shards of earlier formations on the way to modern languages.

For Bleek Africa, in the margins of human progress, symbolises the past rather than the future. Attempts to vindicate Africa by pointing to its archaic contribution to human development along the lines of Bernal's revised Ancient Model compliment rather than challenge one tenacious armature of colonialist ideology.

## Translator's Notes

<sup>i</sup> According to Crystal (1988: 295, 314, 315-16) Hausa belongs to the Afro-Asiatic group whereas 'Hottentot' belongs to the Khoisan which is the smallest language family in Africa. The Afro-Asiatic family is also known as Hamito-Semitic and has six major divisions: the Semitic (e.g. Hebrew, Arabic), Egyptian (now developed into Coptic), Berber (e.g. Riff, Shluh) Cushitic (e.g. Oromo, Somali), Omotic (e.g. Walamo) and Chadic languages. Hausa is the most important of the Chadic languages which are spoken over an area extending from northern Ghana to the Central African Republic. It is also the only Chadic language to have a written form. Crystal further argues that the Khoisan languages are spoken in an area extending from Angola to South Africa,

and that the name 'Khoisan' derives from the Khoi-Khoi, the largest 'Hottentot' group and the San, the 'Bushman' in the Nama region of Namibia. However, San linguists and teachers from Namibia, Botswana and South Africa have recently rejected the conflation of San and 'Hottentot' (Khoi-Khoi) in Khoisan as 'a ploy by non-San speaking people to continue subjugating their unique culture' (John Grobler, "The Khoi don't share our culture, say San", *Mail & Guardian* April 26 to May 3 2001:34). This confirms Bleek's position.

<sup>ii</sup> The Gur or Voltaic group is a branch of the Niger-Congo family spoken around the Upper Volta River.

<sup>iii</sup> In the original text the name of the language is given as 'das Kafirische'. 'Kaffir' is defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1984) as an archaic term for a member or language of a South African people of the Bantu or Nguni family; what is now called Xhosa. No longer used to designate a language, it has come to be used as a derogatory term. Spöhr (1965:ii) notes that Bleek used 'kaffer' as an ethnological term and 'kaffir' as a linguistic reference.

<sup>iv</sup> 'von Eingeborenen' translated as 'by natives' makes it clear that Angano was published by local Malagasy people. It could also be translated without pejorative connotations as 'by indigenous people'.

<sup>v</sup> The German language has noun genders as well as a case system. The article changes according to the case. Therefore it is possible to place the accusative at the beginning of a sentence thereby giving it more emphasis than the nominative. This is what is happening in the original text here. e.g. 'Rafotsibe gab mir die Nadel',

Die Nadel kriegte der Fischer

Translated as it stands this would be:

Rafotsibe gave me the needle

The fisherman got the needle

'Der Fischer' is a masculine singular noun in the nominative case whereas 'die Nadel' is a feminine singular noun in the accusative case. However this does not preserve the THEME/RHEME relationship of the original in which the focus (the THEME) is the needle. In the translation the focus has been transferred to the fisherman. 'The needle was given to the fisherman' preserves the emphasis of the original German i.e. the RHEME of the preceding statement becomes the THEME (focus) of the succeeding statement. However it does not necessarily preserve the full meaning of the original, as 'given' has a stronger element of voluntariness attached to it than 'got' (the literal translation of 'kriegte'). Therefore the two possible equivalents have been included in the translation, i.e. 'the fisherman got the needle' and 'the needle was given to the fisherman'. This strategy has been used for all succeeding passages that are of like construction.

<sup>vi</sup> The Malagasy language belongs to the western group of Austronesian languages. These languages are spoken in Madagascar, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines,



Taiwan and parts of Vietnam, Kampuchea and New Guinea. There are many structural differences between the languages and, it is thought that the link between Indonesia and Madagascar came about through the migration of Indonesian traders ca.1500 years ago. Despite its proximity to Africa, there has not been much influence from Arabic or African languages on the Malagasy language.

<sup>vii</sup> Egyptian developed into Coptic in ca. 2 a.d. and was possibly still used in the early 19th century. It is now used by Christians as a religious language in Egypt.

<sup>viii</sup> These are languages belonging to the Austro-Asiatic family and are spoken in Assam in north-east India.

<sup>ix</sup> Now known as Farsi.

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**Baudelaire**

**Mduduzi Dlamini**

**Translations**

## Ububende I

UPluviyasi, edinwe idolobha lonkana,  
 Ngomqomo uthela ezinkulu izikhukhula kubumnyama obubandayo  
 Phezu kwabashazekile abahlali baseduzane namathuna  
 Kanye nempelompilo kulezigceme ezixuxuvelayo.

Ikati lami phezu kwewindi libhekabhekana  
 Lithukile lingenampumulo umzimba walo wondile futhi unotwayi;  
 Umphefumulo wembongi endala uzulazula kwizitamkoko  
 Usho ngephimbo losizi lomungcwini ogodoleyo.

Insimbikazi iyalila, futhi nezinkuni zishunqa  
 Ziphelezela ngephimboze iwashi elikhwehlelayo,  
 Khona manjalo kumanzi agcwele amakha abolile

Ifa lokufa lesidala isikhukhukhu,  
 Isilomo sezinhliziyo kanye nentombi yezindoni  
 Bahlebelana kambana ngezintando zabo esezafa.

## Spleen I

Pluviöse, irrité contre la ville entière,  
 De son urne à grands flots verse un froid  
 ténébreux  
 Aux pâles habitants du voisin cimetière  
 Et la mortalité sur les faubourgs brumeux.

Mon chat sur le carreau cherchant une litière  
 Agite sans repos son corps maigre et galeux;  
 L'âme d'un vieux poète erre dans la gouttière  
 Avec la triste voix d'un fantôme frileux.

## Spleen I

Pluvius, irritated at the entire town,  
 From his urn pours torrents of a gloomy chill  
 Over the pale neighbours resting underground  
 And mortality over shrouded suburban hills.

My cat looks among the flagstones for a litter,  
 Turning his meager, mangy body without rest;  
 The soul of an old poet plays in the gutter,  
 His sad voice that of a shivering ghost.

The logs blacken with smoke, and the bumblebee laments  
 With the sniffing clock in falsetto accompaniment,  
 While from a dropsical old woman's bequeathed trove,

A deck full of dirty, dull, stalely perfumed cards,  
 The queen of spades and the dapper jack of hearts  
 Have a sinister chat about their defunct love.

Le bourdon se lamente, et la bûche enfumée  
 Accompagne en fausset la pendule enrhumée,  
 Cependant qu'en un jeu plein de sales  
 parfums,

Héritage fatal d'une vieille hydropique,  
 Le beau valet de coeur et la dame de pique  
 Causent sinistrement de leurs amours défunts.



## Ububende II

Nginezinkumbulo eziningi kunokuba nganginemnyaka eyinkulungwane.

Ikhabethe lamashalofu lifuhlelelwe ngamadokodo,  
 Ngamavesi, ngamathikithi ezenamisi, amasamanisi, imishavo,  
 Kunye nezimfumbe zezinwele ziboshelwe kumarisidi,  
 Lifihle izimfihlo ezincane kakhulu kunodumeleyo umqondo wami.  
 Uyingqabasakhiwo, ebanzikazi inqolobane le,  
 Othwele izidumbu eziningi kunethuna lawonkewonke.

- Ngiyingcwaba elizondwa ngisho nayinyanga,  
 Lapho njengokuzisola kuhaqazela imsundu emide  
 Enakana njalo nje nabafi bami abathandeka kakhulu.  
 Ngiyigumbi elidala eligcwele amarozi asaphupha,  
 Lapho kunenzwa eseyadlula yezingqephu esezashabalala,  
 Lapho onolusizi abaphashile kanye noBoucher ophuphile,  
 Kuphela, abaphefumula iphunga lamafulaski avuliwe.

## Spleen II

J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans.

Un gros meuble à tiroirs encombré de bilans,  
 De vers, de billets doux, de procès, de  
 romances,

Avec de lourds cheveux roulés dans des  
 quittances,

Cache moins de secrets que mon triste  
 cerveau.

C'est une pyramide, un immense caveau,

## Spleen II

I have more souvenirs than if I were a thousand years old.

A large chest of drawers congested with balance sheets,  
 Verses, love letters, lawsuits, novels warped and yellowed,  
 With heavy knots of hair rolled up into receipts  
 My tragic mind conceals fewer secrets.  
 It is a pyramid, an immense burial cave  
 That contains more dead than a paupers grave.

- I am a cemetery that the moon forgets,  
 Where long worms drag themselves onward as from regret,  
 On my most beloved corpses always intent.  
 I am an old boudoir filled with withered rose petals,  
 Where lies in a pile every out-of-fashion style,  
 Where the pale Bouchers and plaintive pastels,  
 Alone, breathe the odour of an uncorked phial.

Qui contient plus de morts que la fosse  
 commune.

- je suis un cimetière abhorré de la lune,  
 Où comme des remords se traînent de longs  
 vers

Qui s'acharment toujours sur mes morts les  
 plus chers.

Je suis un vieux boudoir plein de roses fanées,  
 Où gît tout un fouillis de modes surannées,  
 Où les pastels plaintifs et les pâles Boucher,  
 Seuls, respirent l'odeur d'un flacon débouché.



Ayikho into ende njengezinsuku ezitotobayo,  
 Lapho ngaphansi kwezithafa ezisindayo zesichotho zeminyaka,  
 INgcobeko, isithelo sedumazayo inswelolukuluku,  
 Ithatha izimozilinganiso zenswelokufa.  
 - Kusukela njalo awuseyilutho neze, o nkono ephilayo!  
 Kunokuba uyimbokodo izungezwe insabo efiphele,  
 Ungquphazela phakathi le ezinzulwuini zeSahara elufifi;  
 Mbaxambili omdala onganakiwe wumhlaba ongenandaba,  
 Ukhohliwe kwibalazwe, kepha umoya wakho wokuzithwala  
 Uhlabelela kuphela kwimsebe yelanga elishonayo.

Nothing can equal the crippling days,  
 When buried beneath years of snow flakes,  
 Ennui, fruit of dreary apathy,  
 Takes on the proportions of immortality,  
 - henceforth, you are no more, living matter!  
 Than a granite block enveloped in a vague terror,  
 Dozing at the bottom of a foggy Sahara;  
 An old sphinx unknown to a world that doesn't care,  
 Omitted from the map, whose humour, fierce and sullen,  
 Can only sing to the rays of the setting sun.

Rien n'égale en longueur les boiteuses  
 journées,  
 Quand sous les lourds flocons des neigeuses  
 années,  
 L'ennui, fruit de la morne incuriosité,  
 Prend les proportions de l'immortalité,  
 - Désormais tu n'es plus, ô matière vivante!

Qu'un granit entouré d'une vague épouvante,  
 Assoupi dans le fond d'un Sahara brumeux;  
 Un vieux sphinx ignoré du monde  
 insoucieux,  
 Oublié sur la carte, et dont l'humeur farouche  
 Ne chante qu'aux rayons du soleil qui se  
 couche.



## Ububende III

Ngifana nenkosi yendawo enethayo,  
 Inothile, kepha ingenamandla, incane futhi indala ibophekile,  
 Othi, ecanukela izibonelo zabafundisi bakhe abamkhozile,  
 Acikeke izinja zakhe nanganjengezinye izilwane.  
 Ayikho into engamnamisa, namdlalo ngisho nakucupha,  
 Ngisho nabantu bakhe befa maduzane nebhalikhoni,  
 Izilandiso ezixakile zohlanya olukhonziwe  
 Azisalibazisi neze ikhanda lalesigulana esinehluku;  
 Umbhede wakhe oqhakazisiwe usuphenduke ithuna,  
 Kanye nezintombi zengqephu, eziwela wonke amakhosi angamageza,  
 Azisophinde neze zithole izingubo ezihlongamahloni  
 Ze zifumane uhleko lwalamathambo amancane.

Isazi lesi esamenzela igolide asiphindanga sakwazi  
 Ukumonyula kumphefumulo wakhe leli qhuzu eluwubulalayo,  
 Futhi kuleyombhukudo yegazi amaRoma eyayiwanelisa,  
 Nokuthi abadala ibabuyisele ngamandla obusha,  
 Wayengasakwazi neze ukuvuselela lesidumbu esiqinile  
 Laphe esikhundleni segazi kumuka amanzi aluhlaza eLethi.

## Spleen III

Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux,  
 Riche, mais impuissant, jeune et pourtant  
 très-vieux,  
 Qui, de ses précepteurs méprisant les  
 courbettes,  
 S'ennuie avec ses chiens comme avec d'autres  
 bêtes.

Rien ne peut l'égayer, ni gibier, ni faucon,  
 Ni son peuple mourant en face du balcon.  
 Du bouffon favori la grotesque ballade  
 Ne distrait plus le front de ce cruel malade;  
 Son lit fleurdélié se transforme en tombeau,  
 Et les dames d'atour, pour qui tout prince  
 est beau,

## Spleen III

I am like the king of a rainy country,  
 Rich, but powerless, young, yet old already,  
 Scornful of his bowing and scraping teachers,  
 Bored with his dog and his other creatures.  
 Nothing can enliven, no game, no falconry,  
 No people dying in front of his balcony.  
 The grotesque ballad of his favourite clown  
 Can no longer lift his cruel and sick frown;  
 His fleur-de-lys bed turns into a shrine,  
 Where the ladies, for whom any prince would be fine,  
 Can no longer find a lewd enough dress  
 To draw any smile from that young carcass.

His alchemist can never send fleeing  
 The corrupt element of his being,  
 And these baths of blood of our Roman descendants,  
 Remembered fondly by the powerful ancients,  
 Could not rekindle this bewildered cadaver  
 Where flows instead of blood Lethe's green water.

Ne savent plus trouver d'impudique toilette  
 Pour tirer un souris de ce jeune squelette.  
 Le savant qui lui fait de l'or n'a jamais pu  
 De son être extirper l'élément corrompu,  
 Et dans ces baigns de sang qui des Romains  
 nous viennent,

Et dont sur leurs vieux jours les puissants se  
 souviennent,  
 Il n'a su réchauffer ce cadavre hébété  
 Où coule au lieu de sang l'eau verte du Léthé.



## Ububende IV

Uma isibhakabhaka siphansi futhi sinzima sisinda kuhle kwesivalo  
 Phezu komoya okudala uxakwe ingcobeko ende,  
 Futhi uma sizungezwe amamale amagumbi wonke  
 Sisithela ngosuku olumnyama kakhulu kunosizi lobusuku;

Uma umhlaba usushintshe waba ikhulukuthu lomswakamo,  
 Lapho iThemba, kuhle kwesiqhuthamadlebe,  
 Lingqubuzana nezindonga ngezimpiko zalo eziqhaqhazelayo  
 Futhi lishayanisa ikhanda lalo okhakhayini olonakele;

Uma imvula inweba izikhawu zayo ezindekazi  
 Ilinganisa izinsimbi zelithile ijele elibanzi,  
 Nokuthi ingqumbi eyizimungulu yezicabucabubu zencanukiso  
 Ziphotha kancane ulwembu lwazo ekujuleni kwengqondo zethu.

Ezinye zezinsimbi zigeduka kanyekanye ngolaka  
 Ziphonse amazulwini umsindo ohlanyisayo,

## Spleen IV

Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle  
 Sur l'esprit gémissant en proie aux longs ennuis,  
 Et que de l'horizon embrassant tout le cercle  
 Il nous verse un jour noir plus triste que les nuits;

Quand la terre est changée en un cachot humide,  
 Où l'Espérance, comme une chauve-souris,  
 S'en va battant les murs de son aile timide  
 Et se cognant la tête à des plafonds pourris;

## Spleen IV

When the sky weighs low and heavy like a lid  
 On the exhausted spirit given up the fight,  
 And over the whole horizon it has slid,  
 Pouring out a black day more sad than the nights;

When the earth becomes a damp dungeon,  
 When Hope, like a bat it seems,  
 Beats the walls with its timid pinions  
 And bumps its head against the rotted beams;

When the long trails formed by the rains  
 Mimic the bars of a vast prison,  
 And when webs are stretched across our brains  
 By squalid spiders in mute pullulation,

The bells all of a sudden blow  
 And throw to the sky a frightful groan,

Quand la pluie étalant ses immenses traînées,  
 D'une vaste prison imite les barreaux,  
 Et qu'un peuple muet d'infâmes araignées  
 Vient tendre ses filets au fond de nos cerveaux,

Des cloches tout à coup sautent avec furie  
 Et lancent vers le ciel un affreux hurlement,  
 Ainsi que des esprits errants et sans patrie  
 Qui se mettent à geindre opiniâtement.





Sengathi ziyilemimoya ezulazulayo engenandawo  
Ezibeka inkonondo ebalisayo.

- Kanye nemide ingewabo, ngaphandle komculo nazigubhu,  
Ingena kancane emphefumulweni wami; iThemba,  
Linqontshiwe, liyalila, kanti ubuHlungu obubi, bucindezela,  
Phezu kokhakhayi lwami olugobile butshala iduku lwalo elimnyama.

Like stray and homeless spirits of woe  
Beginning their stubborn moan.

- And long hearses, without drums or music,  
File slowly through my soul; Hope, finally bagged  
Cries out, and Anguish, atrocious, despotic,  
On my bowed skull plants its black flag.

- Et de longs corbillards, sans tambours ni  
musique,  
Défilent lentement dans mon âme; l'Espoir,  
Vaincu, pleure, et l'Angoisse atroce,  
despotique,

Sur mon crâne incliné plante son drapeau  
noir.



## Interviews

### Interview with Dennis Brutus<sup>1</sup>

Johan van Wyk

School of Literature and Languages  
University of Durban-Westville

JVW: I'm going to start by asking you some very general questions about your life and about literature.

I want to cover the following: your parents, your early publications in journals, the dates and contents of your various books, your relationship with publishers, the influences on your poetry, the schools and universities you attended, your main memories of those and then we will read and discuss particular poems. Lastly, I would like to have your views on current South African literature, your views of other writers as well as your memories of people like Arthur Nortje and Bessie Head whom you have known. I'd like to know about the type of education you've had because I find the references that you make in your poetry very interesting and I'm sure that it relates to your educational background. Then lastly, what is the possibility of you coming back to South Africa and your views on the current situation in South Africa? So let's start by talking about your parents.

DB: They were both South African. In fact my father came from Saldanha Bay. My mother was born in Uitenhage and they married in Port Elizabeth in October. The first Monday in October was a public holiday, October 1919. Apparently shortly after that they went to Rhodesia as it was then, so that by the beginning of 1920 they were both teaching in Salisbury, in Harare and my brother, who was the first child was born in October of 1920. I was born 4 years later in November 1924 and in between there was a daughter called Helene and after me was a younger daughter called Katherine or Dolly. So it was a family of 4. We were all born in Salisbury with the exception of my youngest sister Dolly who was born in Hankey of all

<sup>1</sup> The interview was conducted on December 19 2000.

places, near to Port Elizabeth in 1926. So my assumption is that at that time of course my mother was in Hankey, but that the family may have moved temporarily to Hankey. I recall growing up in Port Elizabeth roughly from about 1929, from the age of about 5. But my clearest memories were somewhat later in the 30's. Both of my parents, as I say, were teachers at a missionary school in Salisbury. When they came back to South Africa my father taught at a coloured school in Port Elizabeth called St. Peter's. My mother was mostly at home but when she did teach she taught at the coloured Congregational Mission school called Henry Kayser in Port Elizabeth, which was in fact the first school I attended but my schooling was very erratic for a number of reasons. One, I hated school and for some reason I suffered a good deal from nose bleeds and I could make my nose bleed by punching it or whatever. So periodically I had an excuse for not going to school because I had this nose bleed. And then one of the teachers died and my mother developed this myth that I was emotionally attached to this teacher so that after her death I didn't want to go to school any more. Of course, I went along with this story. So I in fact did not start proper schooling until I was eleven years old—1935 at a Catholic Missionary school. By this time both my parents had become Catholics. My father had become a Catholic under the influence of a priest in Salisbury. He came back to South Africa and told my mother from now on we're all Catholics and the children will have to be re-baptized and so I was baptized for a second time in Port Elizabeth in the cathedral or pro-cathedral there called St. Augustine's. And as I say I did not go to school until '35 a little mission called St. Theresa's and by this time of course I was in A B C or whatever it's called—Sub-A, first year, but I was eleven years old and I was older than everybody else in the class. I hadn't learnt to write the alphabet. I had almost no reading skills so I was tremendously handicapped. I couldn't do the work in class. So I would bribe the girls in the class by giving them my lunch and they would do my writing for me but of course, in the meantime I was going hungry because I had no lunch. But at some point I realised that I was going to have to start eating. The tendency is if you're catching up you tend to over-compensate. So in fact I then passed most of the people in those classes and went through a series of promotions which of course had its own disadvantage because I was being promoted upwards but into classes again where the students were way ahead of me. Again I think I compensated for it by catching up fairly rapidly and I think that it was actually an advantage to be disadvantaged. What it meant was that by the time I had reached the last year of junior school, standard 6, as we called it then, I was coming first in class without even trying and wasn't really very conscious of the fact that I was coming first. It didn't make me arrogant or conceited. I almost took it for granted. 'If it happens good', but it wasn't something you strove for. It's interesting because as a consequence of it, I then won a scholarship at high school. My mother would not

have been able to afford to keep me at school—it was the days of school fees. But I won the scholarship in standard 8 which paid for me to go to standard 9 and 10. And then in standard 10, senior year, I won a scholarship which took me to Fort Hare University and which covered my cost there—£120 per year for three years, I believe.

JVW: Dennis, before we continue with that could I ask you what your parents taught at school and was there a lot of literature in your house?

DB: Well, as far as I'm aware both of them simply taught everything. In those days in the mission school you taught arithmetic and reading and history—there was what was called nature study and some kind of physical education exercises-gym. So you really had to be a jack of all trades but of course at different levels. My mother would have taught at a fairly low level maybe standard 2 or 3. My father was teaching at a higher level probably 5 or 6. My mother was educated at a missionary college run by Americans in Hankey of all places. My father would have possibly been educated at Zonneblom College in Cape Town but he then began degree studies by correspondence. There was something called the S.A.C.C. in South Africa—a correspondence college where you got your lessons through the mail and you could get a degree that way. So he took courses in French. He spoke French fairly fluently and possibly German and things like Physics and Chemistry... He did not complete a degree but was somewhat more advanced than most teachers at that level.

To the second part of your question—literature. Yes, this is very interesting and I have not explored it in the past. I'm just going to pick up on 3 or 4 points. My mother would read to us at night but among the things she read was 'Tales from Shakespeare' by Charles Lamb so we were being exposed to 'The Tempest', 'The Merchant of Venice', 'A Comedy of Errors', 'Julius Caesar', and more importantly she had studied those works at the teacher training college and had memorized passages. So she could not only communicate the narrative but even the language and she could recite the 'quality and mercies is not strained it droppeth like the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath'—or from 'As You Like It', 'Sweet are the uses of adversity which like the toad ugly and venomous yet wears a precious jewel on his head'—and she had all that kind of exposure to literature.

Interesting though, a lot of it I was exposed to because she would wash the dishes at night and I would dry the dishes and so we had developed a kind of companionship where we shared this kind of literary interest. My father was actually studying for his degree by correspondence, so he would be reciting poetry and Shakespeare for quite a different reason 'cos it was not so much that he had taught it and loved it but that he was studying. But through him I began to recite Browning

and Tennyson, Blake because he was reciting these people. Tennyson's 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington', Blake's 'Piping down the valley's wild, piping songs of pleasant glee'. A whole range of things.

JVW: Did you start writing at high school?

DB: Not to my knowledge .... Oh yes, half true because I think the very first poem I ever wrote in my whole life was written when I was in high school. It was really just 4 lines about the moon rising above a lake which I had seen and I had tried to capture on paper. I was also writing in Afrikaans and one of my earliest love lyrics was written in Afrikaans.

JVW: Now why would that be?

DB: Well I was comfortable in both English and Afrikaans as languages.

JVW: Did your parents speak Afrikaans?

DB: Yes, but not as much as they spoke English. But I grew up in a community in Port Elizabeth where I would say the use of English and Afrikaans was about 50/50. It then becomes much more English later and an element of Xhosa comes into it, because I moved into a community which was not yet segregated, which had not yet had the impact of the Group Areas Act which only came from 1950-55, post 48 of course. So I grew up in a society which spoke English and Afrikaans, which were very widely used and almost equally used.

JVW: Were you exposed to Afrikaans poetry at that stage?

DB: Yes and no. I was taught by Irish nuns who knew no Afrikaans. So you started with a massive handicap. But when I got to high school for the first time I wrote an exam in Afrikaans. It came back and I got naught out of a hundred. By the second exam I got 22 out of 100 but I was still in deep trouble and I decided to teach myself Afrikaans. And the way I taught myself Afrikaans was by reading Afrikaans poetry. I started reading Malherbe, van der Heever, Langenhoven and people like that—mainly to acquire the vocabulary but in the process of acquiring the vocabulary I also acquired the imagery.

JVW: Were you aware at that stage about all the racial politics in their work?

DB: No, but I was aware of it of course in my society. This was a segregated society where Africans were kept out on the one hand and whites excluded themselves deliberately on the other hand. So you were in this middle pocket where you had vague prejudices but they were not defined. You were also vaguely conscious that you were assumed to be inferior but it didn't really penetrate. I think it was much later when I went into a CNA-bookstore to buy *The Economist* and a woman said to me 'Tell your master that it hasn't arrived' that I really understood what other people's mindset was about me—the assumption that I was just a messenger boy who was sent to buy the master's *Economist* for him or to collect it. But I began in a sheltered community where I was not exposed to the harshness of racism. It's only when I left that community that I become exposed to it.

JVW: What happened to those Afrikaans poems that you wrote, or did you only write one?

DB: There may have been more but I have lost them all. I didn't trouble to preserve them.

JVW: Somewhere I read that Peter Abrahams started off writing Afrikaans but I don't know if that's true, maybe you do?

DB: I believe so and I believe there is some work ... of course his poetry has been published much later—'Mine Boy' and those things. The prose came out much earlier. There is an autobiographical work of Peter Abrahams where it says he wrote in Afrikaans, with some of his writings in Afrikaans.

JVW: We left earlier at the universities so...

DB: Well, I haven't got to that yet, I guess but we'll have to jump to it now. My mother decided I would have to go and work in a factory like all teenage coloured boys—there was really no future once you'd finished high school. Fortunately two things happened—one was a Catholic priest offered to lend her the money to send me to Fort Hare. But in the meantime it was discovered that I had come first in the Eastern Cape at high school level and therefore qualified for a university scholarship at any university. But I had already at that time committed myself to Fort Hare—in my view a very fortunate choice. I think if I had gone anywhere else I would have been less exposed to African culture and African intellectuals so that I could learn the proper respect for them. I worked with people like Seretse Khama, people from Kenya, people from Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana. We were getting intellectual quality

from the whole of the continent, not just South Africa.

JVW: Is that the same time as Mandela?

DB: No Mandela was before me but did not complete the course. He completed his law degree by articles in Jo'burg and then opened the law firm with Oliver Tambo but did not complete a law degree at Fort Hare. So, when I got to Fort Hare, it was on the basis of the scholarship and as I say I elected to major in Hollands and English. I decided to do a double major and I announced that I was getting a double distinction at this time.

JVW: Did you write at university or when did you start to write seriously?

DB Well as I say, at high school I wrote some verse—English and Afrikaans. I don't think I wrote again until I got to Fort Hare and I then wrote for a student publication called the *Fort Harian* so you may even want to go look at some of my poetry there. I was, I believe, on the editorial board. Some of it under a *nom de plume* or I would just use initials.

JVW: Which *nom de plume*?

DB: Can't remember but sometimes I would write D.A.B.—just my initials. So at Fort Hare, I also became part of the Editorial Board of the *Fort Harian* and I wrote in both prose and poetry. Later I stopped writing prose—I just discovered I was no good at it. I gave up on it. But I continued the poetry. But then I wrote for a considerable period until I think I became involved in political activism and then it seemed to me that poetry was irrelevant. So I abandoned poetry.

JVW: What year was this?

DB: I think I stopped writing poetry about 1950 and did not resume again until 1960. I see a clear ten year period.

JVW: So why did you resume? What made you?

DB: Two things: One was a marvelous love affair but the other was that I was teaching Auden. Through Auden I discovered the ability to simultaneously make a public statement and a private statement and a deeply personal emotional statement and at the same time a major political statement. And I realised that you can make

poetry relevant, both through your political activity and your private life. This is where the 'Night song' poem is important because it is the poem where I first pull the two together.

JVW: Is that one of your earliest poems?

DB: Quite early, when I resume after this long break. I'd like to just finish it by saying that I was then invited to Edinburgh to an international poetry festival to read with Auden.

JVW: In what year was this?

DB: '69... after I had come out of Robben Island. The next international poetry festival I was invited to—around about the same time '69, '70—guess what? I was invited to Rotterdam and you know Rotterdam is a serious problem because my work is attended to and major poets are having their work neglected...But I read Edinburgh and Rotterdam about the same time.

JVW: Auden yes. There is an anecdote about Auden. Auden said something to you about poetry....

DB: Right. Auden's remark in an interview we did with the BBC. Well, two things—there was his comment on my poetry when I read it but then when we were on the interview, he said poetry changes nothing, poetry achieves nothing and I could say well I'm the living refutation because it was through your poetry that I became a poet all over again after I had abandoned it for ten years.

JVW: Dennis, you said you studied Hollands and English—those were your majors. Can you tell us more about the content?

DB: Well the Dutch, Hollands was only about one-third Afrikaans. I read Afrikaans poetry, Afrikaans novels and so on—particularly one which I think is much underrated called *Die Gerig*—do you know the *Gerig*? It's by J.R.L. Van Bruggen.

JVW: Jochem?

DB: Not Jochem. Quite striking novel about the Anglo-Boer War and the conflicts... *Die Gerig* was a segment of the syllabus. The major segment was Hollands and I read Joos van der Vondel and all the plays; I read Hooft—*Van Hooft tot Boutens*—I

read Willem Kloos and the whole range of Dutch poetry as opposed to Afrikaans poetry. We were of course doing Eugene Marais and people like that as well. A funny thing happened and it's an embarrassing story but I might as well tell it. I'm writing my final exam in Dutch. I think I was really very much out of touch with my work. But as I begin to write the exam, we got these exam pads and I'm writing in my name. The exam room was next to a toilet and I heard the toilet flush and for some reason I had been working on a notion of memory and the notion of erasure. And I began to write a poem in the exams about toilets and flushing and erasure and memory. I never got around to the exam. So I turned in the poem instead—but of course I flunked the exam. So that was a major and I'm now in my final year and so what I had to do was switch very abruptly and list psychology as my second major and pass that. So I got a degree on the basis of English and Psychology but I had initially listed it as English and Dutch.

JVW: Let's reflect a bit on the education situation in South Africa at the moment and the education that you had at Fort Hare.

DB: Well, I haven't given it enough thought to do justice to it. But you must remember that Fort Hare is really a product of the British legacy and worked very hard at imitating a British university—just as most South African universities unless they were Afrikaans. The English ones, whether it was Rhodes or U.C.T., even Wits. modeled itself on the British system. More seriously, most of our professors were retired English professors who were coming to Africa in a kind of philanthropic mood. This does not mean that they were bad teachers but it certainly gave them a certain arrogance—the kind of things that the metropolitans would always have about the colonial types. But my first English professor was a man called David Darlow, who was English.

JVW: Yes, a good poet.

DB: Fine poet and what is more he seemed to have a reasonably high regard for me for I didn't feel that I was being put down. I didn't have the sense of superiority and inferiority. And I remember him giving me, when I was completing in the last year, a gift of a copy of his poetry and autographing it for me. A little collection called *Shadows of the Amatola* and some little collection—a kind of post-Victorian, even Edwardian poetry. But... nice gesture. When he left, I was then in my final year, the new professor, Donald Steuart, was a former squadron leader of the R.A.F.—he had a strong military bias. But he was also an Oxford B. Litt. and therefore pretty competent and one of the compliments he paid me was when we came to Browning.

He said to me: 'Okay, take over the class'—this really meant that he was treating me as competent in that area—competent to do Browning for the class. So it was really quite a happy relationship, given of course always you remained aware of the parameters. We were working within a very British kind of framework in terms of the syllabus and even in terms of what they thought education was about. It was to prepare you for your place in society. Now this was not as bad as Verwoerd and Eiselen—the people who come afterwards and who insisted that your place in society is a subordinate place. But the imperial assumption is still that the colonial is not quite as good as the metropolitan and so you have to deal with that. But we started wrongly—I think with people like Chaucer—so you're at the wrong end of literature. You ended up with Browning and Tennyson in your last year so that was so-called 'Modern' and you didn't get near to say a Yeats or T.S. Eliot or anybody like that. After Browning and Tennyson there was nothing.

JVW: But you had quite a good education?

DB: I would say yes, given those limitations and I'm quite sure I should have worked much harder. I was very lazy. I cheated and I didn't attend classes.

JVW: And you didn't continue into your post-graduate?

DB: I received a distinction in English and so I assumed—in fact I was told—that if you got a distinction in English you would get a scholarship to go onto an M.A. or at least an Honours. So I tried that and then I was told that there was a clause somewhere that said if you were a Catholic, you did not qualify for it. I'm not sure how true it was but certainly this happened. I then kind of in half-hearted fashion pursued an Honours degree on my own but I flunked that because I really didn't work very hard at it. I wish I had. But I was also becoming much more involved in politics.

JVW: Dennis, you said you published some work in the *Fort Harian* and then you left poetry for a while. When did you start again and where did you publish these poems?

DB: I don't think I published and I'm not too clear about the dates but let's for convenience sake say I stopped round about 1950 and I began again round about 1960. When I begin again, I am not publishing in any journals. I'd sent a poem to a local newspaper—*E.P. Herald*—and they printed something of mine there which was not politically interesting but was as a result of a Henry Moore sculpture

exhibition in Port Elizabeth. Then, 1960 as I say, I had this marvelous love affair which I'm not sure I should talk about only because it would seriously compromise the other person. But I suddenly have this burst of poetry which fortunately comes at a time when I'm teaching Auden. Now it's possible that I would not have written any love poetry and I would not have written any political poetry but suddenly the two came together. And I think I should point to the kind of poems that Auden was writing at that time. One of them was a great love lyric: 'Lay your sleeping head my love human on my faceless arm, Time and fevers burn away individual beauty from thoughtful children and the grave proves the child ephemeral'. But then he goes on to talk about how this love affair is related to what happens in the world and he goes on: 'In my arms 'til break of day, let the living creature lie, Mortal, guilty, but to me the entirely beautiful'. He wrote a marvelous poem when the war broke out, September '39—The declaration of war and he is walking the streets of New York, Broadway and he sees a car, empty car, no driver in it. But the windscreen wiper is moving frantically. It's just swinging up and down—no one in the car. The poem goes on to say: This is the end of the old regime. He uses this kind of breakdown of society, and then he repudiates all this great political poetry. He takes it out of the *Collected Works of W.H. Auden*—quite surprising. Then we could return to that too, but as I say, here I am having a wonderful love affair, I'm politically active, I'm working with Mandela, I'm working with Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, and the ANC and PAC have been banned. We were working in the underground and literally running the resistance in the Eastern Cape with Govan Mbeki and two of us. Someone was subsequently expelled from the ANC called Themba Kgotla—a great activist who got out of line politically. This woman who was working with me and she was white and she worked with me in the resistance and exposed herself to arrest every night in the ghetto, in the slums. So, part of all of this is kind of heightened tension, heightened emotional experience and I was going out at night with an aerosol can painting slogans on the front of the Dutch Reformed Churches. Sunday morning, people go to church and see an ANC slogan on the front of the church. But of course if you were caught, this was sabotage—you could have been hanged for it in those days. So, the poetry then comes out of this combination of political activism and a love affair of great intensity under conditions of great danger. Then she is deported after having to choose between either prison or deportation. Some of my poetry then deals with the aftermath of that experience. After that again there is a long break in which I stopped writing.

JVW: Mention some of your poems about her.

DB: Well I must say that after her I had a series of other affairs so the poems deal

with that as well. But if I were to choose one poem that particularly catches the experience that we had together, I would choose something like—I can't even remember the lines myself—'But kneeling before you for an instant...'

JVW: Yes, I've seen that one.

DB: You probably know that one where I talk about loving surrounded by bayonets—the sense of knives around you or making love on this back stairs of her apartment building in the wind under the stars. So you have that kind of thing—and we can get into it when we read the poems themselves. Right now I am just trying to catch the quality of the experience.

JVW: Yesterday you said you published some poems in *Drum* and maybe in *New Coin*.

DB: One I wrote in a copy of *New Coin* for an Afrikaner called Daantjie Oosthuizen who was then editing *New Coin* at Rhodes. So I'm not sure if the poem was actually published in *New Coin* but when I gave it a title I said 'This is for Daantjie Oosthuizen of *New Coin*'—something to that effect. I was really not trying to publish. So what it meant was I gave away poems and sometimes other people could publish them. In the case of the one on Henry Moore, that one I sent to *Eastern Province Herald*—others were published in a kind of haphazard way. I should add that for *Drum* I wrote quite a long review of a play that was touring South Africa which had an Indian caste—'The King of the Dark Chamber'—and was touring the whole country. And then I wrote things about sport—sport and racism—because I was always having this almost triple identity that I was poet, I was sports organiser and I was also activist at the same time.

JVW: You didn't say anything about *Drum*.

DB: I'm not sure there was poetry in *Drum*. It was more like reviews.

JVW: And do you remember the people you gave your poems to? I think Ingrid Jonker did the same—always giving away her poems so there is a lot of unpublished poetry.

DB: I would give it to whoever happened to be nearby. Later, with people like Arthur Nortje, I would give it to them for critical comment and you must remember Nortje died in 1970 but our association was in the 60's at the time just before I was

banned from teaching. He was a student in the year that I was banned from teaching. He was in my matric class.

JVW: And John Bruin? When did he come into existence?

DB: John Bruin only comes into existence when I am in prison, and after that in exile. While I was in South Africa I wrote numerous letters and articles under a pen-name. The trouble is that if I saw something like white pages, I would just call myself Mr. W. Page. I would use whatever was available. So, it's difficult now to identify my work because of the *nom de plume*. Some of it appeared in papers like *Contrast*, which was edited by Patrick Duncan, some of it appeared in a journal called *Forum* which was to be published out of Johannesburg and had been the organ of the Springbok legion—people in the army—and *Golden City Post*.

JVW: *Fighting Talk*?

DB: *Fighting Talk*. I'm glad you mentioned that because in fact that's where most of my literary work was done, but also some of my political work. I have, for instance, a long sequence of poetry called *Tourist Guide* which has never been published in book form but it does appear in *Fighting Talk*. In a newspaper called I think *The Guardian* at that time although it might have been *New Age* when Luthuli got his Nobel Award, I wrote a poem for him. And of course years later when he was found dead—allegedly under a train or killed by a train—I wrote a long sequence that I began in Kitwe. I was there at the time and then continued it elsewhere—possibly Nairobi and Amsterdam. But when you ask me these questions, I am intrigued at how, in fact, there is really no systematic pattern in my writing. It seems to have been random and it seemed to have been sparked by circumstances; certainly a love affair would help one to write poetry, certainly Sharpeville and the killings at Soweto in '76.

JVW: Now referring to Sharpeville, there is an allusion to Sharpeville in one of the poems but I don't find any poems using Sharpeville as the main topic.

DB: You're right. In fact the reference to Sharpeville is a very oblique one and it's almost a pun because I talk of being 'sharpevilled'—I make it into a verb, yes, and I'm talking about the notion of retribution. We will be 'sharpevilled' into that. The same poem by the way uses the word 'nemeses' and I'm deliberately using it as an echo for the word *umkonto we sizwe*—the spear of the nation. So Sharpeville is sharpened, and there is the notion of the spear. There is a series of political



statements underlying what is said on the surface. And a later poem on Sharpville written in the US.

JVW: Explain the idea of nemesis.

DB: Nemesis of course is essentially retribution—when justice eventually catches up with you. It certainly comes from the Greek but I don't think there is a personality called a nemesis. The Greek's talk of the furies. These are these winged, kind of bird-like figures—Harpies who come and take revenge and they can be described as the action of nemesis whereas the furies in fact represent nemesis.

JVW: Dennis, so you started writing poetry again because of this great love affair and the discovery of Auden, who else did you read? Did you read fervently or did you rediscover literature and what was your exact involvement with literature then?

DB: Well, you'll have to remember I'm an English teacher at a high school ....

JVW: Tell us more about what you read as well.

DB: And I'm starting at Paterson High School in Port Elizabeth—where I had matriculated. I had done junior certificate, I had done higher, senior certificate, I'd won a scholarship. Now I returned to the same school as a teacher and I teach English and I become the senior English teacher—which means I teach the matrics—high school senior certificate. Some junior certificates but mainly high school. What does this mean? It means you teach Chaucer and Herrick and Shakespeare and all the way through to Pope, Dryden. You end up with some contemporary poetry, I'm glad to say, although I had not been taught this myself I was now being a teacher of it—teaching Auden, teaching Spender, people like Louis MacNeice, Alan Rooke and in between of course there's this big chunk of John Donne and Crashaw and the meta-physical poets for whom I developed now a major enthusiasm with the disadvantage that it had not been taught at university—so I'm really getting to the metaphysicals on my own but I find them so much akin to my own temperament. This combination of intellectualism with sensuality especially in Donne—the tension between the two and this delight in complexity for its own sake which is quite unlike Shakespeare—where complexity is functional, it is part of something else. But the John Donnes, the Crashaws, the Carews—they really enjoyed constructing these very complex poems which was why Samuel Johnson disliked them and called them the 'Metaphysicals'. These people yoked unlikely ideas together. But I like that combination.

JVW: Did you also refer, in a similar vein, to Ezra Pound the other day?

DB: Indeed, yes because I find Pound later having that kind of intellectual richness even when you disagree with some of his ideas. So you're quite right that for me, Donne becomes a very important influence on my own poetic approach—poetic manner—I'm trying to do what Donne did just as I'm trying to do what Auden did. Well I'm not of course imitating them, I'm just letting those models help me to work out my own answer. So certainly, but not only, I think did I enjoy Donne or say Hopkins later, but I could communicate this enthusiasm to students so that they began to write like Donne or Hopkins and of course Nortje is the best example of that.

JVW: Just before we get on to Nortje, Donne is your great literary master, Auden and Donne possibly some others. But what about Marx—did you discover Marx in those days?

DB: I actually discover it at high school because some of my teachers were engaged in a debate and the debate was whether you collaborated with the apartheid government and you got all the perks and the promotions, and there were those who said we don't collaborate. So among students as well as among teachers there was a clear division. I think I was fortunate that I fell on the radical side. That's sometimes mere accident, who happens to influence you. But the teachers whom I respected were themselves Marxist or at the very least leftist and some of them were Trotskyist. In fact, that was a further division between the ANC which took a Stalinist position and those who took the Trotskyist position. And I ended up being the editor of a journal of the teacher organisation which is called the T.L.S.A.—Teachers' League of South Africa. I revived a journal they'd had before which was called *Educational News* but I shortened it to *E.N.* and made it more jazzy and in fact I wrote articles about the predicament of people in South Africa and what I call the 'deepening twilight of apartheid'—the lights of freedom were going out all over the country.

JVW: Were you part of the Unity movement?

DB: Teachers' League was part of the unity movement and something called anti-CAD—Anti-Coloured Affairs Department plus the AAC, All African Convention, which put me in opposition to the ANC and so I engaged in many debates with Govan Mbeki and these people. But Sharpeville 1960 becomes the kind of pivotal event and I switch from the Anti-CAD unity movement people and become an

activist working with the ANC without being able to join the ANC. It was important to remember at that time only Africans could join the ANC—the constitution said Whites had to join what was called the Congress of Democrats and Indians had to join the South African Indian Congress. For the Coloureds there was the Coloured People's Congress of which I was an official for Port Elizabeth.

JVW: So you had apartheid in the ANC?

DB: Oh yes and Coloureds had to join the South African People's Congress and only Africans could join the ANC—African National Congress. They only changed that constitution in exile in the late 60's but prior to that non-Africans could not join the ANC. So there I was working. Sisulu flies down to Port Elizabeth to ask me to organize the Coloured resistance. Mandela stays in my house when he's hiding from the cops and goes underground but I could not join the ANC. But I worked with them of course very, very actively and in fact when I went into the shower on Robben Island for the first time Walter Sisulu was under the shower and he called me by my underground name—this was the code name that I had.

JVW: What was your underground name?

DB: Leave that out for the time being—a few people know it. In fact, Ruth First was interrogated about it—almost tortured when she spent 117 days and she said to them: 'Oh, that guy. He's left the country. You're wasting your time looking for him', and the Special Branch police believed it but I was still in South Africa at the time.

JVW: So you knew Ruth First?

DB: Oh, yes. I worked with her of course because she was editor of *Fighting Talk* and I was writing for *Fighting Talk*. But more interestingly, I was writing poetry for her. I'm not going to go into the details of that but I will read one of the poems where I talk about the 'beauty of my land peers warily from a palisade of trees.

JVW: What other details are there? She had an interesting literature as well.

DB: Oh yes, enormous. One of the important things that people don't know about her I think is that she was very courageous in her resistance to a kind of Stalinist hard line in the Communist Party so that even while Joe Slovo, you know was toeing this Stalinist line and defending the Communist marching of the armies into Prague and into Budapest and so on, she was as openly critical of it as was I. So we were

actually allies against Joe Slovo and other people in the party.

JVW: Let's go back to Arthur Nortje and some of the scholars who were great achievers.

DB: You'll have to remember, that he was an illegitimate child—what in the townships was called an 'optel kind'. And I met him first at high school. He was very bright and then I had organized a poetry competition and a short story competition for the whole English class—matric or senior certificate. And a young man called David Roman won—wrote an excellent short story and got the prize. I persuaded the bookseller in Port Elizabeth to donate the prizes and then here I get this astonishing poem called something like 'Thumbing like a lift'. And it's a young man trying to get a ride and writing about the predicament as he walks on the hot tar and the sun beating down on him. This was Arthur Nortje. So obviously the poetic talent was there. Immediately I recognised it. But then I encouraged him of course and gave him the Hopkins, two volume Hopkins—a dissertation by W.H. Gardener, from Natal—and that was a tremendous influence on him, also liberated him I think as a poet. So there is some imitation of Hopkins but there is never the loss of his own voice and so I think in my own estimate that he is the finest poet South Africa has ever produced. I'm very anxious that people should revalue him and I'm not knocking other poets—I just think there is a tremendous skill and a very conscious craftsmanship at work there.

JVW: Was there a type of dialogue between your own poetry and his at that time?

DB: Yes, I always remember him saying to me: 'The trouble is you have no stamina', because I like short lyrics and he liked the extended lyrics. He would construct a lyric so that there would be several facets. I'm not opposed to that but I think if you can say it in 10 lines then you shouldn't say it in a hundred and so we had differences there. I would correct him line by line—not so much correct him but comment on him line by line and find out what he was trying to do. And he did the same thing with my work so I was fortunate really to have an intelligent student who could say to me—this line doesn't work.

JVW: What was his home language? Was it Afrikaans or English?

DB: He spoke both English and Afrikaans. But he came out of an Afrikaans background. Most of his friends called him Attie, which is short for Arthur and of course he'd come from Oudsthoorn as far as I know.

JVW: He didn't write in Afrikaans?

DB: He may have but I never saw any of it. He was also a very talented sportsman—a fine rugby player, a fine cricket player. So he had so many multiple facets to his personality, poetry was just one. Because of the kind of regular contact that we had some people have tried to suggest that it might have been homosexual, which doesn't bother me in the least despite its inaccuracy. We were intellectually very much in tune with each other. That was all there was to it. It's possible that he may have had other homosexual affairs—he was probably bisexual—from the text of his work but that didn't interest me. But as you know, he goes through this phase of writing in Port Elizabeth, then he wins a scholarship to Western Cape. Gets a degree there then gets a further scholarship which takes him to Oxford and then he dies at Oxford. My own hunch is he certainly took an overdose. It's not clear whether it was deliberate or accidental and I think it's still an open question. But I know because he came to my wife—I was, I think, in Algiers at the time at the Poetry Festival there—came to her in desperation and asked her to get in touch with me 'cos he thought I could help him with the British authorities who were demanding that if he wanted to renew his South African passport, he would have to come back to South Africa to do a renewal and he was genuinely scared he would be arrested when he came back. So I think that was certainly one pressure on him—perhaps the major pressure because he was very emotional—to a far greater extent than I was. He would react to a threat just as he would react to praise in a much more exuberant way but his fears were real and his poetry about Robben Island is better than some of the people who were on Robben Island. He had the capacity of empathy, of thinking himself into that situation in an incredibly exact way. But then he has of course a long poem about me where he talks about me being kicked in the stomach on Robben island and the stitches of a bullet injury being opened.

JVW: Dennis, you must have been one of the first black poets to write in English apart from H.I.E. Dhlomo and Vilakazi?

DB: Perhaps.

JVW: Apart from the few poems that appeared in journals ....

DB: You're right in that sense. There was a young man, an Indian in Port Elizabeth whose name was Cooper—I'm not sure what the first name was—who self-published some of his works, short stories and poetry. It would be nice if we could find it. But it's great in the sense that really at the time that I started poetry, there was pretty much nobody else writing.

JVW: What was his name?

DB: I think Coopersamy or ... but they called him Cooper.

JVW: There was also a journal called *Zonk*. What was that about?

DB: *Zonk* was a kind of *Drum* but a little more jazzy and the emphasis was more on entertainment and murder and sex and rape and scandals. But *Drum* as you know was a little more substantial. They tried to carry prose and fiction...

JVW: But there was some interesting literature in *Zonk*?

DB: Oh yes, *Zonk* was quite fun. It seems to me things like *Bona* now are similar to what *Zonk* was. Going back to Nortje after his death, I published his manuscript as 'Dead Roots' but Heinemann asked me to keep my name off the publication because I was banned and it could not be sold in South Africa if my name was attached. Frankly, it was badly done—badly edited.

JVW: What do you mean by 'edited'? Did you change poems?

DB: No. There were several versions of some poems and I think I could have spent much more time selecting or arriving at the final version or the correct version. A lot of the poems were in manuscript and I sometimes had to actually guess whether the word was 'have' or 'hand'—it was really difficult. So there are some textual errors for which I must take the blame. I was anxious that Nortje's work should not be forgotten. And it seemed to me—I still think—that he is a major South African poet, perhaps the best poet to come out of Africa, and that's a very high praise of course. But I admit that there are textual errors for which I must take the blame and my defense is that I did it because it was done in great haste. I was doing a hundred other things at the same time but I still wanted it to come out and to be available. And I'm glad to say that, as far as I know, the print edition was exhausted, it's now out of print. You can find it in rare libraries, and I think they have a copy of 'Dead Roots' at Rhodes. I was successful in persuading people like Guy Butler that Nortje deserved more exposure and so the *New Coin* people at Rhodes did publish a collection to which I contributed and again my name had to be kept out. It was called 'Lonely Against the Light'—a very fine little collection and then of course this year when I was down at the festival I gave a talk on Nortje where for the first time I addressed the allegation that I was to blame for his suicide because I had pressured him into political activism when he did not want to be politically active. I think it's

nonsense, this claim, and I think there is so much political material in Nortje's work that that in itself contradicts the notion that Nortje did not want to be politically engaged. He had a marvelous poem which is called 'Apartheid' where he writes about being in a car. He is given a lift by a white person and he talks about the miracle that because two people are in the same car, however much the law might try to keep them apart, they share the same air, because they breathe the same air and he has poems about the Coloureds who were part of the resistance like 'Witbool'. He talks about 'Witbool' and people in the interior who resisted British governance and he talks about storming the barricades and people who have to chronicle the happening of the struggle. There is so much politics in his work in a non-sloganizing way that for anybody to say that he was opposed to politics and I tried to force him into politics is nonsense. So I never seriously addressed this but this year in Grahamstown I said 'Let me at least once respond to this rumour'.

JVW: Now to another very interesting author—Bessie Head who only came to the fore in the '70's, maybe late '60's. When did you first come across her work?

DB: I knew her husband Harold Head who became a journalist in Port Elizabeth at the *Evening Post*. But when I got to know Bessie as a person, she actually decided to flee South Africa and go to Botswana and she came through Port Elizabeth and found shelter at my place with her little boy and she left her husband in Cape Town. And the story, as in many of Bessie's stories, is very convoluted. The versions she gave me was that she feared arrest because of her involvement with the PAC—that may be true. Certainly her ex-husband Harold Head who is still living now in Toronto was involved with the PAC. Others say that a friend of hers was in danger. Anyway she crosses the border, gets to Botswana, but stays in Port Elizabeth for a while at my place and among other things there's this curious episode where we go for a drink in the pub and I buy her a drink in the Alabama, this little Coloured hotel, and they have these formica plastic table tops and she accidentally gesticulates and knocks over her beer and it spreads all over the table and I say, 'Don't worry I'll buy you another', and she insists on lapping it up with her tongue. This was one of those odd things which was very Bessie. But when I am at Wits, studying Law, she sends me her manuscripts and I write back very encouragingly and she reports this in her letters. But it turns out that pretty much all the established writers in Cape Town had told her 'You're wasting your time, you have no talent. Eventually she found me and then subsequently someone like Randolph Vigne, a few people who encouraged her. I'm very pleased that there is clear evidence in her letters that I helped her by giving her confidence at least and telling her, 'Keep mining this stuff. There is a real ore here which you have to dig for but it's there'. I then meet her, once or twice, but

most importantly in Berlin at this festival called Horizonte?, where we have this peculiar episode where she alleges that she was insulted by Lewis Nkosi, which is quite possible because Nkosi insults people without even knowing he's insulted them, especially women. But she walks off a TV-set in the middle of a panel discussion and demands her ticket and leaves the country. Shortly after that, she dies of a heart attack back in Botswana. But we got on quite well. And then after that I met Lewis in Jo'burg and I said to him 'What did you say to Bessie?'. He says, 'I don't know, I don't know what I did or what I said', which in a sense, one has to believe of Lewis. She was very talented and they now have a Bessie Head Museum in Gaborone and her manuscripts are being collected.

JVW: What about your relationship with publishers, how was the first book published, what was involved in the run-up to it and then your subsequent books?

DB: Well it's all very odd and very disorganised but a couple of things happened. An essay appeared in *Fighting Talk* by Ezekiel Mphahlele announcing a poetry competition for Blacks only. I wrote an essay in response to that saying, 'Nonsense, a poet is a poet. His colour doesn't matter'. So we get into this debate about it and as a result of it I make a very odd decision. I decide to enter the poetry competition, win the prize and then return the prize. This happens. I actually win the prize—it's called the Mbari Poetry Competition. It's run by Zeke Mphahlele and people like Spender and Kristol, and they were called the 'Encounter' group in Europe. They were funded by the CIA. Some of them knew it, some of them didn't. Auden didn't know it. He claims that Spender knew it but I don't know. Certainly there was a very consistent effort post-war by the CIA to buy intellectuals in Europe—very concerted. They set up a thing called the Congress for Cultural Freedom and Zeke heads it and Africans only are allowed to enter. So I enter and I win a prize and I turn back my cheque. I say I don't want the money because I don't approve of poetry competitions run on a racial basis. So, here we go and guess who wins third prize? Arthur Nortje—but of course he keeps his prize. I return mine and of course he was entitled to do what he saw fit. I wasn't saying because I do something, you must do it. He kept his prize, I mailed my cheque back. Subsequently of course, when I learnt that this was run by the CIA, I felt very good but I can't say that I'd rejected it on the grounds of the CIA. I had rejected it because I said I don't accept racial categories in poetry. And people can agree or disagree. So after that Mbari Press writes to me and says you won the prize, we congratulate you. Do you have any more poems? I said yes, but I'm having an affair with a woman in Jo'burg and I say to her you choose what you like and send it to Mbari and I'm glad to say, she must have made a good selection because it's then published and it becomes 'Sirens, Knuckles, Boots'. But

it's published more by accident so I'm not really good at answering your question.

JVW: The majority of the poems are love poems in this book?

DB: About relations, political and love—we have a combination.

JVW: Was that ever banned at that time?

DB: I don't think it was even banned, because it never came into the country as I was already a banned person. On Robben Island, they bring me a copy of the book and they say, 'Did you publish this book?'. And I say, 'Yes'. And they say, 'But you knew it was against the law?' And I say, 'Yes'. 'You're a banned person, you can't publish which means a further 5 years in jail'. And I say 'I guess so', and they draw up a charge sheet. But on the charge sheet they have to give a date when I mailed the manuscript out so they come to me and ask me for it and I say: 'Look, if I knew the date I would give it to you but I simply don't know the date. I can't remember when I mailed this manuscript to Nigeria and in fact I may have not mailed it. The woman may have mailed it'. Interestingly the charge collapses simply because they could not supply a date on the charge sheet on when I had committed the crime so at least I didn't have to spend an extra 5 years. But you can see how my relations were very casual and just to take it a step further, when I'm published in London subsequently, *Letters to Martha* it's not at my decision again. It's first published in a little journal called *Christian Action* and then Heinemann approaches *Christian Action* and says they would like to publish these poems, are there more? And John Collins with whom I worked in St. Paul's was connected both to *Christian Action* and Heinemann. So I give them *Letters to Martha* and—just to answer your question a second time—Martha is my brother's wife and when my brother goes into Robben Island after I came out, I then send the poems to Martha to describe the experience of being on Robben Island but I have to call them 'Letters' because I'm banned from writing poetry so by calling them 'Letters' the poems became legal. But of course I couldn't write them to my wife because we were living in the same house. It had to be for someone outside. Martha, my brother's wife was from Cape Town—he died of cancer in London after escaping from South Africa. That was the 'Martha' that was then published by Heinemann, really on their initiative. And then they published my next volumes, *Simple Lust* and *Stubborn Hope*, and in between comes 'John Bruin' which happens in a very curious way. I'm having a beer with Lindfors in a pub at St. Paul's Cathedral and we talk about my being banned. And he says, 'Well, supposing your poetry was sent to South Africa under a pseudonym, what could they do?'. And I said, 'Let's try it'. So we get together and put together a small collection

called *Thoughts Abroad* and I choose the pen-name 'John Bruin' because I want to be Coloured so that those who are interested will know it's a 'bruinmens'. But you have to be wise enough to know that and I would call it 'troubadour press' and again the troubadour is a kind of a clue. So it's published and was sold in South Africa and reviewed by Nadine Gordimer—a very favourable review. But then Heinemann tells the media in South Africa that John Bruin is really Dennis Brutus. So it gets to South Africa and then the book becomes illegal.

JVW: Was Heinemann angry at you for publishing it on your own?

DB: Not to my knowledge because it was a very small publication. It was not competing with anything. So that was 'John Bruin'. Then Heinemann publishes first *Simple Lust* and then *Stubborn Hope*. But in the meantime the University of Texas agrees to publish two of my other collections. One is *Poems from Algiers* and the poems I wrote when I was in China, *China Poems*.

JVW: These are your global poems?

DB: I'm expanding at that stage. And of course with my students when I was visiting Prof. Texas we put together another collection called *Strains* which was edited by two students—Chip Dameron and Wayne Kamin. So all these came out and then together with Lindfors, and I put together what was called *Voices from South Africa* and another anthology called *Seven South African Poets*.

JVW: That was Cosmo Pieterse?

DB: That's right. Cosmo edited for Heinemann *Seven South African Poets*. The one I did was called *South African Voices* and comes out of the University of Texas. But in all cases I have not had to fight with publishers except lately. I was dissatisfied with what happened at Three Continents Press, publishers of the critical perspectives. But in the case of *Simple Lust* there was a British edition by Heinemann plus an American edition which came from Farrar Strauss and Giroux who had a subsidiary called Hill and Wang who published *Simple Lust*—and, I think, *Stubborn Hope*.

JVW: What was the reception of these books like? How many were sold?

DB: Recently I got a figure; it said about 16 000 of at least one of them—*Simple Lust*—had been published. The figures are—some of them—are in the critical

perspectives. They've checked with Heinemann and asked them to show them the returns. But in most cases I think the publishers did not work very hard at getting exposure or getting it reviewed and if you don't get that you don't have an audience. *Simple Lust* is still prescribed as a textbook in the United States in African Studies courses. So there is a steady purchase. I got a cheque recently for £699 from Heinemann which is really quite substantial. Seven hundred pounds for poetry is pretty good. So it means that you're getting about 2 pennies on every copy. But I think it's being selling steadily. Of course I haven't worked at promoting it because I think that would be egotistical.

JVW: Did you write any poetry in prison?

DB: Yes, but it was all discovered. It was on toilet paper.

JVW: What happened to it?

DB: Destroyed, so what I did was to recreate some of that, particularly poems about say sodomy and violence. So there are recreations where the originals were confiscated.

JVW: Which poems are those?

DB: Well, there's a set called 'Postscripts'.

JVW: Oh yes, I know.

DB: Which are part of the *Letters to Martha* and then you have an earlier sequence and then in *Stubborn Hope* you have a sequence called *Robben Island Sequence* which deals with the rocks, and slipping on the rocks and the beatings and all that. So, the poetry about Robben Island appears in different places but none of it survived prison. What was found there was confiscated—with the exception of one which is very curious. I met Stanley Makoba recently in Parliament building in Cape Town and he was on Robben Island with me and in fact, he claims that I was an influence that turned him from crime to religion. He is now a bishop and head of the PAC. My job was cleaning the floors, polishing and that meant I passed everybody's cell. And these guys were in single cells. And he says I asked him what was he reading? And he said: 'Nothing', because even the Bible had been taken from us—not allowed to read it. But when I came past his cell again, I slipped him a book—there's a remarkable book by G.K. Chesterton called *The Everlasting Man* and I

think that's the book I gave him. But it turned him around completely. He became deeply religious in solitary because of this book. And in fact he recently gave me a copy of his autobiography with an inscription in it talking about the spiritual experience of Robben Island.

JVW: What about the poem that survived?

DB: The one, yes. He reminded me of a poem that I had totally forgotten and so he said to me it's something about the beads of rain, of barbed wire and it resembles the beads of a rosary, and I may have used that image in a poem which he remembers but I don't remember the poem anymore. But I'm told it survived somewhere.

JVW: Were you ever aware of Mandelstam?

Dennis: Mandelstam I knew later—I didn't know him at that time but I knew people like Lorca, Pablo Neruda, people I had read before I went to prison. And Achmatova—interestingly Ruth First sent me a manuscript of her poems so there was some exposure there.

JVW: Before we read some of the poems and discuss them I would like to know about your feelings about the current South African literary scene.

DB: It's an area that I am particularly interested in and I've been talking about it in public in Grahamstown and Johannesburg and elsewhere, and I'll be talking about it next year in Grahamstown at the festival. Two curious things: One, poems, poets, writers who are part of a marvelous, radical tradition in opposition to oppression and for some of them it was racial, for others it was economic and for others it was political and so on. But you had these wonderful, courageous voices speaking out. The Kgositsiles', the Don Matteras, the James Matthews' and of course the Nadine Gordimers and subsequently the André Brinks, Breyten Breytenbachs and so on—great, courageous writing—critical of injustice in its various forms. Here's the fascinating thing—point two, suddenly those voices have disappeared. Although there's so much inequity and injustice and poverty and hardship and cruelty in South Africa now, those voices are silent. They're not only silent but they have circulated a letter saying there is no need for radical voices. This is so remarkable—a letter is published with 19 signatures, 19 writers who were part of that radical tradition. They meet, they talk about the necessity to revive something called COSAW—Congress of South African Writers—which was the major vehicle by which they expressed their opposition to oppression. They meet and say, 'We don't need COSAW, there's

no need to revive it', and this letter with 19 signatures is circulated. But it gets more complicated. Subsequently, Zakes Mda and other people whose names appear on that list say, 'We did not sign that letter. We were not asked to sign that letter', and they challenged Nadine Gordimer about circulating a letter on their behalf that they had not signed. So you have a very interesting situation which I am now of course developing and hope to develop in Grahamstown where I am going to say, 'Alright, let's see, do we really need COSAW? And what happened to those radical voices?'. And I'll be talking about it in Johannesburg when I leave Durban because encouragingly—and in opposition to the people who say we don't need COSAW—it turns out there are a lot of people, writers who are saying on the contrary, 'It's time we found our voice again and we started speaking out'. And whether injustice comes from a white source or a black source, it is injustice. You have to speak out against it. I'm now getting ready to issue a call, kind of broadcast over the net, elsewhere to say: 'Anybody who's interested, let's get together and find those radical voices, organize ourselves again'.

JVW: I don't know if you're the right person to answer this question for me but what I find fascinating is the way people see South African literature, say, English South African Literature. There was this debate between Lionel Abrahams and Ursula Barnett about whether a white writer can be a South African writer. Barnett was saying that's not possible. People like Lionel Abrahams shouldn't be included in compilations of African literature.

DB: My own position has been very clear right from the start—that writers are writers and you don't distinguish on the basis of race or pigment, ethnicity. I have made a distinction—and it's made people like Tim Couzens and others very angry—between those who collaborated with apartheid but who still hoped that they would not be punished for their collaboration.

JVW: This is very interesting where you have the African languages. A lot of those authors in a sense collaborated with the whole Bantu education system, although some of them might have produced interesting literature like Nyembezi.

DB: There may be a more complex situation there which I'm not really able to discuss now. But I have to remind you that African writers were not only co-opted into Bantu education, but very often they were instructed what to write and it had to be in conformity with an ideology and I think they must be called to task for it. You have to say, 'Look, this is what you did and you better admit that this is what you did'. It's a bit like the whole reconciliation debate. But, just to go back to it, I think

that for me there's never been a problem about whether you're South African, whether you're black or white. If you were born here, you grew up here, your loyalty is here—that's where you belong.

JVW: And the language issue? How important is the promotion of African languages?

DB: I wish I knew more, Johan, about the current debate on the language issue which I think has become very complex. My short answer would be to say that all the languages of South Africa are entitled to equal treatment but they may not all demand equal treatment or require equal treatment in the sense that some are spoken by very small groups. Others are spoken by large groups and one of the questions that emerges is really intercourse. The commerce today is predominantly English or Afrikaans, so that's going to happen anyway. But certainly the languages should be treated as equal constitutionally.

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JVW: Dennis, when I started reading your poetry again this morning I recognized a number of themes which became common in later South African poetry; like the post-office scene in this 'Waiting' poem—'Waiting (South African style): 'Non-Whites Only'.

DB: This is an early poem and it's me just beginning to become political and in a sense still rather tentative in my language. But I'm commenting on specific occasions and avoiding the kind of generalized, sloganizing politics. I don't want to be writing poetry about a 'rise and resist' and 'get it together for Mother Africa' or whatever. True, a lot of that was being written so what I'm trying to do instead is choose a specific incident, a specific locale and then make a very specific reaction to it. So I'll just read them.

The first one (and they're both called 'Waiting (South African Style)' which means non-whites only waiting):

At the counter an ordinary girl  
with unemphatic features and  
a surreptitious novelette  
surveys with Stanislav disdain  
my verminous existence and consents  
with languorous reluctance -



the dumpling nose acquiring chiseled charm  
through puckering distaste -  
to sell me postage stamps:  
she calculates the change on knuckle fingertips  
and wordless toothless-old-man mumbling lips.

The second one:

Was ever office-tea-coloured tea as good as this  
or excited such lingering relishing ever?  
Railway schedules hoot at me derision  
as trains run on their measured rods of time:  
But here in this oasis of my impotence  
the hours drivel through lacunae in my guts:  
Stoic yourself for some few hours more  
till the Civil Service serves—without civility:  
'Arsenic and Old Lace' andantes through my head.

JVW: I think one can recognize the Auden influence.

DB: I think so, yes I think so.

JVW: When and where did you come across 'Stanislav'?

DB: Of course it's actually Stanislavsky but I turned it into an adjective 'Stanislav' but you're right, the acting technique was that you have to develop to the point where if you want to express an emotion you don't express it just with words. You have to express it with your entire body. So if you're angry, your whole body is angry. If you're amused, your whole body is amused. If you're disdainful, every pore in your body must be expressing that disdain. So there she is with her whole being asserting her disdain for me and of course it's a little tongue-in-cheek. I'm writing but I'm not being devastated by her contempt. I'm rather amused by it. So it's a kind of tongue-in-cheek observance. But 'arsenic and old lace' might be worth developing. There was a movie made in Britain of two old ladies who were very nice and they had all these boarders and every now and then they would poison one of the boarders by putting arsenic in the tea. So when I see her preparing this office tea while I have to wait, I say, 'Oh boy, if only I had some arsenic now to put in her tea'. But again I am making it light by using a verb. The phrase runs through my

head like a musical phrase, an andante phrase. It was playful at the same time. So, it's not as if there is venom, there's not a genuine desire to poison her, to murder her, it's a whimsical thought that runs through my head.

JVW: Dennis, what would be the status of this type of poem in our post-apartheid South Africa? Would students for example be able to identify with what's happening there if you teach a poem like this?

DB: My guess is that they would have a vague memory of how it was and they might have a vague memory of how their parents said it was. But because of Joe Slovo, because of Nelson Mandela, because of what is called the 'sunset-clause', many of the people who were part of the apartheid establishment are still around. They are hold overs of the old regime and so you can even today encounter some of that prejudice. I have to tell you though, that now the reverse prejudice is present as well. There are Blacks who will deliberately make whites wait. It's the reversal of the days when whites deliberately made Blacks wait. So unfortunately you have both manifestations now. Both of them are based on abuses of power; people who have power and use their power to make others their victims.

JVW: The next poem is 'Erosion: Transkei'.

DB: A fine one, if only because it was written in Durban and most of it I think was written in the bath. I was sitting in the bath when this poem came to me. I had traveled from Port Elizabeth to Durban in a lorry or a van and I had gone through two kinds of Transkei. The Transkei of the Bantustan collaborators who had been given irrigation and tractors and so on and so their soil was very good. But there were other chiefs in the Transkei and the Ciskei who refused to collaborate with apartheid and they were deprived of water, irrigation, tractors and so on. So going through the Transkei you saw all this erosion of the land—it's a geographical poem except the word 'eros' is the hint that it's also an erotic poem. It's a poem about a woman and a doctor who 'sneaked' me into the hospital, put me in bed as a patient. So it was just one of the many adventures I was having. But when we went out dancing she would wear a sari draped over her bare flesh so I had all this lovely sensual feel of her flesh under my hands as we danced. And of course the poem ends with the image of drought and rain but it's also an orgasm, a sexual climax. So the poem is running on those two levels. It's called 'Erosion: Transkei'.

Under green drapes the scars scream,  
red wounds wail soundlessly,

beg for assuaging, satiation;  
 warm life dribbles seawards with the streams.  
 Dear my land, open for my possessing,  
 ravaged and dumbly submissive to our will,  
 in curves and uplands my sensual delight  
 mounts, and mixed with fury is amassing

torrents tumescent with love and pain.  
 Deep-dark and rich, with deceptive calmness  
 time and landscape flow to new horizons -  
 In anguished impatience await the quickening rains.

What you might miss is the rhyme scheme. It is quite subtle: 'scream' and 'streams' and 'delight', 'pain', 'rain', 'amassing', 'soundlessly', 'satiation'—the whole kind of sound, music... but it's very much an erotic poem. Talking about the land being eroded as a result of apartheid and people being punished for failure to collaborate with apartheid, but also talking about the impatience for change—political change but it's also about sexual climax.

JVW: I think we should get back to the erotic theme a bit later on. The next poem 'At a funeral' is also interesting because it also becomes one of those themes in the later apartheid poetry especially after 1976. I would like to know who was Valencia.

DB: Majambozi .... I would say this would be probably again in the 60's when I'm beginning to write poetry again. She's a young woman, ironically who completes her medical degree at Wits and dies within a month. (She acted in a play in Durban which Lewis Nkosi saw.) So suddenly all the years, the effort that her parents put in to put her through medical school, seems to be totally wasted by her death just after she's completed. So the poem is about her and about talent and potential being frustrated and that's one level of the poem. But it's also a poem about the ANC, which begins with the ANC's colours, black, green and gold. Her colleagues turn up for the funeral wearing black hoods from their degrees but with the green or gold—the arts graduates or science graduates, one is a green silk hood and the other one is a gold silk hood. So I'm beginning by using those colours but it's also signaling a political statement. The poem will end with a comment about the Pass laws and resistance to the pass laws: better to die than to allow your identity to be created for you by a pass book so that you should preserve your own identity and not submit to the law.

JVW: Let's go to 'Night Song: City'.

DB: Well, as I said, this is the one that really releases me after I have read Auden and I begin to realize that one could simultaneously talk about your private affairs and public affairs. I originally was going to call it 'Nocturne' but I decided that 'nocturne' was too foreign a word. It didn't really belong in the English language, it's French, and so I chose 'Night Song' which is good Anglo-Saxon English. Two things are happening; one is I am part of the resistance organizing to get engaged in a sabotage action—so that's the political level—but at the other level of course it's a love poem which says to the woman 'Sorry, I can't be with you tonight'. And so the opening is ambiguous because it says:

Sleep well, my love, sleep well:  
 the harbour lights glaze over restless docks,  
 police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets;

from the shanties creaking sheets  
 violence like a bug-infested rug is tossed  
 and fear is immanent as sound in the wind-swung  
 bell;

the long day's anger pants from sand and rocks;  
 but for this breathing night at least,  
 my land, my love, sleep well.

JVW: I'm interested in this erotic association of the land, the personification of the land as a mistress and so on. Do you know Eugene Marais' poem 'Lied van Suid-Afrika', where South Africa is this mother who smothers her children in the sand?

DB: I know some of Marais, of course, things like 'Winternag' and so on. I've probably read that one but I don't remember it straight off and I'm not sure it would have been incorporated into my ideas. But I knew Marais' work because I liked it—especially poetry in the anthology *Digters uit Suid-Afrika*. It's the one by Pienaar.

JVW: Shall we move to 'It is your flesh that I remember best' which is dedicated to your wife and I would like you to tell us something about her.

DB: Sure. I'm in Johannesburg and I'm confined to Johannesburg. It's illegal for me to leave Johannesburg, but my wife is in Port Elizabeth. This is really a love poem

which of course is also about the fact of separation. I think it's a very honest poem although she doesn't really approve of it. I say that the essential element of our relationship was a carnal one and you know I admit that. But other people might say well it's an emotional one or an intellectual one, whatever. But I say, well, it's your flesh that I particularly remember.

It is your flesh that I remember best;  
its impulse to surrender and possess  
obscurely, in the nexus of my flesh  
incoherent stirrings, patterns of response  
re-enact the postures of our tenderness.

Yet I would condemn myself in guilt.  
for contumely if this were all  
for know, as dearly memorable are speech  
the shy expressive gestures of your eyes  
your patient, penetrative patient mind.

So, I compensate by saying of course the other elements are important too, but let's be honest about it—this is the central one.

JVW: One of the most beautiful poems is this 'Rosy aureole of your affection'. I would like you to read it.

DB: Oh yes. 'The rosy aureole'—interesting. Of course an aureole is a nipple. It's the circle of red flesh around the nipple. So I use this image of a nipple to insist that there are all kinds of little fine filaments running from the nipple which is how milk gets through the nipple after it has been accumulated. But I use that complexity to suggest complexities in our relationships and I end up by comparing it to a spider's web. And the black widow spider will kill the male after he has fertilised her and I see the female demand to be made pregnant—it's the same thing. The womb yawns but it demands the sperm, it demands to be fertilised. But once it has been fertilised, it really has no use for the male after that point. So picking up ....

The rosy aureole of your affection  
extends beyond our urban-bounded knowledge  
to tangled undergrowths of earlier time;  
subtly obscure lymphatics of the flesh  
proliferate bright labyrinths of mind

and cobweb-shadow them with primal dusk.

Beyond our focussed shaped projection  
to immensities of tenderness defined  
like blind protrusion of these searching nipples  
shut-eyed in luminous rooms of lust I nuzzle,  
loom shadows darker than the dusk of passion  
that turn our pinks dusk-grey as spider's back.

Beyond your open, hungering embrace  
yawn other older mouths from oozy shores  
and over me, enormous, straddles  
the ancient foetus-hungry incubus  
that leaves me sprawling, spent, discarded  
dry-sucked and shattered as a spider's shard.

JVW: What I find interesting is the way the poems flow into each other. You don't have titles to separate them from the previous poems. Was that done on purpose?

DB: Yes you're right and that's where I think the printer is very important—the way they place a poem. They should give you a clue. I should say that I always said a good poem doesn't need a title and the only poems that need titles are poems that need a sign-post which helps you to enter the poem. If you need an external clue to make sense of the poem, then you should provide a title. But if the logic of the poem is within the poem itself and all the explanations are there, I try to avoid a title. And of course other poets have different approaches but for me the rule of thumb is a title if it's necessary to make sense of the poem. If it's not necessary then don't give it a title. But then you're right. You have to be careful so that the reader knows whether the poem on the next page is a continuation of the previous poem.

JVW: Tell us something about the writing process with you. How do you write? Is there one particular way?

DB: Let me tell you something that sounds a little hard to believe but it still happens to be true. As a young boy in Port Elizabeth, in the segregated Coloured area—interestingly we were right next to an African location. And the Africans on Sunday would come onto the hillside outside the Coloured area and sing hymns or they would chant. And they would also have a kind of 'indaba' if they had a debating issue. They would debate for the community: 'What are we going to do about so-

and-so who has disgraced us? What are we going to do about so-and-so whose dying and his wife has no support?'. The community would discuss serious political issues too. But one of the things I learnt which I never forgot was that the skill of oratory often depended on starting with something that looked like nonsense. You had to catch the attention of your audience by saying something that was paradoxical, that was contradictory and then as you developed your argument at the end you have these murmurs of agreement when the phrase with which you opened was repeated but it now made sense. This seems to be one of the great elements of African oratory which is also of course part of the skill of the craft. So I would write a poem and I have one here which begins 'We loved each other better because we hated', and you say: 'What the hell? Hate makes a love better?'. And I show how two people who are linked in the hatred of oppression—that hatred which they share is what intensifies their love for each other so that what started as a contradiction eventually makes sense.

JVW: Dennis, you've referred to your experiences of African poetry, but did you read any particular handbooks on the writing of poetry because you use a lot of meter and rhyme?

DB: One of the most useful books I read of poetry was an Afrikaans book and I'm not sure I remember the title. I read the Dekker, 'Literatuur-geskiedenis' which I bought for myself as soon as I had enough money. But there was a book which was about literature and it was by an Afrikaner. It was in Afrikaans and it had a green soft binding and I learnt so much about poetry including English poetry from that book. In fact I only understood the poetry of someone like Danté Gabriel Rossetti via an Afrikaans author.

JVW: I'd like to know the title of the book.

DB: I think it was a van Bruggen but not Jochem. It might be called *Literatuurgeskiedenis* or something simple like that. But I must say that that was one of the most helpful books that I read on the craft of poetry and the craft of literature. My father and I had a terrible relationship, but one of the books I got from him was 'The Study of English Literature' by George Saintsbury and I always felt that to compensate for the hostility, lack of love between us at least through that book he was communicating his knowledge to me. So the short answer Johan is that actually I was always trying to find out more about poetry, poetic forms, and poetic ideas and so on and of course by the time I got to Fort Hare and I was majoring in English there were a couple of useful books; one by a man called Greening Lamborne which

was about how to write poetry and how to read poetry, and one by a man called Bernard Groom which is a history of English literature which was a prescribed text that included a discussion of course of poetic form. And then once I started teaching obviously I had to buy books to improve my own skills in teaching and of course in the process one uses skills to write poetry. But my mother I think was a very important influence—the fact that she was reciting Shakespeare and Wordsworth to me while we were washing and drying the dishes. The fact that my father was reciting some Browning and Blake. So it was more by osmosis, you absorbed knowledge rather than found it in books. I suppose I'm reasonably competent in my knowledge of poetic forms which is why I can teach them and, as you know, some of my poems are very deliberately constructed as Petrarchan sonnets or Spenserian sonnets.

JVW: Dennis, earlier you claimed that you're the greatest erotic poet of Africa. Do you include the African languages in that equation?

DB: Well of course that's again said tongue-in-cheek. No, I don't. But it depends on what one means by greatest and if by greatness you mean more frequently than anybody else which is one way to define the commonness if you like or the most complex, more multiple, more numerous and also kind of explicitness. My poetry will talk about cunnilingus, talk about cock-sucking, all kinds of intimacies—and some are not naked or crude or clumsy because I think the line between eroticism and pornography is that the one has a certain art about it. This is how we defend it. So there's a good deal of my poetry which in fact is erotic at one level even while it is being non-erotic at another level. This may be why some people have not identified the erotic element because they're focusing on say the political or the landscape. For me the notion of hills and breasts is very often present, if you are open to that suggestion. But more interesting, the word 'continent' for me is 'cunt' as well and when one talks of the hibiscus, the opening of a red flower, I think of Wells' 'Rosebud'—some people say there is a sexual image there. The erotic appears more frequently in my work than, as far as I know, any other poet who writes in English in Africa. I know people like Soyinka have done it, Kgosisile has done it, others have done it but they do it less frequently.

JVW: How important is the erotic within politics?

DB: Politics or poetry, one could look at it either way and I'll start with the poetry. It seems to me that to suppress the sexual erotic element in poetry is dishonest if in fact it is a component of your experience and you either exclude it or you repress it, you

deny its existence. If it is a part of your experience then the honest thing is to include it, and poetry is always about honesty. You cannot have good poetry that is dishonest. But that is the first area and we can return to that. The second portion of your question is much more difficult—how important is the erotic in politics? It seems to me I would touch on two points there. The one is the incredible impulse to attempt to control the erotic impulse which nearly all politicians seem to succumb to. And more and more as you achieve power the more you try to control the sexual and erotic activity—it's amazing that somehow political control is equated with what happens in the bedroom. Although what happens in the bedroom is really none of the business of government or politicians. That's the one element—it's very intriguing. The second one, more complex, more difficult to define, but it does seem as if the politicians fear the erotic. And it may be that they fear it because it's as Freud said, the libido, the impulse to pleasure becomes almost self-destructive, suicidal, you may end up in the pursuit of pleasure and it amounts ultimately to what people talk of as the 'death wish' and of course the interesting thing about sex is that to repeat it is not to be satiated. Ten minutes later you want to do it again. Twenty minutes later you want to do it again. So there is this libido, this powerful impulse which is very often self-destructive and I think the politicians fear it because you cannot rein it in, you cannot discipline it, you cannot regiment it. You can't say 'Stay on line, I'm ordering you'. It is one of those impulses that's both irrational and uncontrollable. To some degree there always is a controllable degree. There always is a rational degree but you can push beyond the edge of rationality. So whether it's coming from a Marxist perspective or liberal perspective, choose whatever you like, it's amazing how eros and sex gets into the debate and nearly always the debate is about how to control it as if it is something that is feared. Of course, Plato long ago said: In a republic you would ban all the poets. First thing you would do to create a republic, ban all the poets. Shakespeare's approach is quite different. When Shakespeare's working class is plotting a revolution, they say first thing, kill all the lawyers.

JVW: What about the different women in your poetry because there seems to be a lot of different, unidentified persons?

DB: There was Ruth First. We can read the poem I wrote for her.

JVW: Which one is that?

Dennis: That's 'The beauty of my land peers wearily ...'. It's about caution in the sexual encounter. How you are both willing and unwilling. But more importantly I

think you're really asking a question about the way women and the landscape are often interfused so that my relation with the land is almost a sexual one. It's certainly an emotional one, it's certainly a romantic one but it almost amounts to the point where it's sexual. In fact that where one's pleasure in the land is orgasmic. We can definitely reach that point. But when I talk for instance in the 'Troubadour' poem of 'exploring your secret thickets with an amorous hand' this is both the land and the woman and one is really doing the two things at the same time.

JVW: So it's an interesting psychological thing, this erotic association with the land. I suppose you find it with Breitenbach as well as other poets.

DB: What it does is it gives you such a bond with the land that exile becomes intolerable. Exile is the ultimate punishment because that's the total separation.

JVW: Yet you seem to be a poet of another country- were you thinking of coming back?

DB: Do you know that set of poems called 'Sequence for South Africa'?

JVW: No.

DB: I talk about exile there and I say exile is not like amputation. It's not as if a limb has been cut off. When a limb is cut off you can feel the ends of the nerves where the cutting took place. But exile is quite different. You can choose not to be conscious of being in exile and it's only when someone says to you stupidly: 'What's it like to be in exile?', then you get so mad because they've reminded you that you are in exile when you've chosen not to be aware of it. You have shut that out of your consciousness because by shutting out the recognition of your predicament you shut out the pain.

JVW: Is it not exile that actually brings about this type of relationship with the land?

DB: Oh no. The relationship existed prior.

JVW: Because of the distance? So you can desire from a distance?

DB: No. The desire was there while I was in Jo'burg, while I was in Port Elizabeth, while I was in Durban—it was real. What I had to do when I left the country was to say I will not allow that pain to enter into my awareness. I literally shut it out and it

only entered my awareness when someone rather tactlessly raised the question. But I myself would not raise the question.

JVW: On page 24 there's an image which I don't understand: 'It's still fresh treason to the country'. How did you see it? Why the word 'treason'?

DB: You must remember that this is not written outside South Africa. I'm inside South Africa and I'm choosing between the land and the woman. And I decide for a while to choose the woman. And then I give her up and I say I'm sorry the land is more important than you are. So for a while I was guilty of treason. I betrayed my real love, the country for this woman but then I leave the woman and go back to the country.

JVW: On page 25 one of your best poems, I suppose, 'Gaining teetering on the edge'. Will you read that one?

Dennis: There was a rabbi who asked me: 'Is this poem about cunnilingus or not?'. I like that. It could have been about both but I'm really addressing something else here. The fact of mortality and you must remember this is where John Donne comes in again. All Donne's great poems are about death including the famous 'terrible sonnets'. So while I'm with her and I'm rejecting her, I'm not rejecting her because I don't want the sexual intimacy. I'm reminding her instead that one dies. The 'too-tired, the soon too-tired muscle' is not a penis but the heart. The heart is a muscle which gets tired and then you die. And the 'cage' of course is the rib-cage. Within the rib-cage, the 'soon-too-tired muscle'—that's the heart—'and all this animal spirit spent'—this emphasis on sheer carnality, this reiteration of mortality—that's the most important word in the whole poem. The remembrance that you have to die, you are mortal. The reiteration of mortality and all these immediate joys are ephemeral. They'll all pass. That's why I say no.

JVW: What I don't understand about this poem is on the one hand you describe the bathroom and then you move to the prison.

DB: No. The light coming into the bathroom is the same kind of grey light that comes out of a prison. It's not really in a prison. The prison light was like light that comes through opaque windows of bathrooms. So you are getting a kind of grey light instead of your normal light and I call it 'prison-grey'.

JVW: You make reference to the 'troubadour' in your first poem in this volume and I see there's repetition in 'every mind as a function like the chorus of her'...

DB: Right. 'Morosely I, morosely I know I try'. Ballad form.

JVW: Who's Bernice, on page 29?

DB: She was a woman who was a law student at Wits. at the same time that I was a law student and she allowed me to use her apartment. I write something for Bernice but in fact it's a poem which is more like an exercise in a Japanese form. So I might as well just mention it. The Japanese have a poem that you write on a fan on all the vanes of the fan. Each vane has a line of the poem. But you can close the fan at any point and the lines will make sense. So you have to write a poem in such a way that there's repetition, there's a pattern, but also no matter how randomly you read the poem, it will make sense and that is what I'm trying to do here. There's a lot of repetition here and in fact the poem has a kind of Japanese quality. It's all about delicate blossoms falling and things like that.

JVW: Then this poem: 'Under me your living face endures'.

DB: Sydney Clouts wrote to me congratulating me on this poem and he said: 'In my view this is an achieved poem'. And it's only 7, 8 lines long. I was very pleased but I have to tell you that because I respected Clouts and recognised that he was a poet of considerable talent himself, a word of encouragement like that meant a tremendous amount to someone who was literally living in the desert. There was no-one I could discuss my work with, so Clouts' note to me was very important. But it is, I think, a successful love poem and it's about traveling to a woman. I'm going to meet her and she's waiting for me. This is the woman that's going to be deported. But at the same time I'm flying into Kimberley and the mine dumps and what was called sludge or slime, an ugly portion of Kimberley. So the poem is both again a political poem talking about South Africa, about oppression in South Africa, ugliness in South Africa. So it's a poem which is both about a woman and about South Africa and about the predicament of both. The woman is being deported, the land is being raped. And so I'm really dealing with the two and my own tenderness for both the woman and the land and so I write the lines 'descending to you in a rage of tenderness you bear me patiently as I fly into Kimberley'. But in some ways this one 'Kneeling before you' may be the best expression of that kind of lyricism. It's both love for the person but written in the context of the political tension.

Kneeling before you in a gesture  
unposed and quite unpractised  
- I emphasize, though we need not be assured  
for neither could take time to posture  
standing always stripped to the very bone and

central wick of our real selves  
that burnt simple and vulnerable as flame –  
Kneeling before you for a moment,  
slipped quite unthinkingly into this stance  
- for heart, head and spirit in a single movement  
responded thus to some stray facet  
of your prismatic luminous self  
as one responds with total rhythm in the dance –  
I knelt

and in answering, you pressed my face against your womb  
and drew me to a safe and still oblivion,  
shut out the knives and teeth; boots, bayonets and knuckles:  
so, for the instant posed, we froze to an eternal image  
became unpersoned and unaging symbols  
of humbled vulnerable wonder  
enfolded by a bayed and resolute eternalness.

JVW: So it's about the tension between politics and love?

DB: Right and very much in the context of loving a woman in a dangerous situation.

JVW: The one 'For a dead African'? I would like to know the context of that one.

DB: 1956, John Nangoza Jebe. But as I told you between 1950 and 1960 for 10 years I wrote almost nothing, but you can see '56 I write the Nongoza, and in '61 I write the Luthuli.

JVW: So these are two of your earliest poems?

DB: Yes, very early. This is after I stopped writing. I stopped writing in '50 and I don't begin again except that I write this one in '56. This is before the love affair. This is before the Auden. So it's kind of independent. The ANC has a march in New Brighton and Kwazakele on what was a sort of Good Friday night. The police come along and open fire and this guy was killed and the moment I heard about it, it triggered a poem. But it was a poem which was really about contradictions saying that if we have a hero who was not recognised as a hero you could do heroic things and the history books would not record it because the history was being written by biased people who saw events in one way. So it's really among other things, about

perspectives—the perspective of the oppressor and the perspective of the oppressed. So John Nangoza Jebe—I did not know him personally but I knew about ANC marches and I knew that he was killed in the march. So I wrote this poem. Do you want me to read it?

The important thing I think about 'For a dead African' is that the tone is ironic. You should not say this is a poem which says there are no African heroes. I'm saying there are no African heroes in the histories written by the oppressor.

We have no heroes and no wars  
only victims of a sickly state  
succumbing to the variegated sores  
that flower under lasting rains of hate.

We have no battles and no fights  
for history to record with trite remark  
only captives killed on eyeless nights  
and accidental dyings in the dark.

Yet when the roll of those who die  
to free our land is called, without surprise  
these nameless unarmed ones will stand beside  
the warriors who secured the final prize.

What I think is important about a poem like this in 1956 is that this is at the time when the ANC is still committed to Gandhian, non-violent resistance against the pass laws, people going to jail, Mandela, Patrick Duncan, everybody. But the poem anticipates a later phase of armed struggle. When I talk about 'warriors who have secured the final price' I'm encouraging weapons who are going to come after the unarmed group. So I'm rather pleased at the fact that I was honestly saying there will be a military phase even when the ANC officially was saying 'Oh no, we're going to win this battle through unarmed struggle and Gandhian tactics'.

JVW: This reminds me also of Ingrid Jonker's poem 'Die kind'.

DB: Right. Which of course is about 'Nyanga' and the child who died and how that child becomes the voice of the resistance.

JVW: Okay Luthuli, especially the African ....



DB: Looking back on the Luthuli poem, I'm a little more cynical now than I was then. When Luthuli was given the Nobel Peace Prize it was primarily because the West was trying to head off the movement to armed struggle. So what you did was you rewarded the guy who stood for non-violent struggle and in a sense you were saying 'Don't engage in armed struggle'. Of course armed struggle was to come immediately after because Sharpeville, March 1960, is in a sense a turning point. By December of 1960 the ANC is announcing that from now on the struggle will no longer be a non-violent struggle. It will include armed struggle. It will include violent elements. But Luthuli gets the Peace Prize partly, I think, in an effort to head that off. So I wrote a poem which then appears in *New Age* or *The Guardian* or whatever the unbanned paper was at that time. And I use the image of the lion, African lion. It's not a bad poem. I was just banned—October '61—so it was my wife in fact who read it in public at a celebration for Luthuli after he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. I was not able to be there but it was printed in *New Age*.

JVW: Do you have any link with the African poetry tradition?

DB: A little, because this imagery of the lion, of the man who crushes the reeds by the river, the man who can take on the rhino, break the jaws of the crocodile—all those are great images from the oral tradition. There's a little there.

The African lion rouses in his shadowy lair  
and challenges the clamorous  
earth:

- its billow blots all discard and all jars.

Hippo and elephant and buffalo without dispute  
go lumbering to the drinking pools:  
- but all the land he views he rules:

From here he pads on sun-picked bone and brittle thorn  
sniffing the tawny skies of a new day:  
- power ripples over him like the light of dawn.

And I think it's in the oral tradition very much a praise poem. Just in passing I should mention that Blade Nzimande wrote a praise poem for me which he read at the end of a class I was teaching in Oxford. I taught summer school on African

literature at Jesus College, Oxford and he was in the class and on the last day of class he announced that he had written this praise poem for me.

JVW: In English?

DB: No, in Zulu first and then in English, but the original version is in Zulu. Unfortunately I've lost my version given to me but he might have a copy. It was a very nice poem which praised me for my commitment and my willingness to go to prison.

JVW: How did he deliver it?

DB: Very impressively with a strong voice. Not the way that the 'izibongo' would, with the staff and the leopard skins and so on but he just read it in class. It was a small class—about a dozen students.

JVW: Dennis do you still write poetry?

DB: Sort of and actually it's a good point to get into. The last decent poem I wrote was written for this young man that was shot and killed on the campus of the University of Durban-Westville. I see the killing of a student there as not unrelated to the killing of the students in June of 1976. Just as the point is reached of repression when the young people challenge injustice and the result of the forces in power is to use the limit of their power, killing. I see the death of this young man as foreshadowing the entry of a phase where as resistance grows to the injustice which unfortunately the ANC government is guilty of, they are going to resort to the same kind of ruthlessness as the previous regime. So my poem is about that and I refer to June 1960 and I refer in fact to the poem called 'For the students at Durban-Westville'. Now this is interesting—in the audience when I read it at Windybrow Theatre with Nadine Gordimer was Don Mattera, Arthur Maimane—who was one of the old Dutch campaigners—plus people like Raks Seakhoa who used to run COSAW. So for me to be reading in the presence of these guys who were radicals but are now so complacent, to read a poem which says to them: 'Hey, you have to get ready for a new struggle. You ought not to be silent in the presence of injustice,'—it was very challenging. What was interesting was that nobody reacted. They neither criticized me nor applauded me. They were not going to agree and they were not going to disagree but somebody has to fire the opening shot which gets people thinking.

Talk about love poems and I have bad news. The only decent love poetry I have written recently is poetry of 'Lament for a dead woman'. She died under an

anaesthetic in the most absurd circumstances and she's very dear to me. I can't even say that we had continued at an erotic level. Our level of relationship had become much more complex, much more intellectual but she died astonishingly in San Francisco for a ridiculous operation she was having to straighten out her nose—would you believe it—and she was suffering from asthma. She gets an asthma attack while she's under anaesthetic, starved of oxygen and becomes brain-dead and so they just pull the plug on her because there's no point in keeping her alive. So I'm trying to deal with that but it is poetry of loss, poetry of lament. I'm finding it very difficult to write it.

JVW: 1976, you were in exile?

DB: Right.

JVW: How did you experience that?

DB: Well I can't recall right now but I had kept in touch with the Black Consciousness Movement, with what Biko was doing and Barney Pitsoana and these people, and I knew that they represented the whole new thrust which the ANC was not too happy about but these were the guys that were taking over the struggle. I went back to Soweto. I've insisted that you cannot erase that memory even if the SACP wants you to erase it because it's an important part of the history of the country, the history of struggle.

JVW: What about the ALA and your role in its foundation?

DB: I think there is some distortion of the facts so it's good to at least give my version of that. One, I'm professor at North Western University. Bernth Lindfors invites me to become a visiting professor for a year at the University of Texas and I like that. But while I'm there I discover that there's been an effort to form an African Literature Association which is being frustrated because the white academics are fearful that they'll be excluded and they'll lose their control over the black academics, so they resist this formation. There's something called African Studies Association (ASA) dominated by whites where the blacks are just really on the fringes. So the blacks attempt to form an independent organization. The whites are now very unhappy. I learn about this and I say: 'This is nonsense, let's go ahead and form the association'. So while I'm teaching in Texas, the ASA, the white-dominated organization, meets in Chicago, but we agree that at that meeting we're going to form a sub-committee and look at the question of forming an ALA. When

we get there and people are debating and there are a number of blacks incidentally who oppose the formation because they don't want to oppose the whites and the various perks that they get. Anyway by sheer coincidence Lindfors moves me to chair the discussion. And of course I had already made up my mind that I'd wanted such an organization. So the way I steered the discussion, it was hopefully very open, but it ends with them saying: 'Alright, let's form a sub-committee which we'll draft a constitution for'. So we meet and I'm on the sub-committee and the next morning we report that 'We have this draft, you guys want to approve it? Okay when are we going to have the first meeting?'. Sharpeville day in Texas because I'm there and I've already invited writers to come there. So the ALA is formed but I think it's important to be aware that there were both Africans and African-Americans who actually opposed it. We tried Ezekiel Mphahlele by name because he was one of those who opposed it, so did Willie Kgositsile. Oswald Mtshali was neutral, Wally Serote was neutral, but I got them all to Texas. I was elected the first president but I think it's worth recording that I actually steered it into existence at a time when there were people who opposed it. Dan Kunene was another who opposed it. I still think it was one of the most useful things I've ever done because it's now become the leading organisation in its field, huge membership, big budget, tremendous influence, helps people to be published, people to get jobs, people to be promoted to full professors—a whole range of activities which would not have happened if the ALA had not been formed. So it's one of those things that I feel quite pleased about as an achievement, although I should add there are at least three others I'm pleased about so maybe I should mention them as well. I think to get South Africa expelled from the Olympics was not insignificant. It took a lot of hard work, starting here in Durban. We formed SASA in Durban and SANROC was formed in Durban and Durban was a very good support but to have achieved that was a major activity on its own. ALA was important but then you must remember that in the United States, in Britain, France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, India—I went everywhere on the question of getting money out of the apartheid economy. So I had a major role in the disinvestment campaign, just as I had a major role in exposing conditions on Robben Island, political prisoners and so on. So these are some of the other activities that are worth noting as part of my achievements, my record.

JVW: You often recite some of these old Afrikaans poets and it amazes me why you do it.

DB: Well why do I? For one, because I think sometimes what they said was relevant to whatever discussion we're having. Two, because I think it's important to assert the viability of the Afrikaans language. I think it's a language with a rich literature

which we ought not to lose sight of but that's another point. But of course it does amuse you and perhaps it's partly for your amusement as well that I will quote Totius, Langenhoven, Eugene Marais, Louis Leipoldt and I enjoy that.

JVW: Have you ever read 'Oom Gert vertel' by Leipoldt?

DB: Yes that's a fine poem. And one of the things I learnt from 'Oom Gert vertel' is a marvelous way of underplaying emotions. You say, 'Excuse me there are tears in my eyes. It's just that my pipe is smoking, that the back of the smoke has got in my eye'. So you play down the emotion but in fact you intensify the impact by that downplaying of emotion. Very skillful.

JVW: Yes and 'Dis al', I think that's your favourite?

DB: That's right.

JVW: That's a struggle favourite—'Dis al'.

DB: Jan Celliers—'Dis al'.

Dis die blond,  
dis die blou;  
dis die veld,  
dis die lug;  
en 'n voël draai bowe  
in éesame vlug  
- dis al.

Dis 'n balling, gekom  
oor die oseaan  
dis 'n graf in die gras  
dis 'n vallende traan  
—dis al.

JVW: Perfect Afrikaans—a nice ending, 'Dis al'. Coming back Dennis?

DB: That's a complex issue.

JVW: Breytenbach always declared his love for his country and when he had the opportunity to come back, he never came back.

DB: True. He's chosen not to and of course I've chosen not to and there's a kind of contradiction there. But I think my own situation has a kind of internal logic and it starts with the fact that the people who were with me in prison are now the people in power and the irony is that the things we fought for, struggled for and went to prison for, are the things which they are now denying. And not only denying but they are frustrating any efforts to achieve the kind of just society that they spoke about and if that's not bad enough, worse is the fact that while they can see people living in poverty, near starvation, sickness without medical care, homelessness—they can live in disgusting affluence without a sense of guilt. If I were back in South Africa I would be out in the streets each day denouncing the contradiction between what they're doing and what they said; denouncing their betrayal. So I have this choice and when I make the choice to do that I have to know that I'll be heard. I've come to South Africa six times and when I talked to people about the failure of the ANC to deliver, very interestingly initially they looked at me in bewilderment. They say: 'But we have the vote. We have democracy. The apartheid law has been abolished. We have a free country'. And I have to say: 'I don't believe that'. But coming here this week was significant because you had a group of people coming together saying: 'We are going to challenge the truth and reconciliation commission because it has not delivered and more seriously it was based on the premises which were not the premises of the people. The people were not consulted about, people did not participate in the decision-making process'. So what I see now is the possibility of coming back to South Africa and being heard and not only being heard but finding people who are willing to be allies in a critical statement. So the time may come when it's possible for me to return. I could have come when Mandela invited me back, when he said: 'Let's have this celebration for all the people on Robben Island'. I said: 'Sure'. I was there at the celebration because at that stage you could not see the extent of the betrayal. You could suspect it but you could not see the extent. Now you can see it more and more. You're going to find white and black South Africans who say: 'This is intolerable. We have to do something about it'. Not just complain. You've got to go beyond complaining to demand change and if the change is not delivered we will produce the change ourselves.

JVW: Can we deliver when we are dictated to by the big international powers like the United States?

DB: I think it is true that just at the time when we had discarded apartheid unfortunately, we moved into a new era dominated by the IMF and the World Bank. So you're quite right.

JVW: Was that a new era or did it start when the ANC went into exile?

DB: Perhaps, but I still think historically if you lived in South Africa, the point counts. When just as they say, 'Shake off the yoke, suddenly hey along comes Basson and Wilkinson and these guys. So you're quite right. The deal was being made outside, but calendar-wise you can see it happening in South Africa at a given point. Now I think the question becomes: Can you realistically challenge this new era when the monster is not apartheid but a global monster? My answer is yes provided your response is a global response. If it was local in South Africa alone, forget it, you'll never achieve this.

JVW: So how do you do this?

DB: In Durban in August of next year when the UN comes here to Durban have a conference on racism and the world is told: 'Oh, look at South Africa: justice for everybody, no racism, no poverty, no homelessness, no joblessness'. We are going to expose the lie and say: 'You had better take another look at what Mbeki is telling you and see the reality of South Africa'. So in a way South Africa is going to be the crunch-point globally. It will take us between now and August to develop our protest on the understanding that the police are going to be incredibly ruthless. Teargas, dogs, batons—you'll see it all. They're going to unleash their power against us 'cos we are going to unleash our power against them.

JVW: Are we going to publish this?

DB: I don't mind. I've been in three major global protest actions and each one has been more intense than the other. And with each one the police repression has been more severe than the previous one. Seattle was bad where we had probably 50 000 on the street. The cops were just plain inefficient until the end when the mayor called in the National Guard and declared a state of emergency. I don't know if this was reported, but that was the stage to which it had escalated. After November of last year in Seattle we had April this year in Washington. Thousands on the street but the cops were very clever. They pre-empted the march by arresting all the people the night before the march and the following day they turned the teargas on us—we were really very disorganized. I still think we had some success there but that's another matter. Success and failure I think are relative terms. But I was in Prague in September where they sealed the border. A train-load of demonstrators from Italy were stopped on the border. The train never got into Czechoslovakia. They brought

out the army, they brought out water-cans, they brought out teargas and they brought out what was called concussion grenades and they would box the demonstrators and cover them from two sides so there's no retreat. They were beating guys over the heads, they were dragging women by the hair—over 800 in jail and then we had to struggle to get them out of prison. So as I see it, there really is the development of global resistance to global oppression. The global oppression comes from IMF and the World Bank. We're not dealing with the government only, we're dealing with international institutions.

JVW: My problem is that it is reactionary; don't we need to think beyond that?

DB: Very good, I'm delighted that you raised that because you're quite right. You cannot change the society by putting people in the streets. It might help but you need a lot more than that. You actually need a programme, you need direction, you need analysis, you need an alternative economy.

JVW: A vision?

DB: You need an alternative vision. So you're quite right but fortunately people understand that that does not come overnight. It grows and it grows slowly and it grows by consensus. We're not interested in dictators, gurus who come along and dictate solutions. We are working out a consensual solution and it will be third world countries involved—Asia, Africa, Latin America working together to develop a global consensus. But it's coming. You're quite right. We need it. It is coming and I'm glad.

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### **Flying into Midrand**

(For students at Durban-Westville)

Still undulant curves shadow our horizons  
delicacy of pastel shades clutch at heartstrings  
but disgust sours saliva, rancids breath;  
how have our hopes been betrayed  
what newer outrages scar our landscapes  
what student blood puddles our dusttracks;  
time for fresh resolves, challenges,  
time for new confrontations.

Dennis Brutus  
June 18, 2000

## To criticise the critic: *Disgrace*

Shane Moran

### Review Article

*Disgrace*

by J.M. Coetzee,

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Sometimes a critic may choose an author to criticise, a role to assume, as far as possible the antithesis to himself, a personality which has actualised all that has been suppressed in himself; we can sometimes arrive at a very satisfactory intimacy with our anti-masks (Eliot 1933:112).

I propose to approach *Disgrace* through discussion of the type of investment made in Coetzee by literary critics committed to shoring up his canonical status. Approaching this topic through a consideration of Eliot's views on the relation between criticism, literature and politics has the advantage of clarifying some of the general issues at stake in judging literature. Coetzee's reading of Eliot foregrounds the limitations of one lingering form of traditional literary criticism. I argue that *Disgrace* presents a serious challenge to the current installation of the Coetzee critical medium.

#### I

In the essay 'To Criticize the Critic', casting a judicious eye over his literary criticism of the last forty-odd years, T.S. Eliot declares that the question of the use, or uses, of literary criticism is a question worth asking, even if we find no answer satisfactory. Echoing Arnold's (1864:12) vision of criticism 'creating a current of

true and fresh ideas', Eliot hopes to draw some plausible generalisations of wider validity, and—what is still more worth while—stimulate other minds to do so. In this sense criticism is self-criticism, as when he concedes 'the dogmatism of youth' and the partisanship of the early essays; 'I was implicitly defending the sort of poetry that I and my friends wrote', and 'I was in reaction, not only against Georgian poetry, but against Georgian criticism' (Eliot:1961:16). The emphasis on 'tradition'—and the coining of such portmanteau phrases as 'dissociation of sensibility'—came about 'as a result of my reaction' (19), 'from my feeling of kinship with one poet or with one kind of poetry rather than another' (20); as a bridge over more immediate predecessors to the writers of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Still,

There are errors of judgement, and, what I regret more, there are errors of tone: the occasional note of arrogance, of vehemence, of cocksureness or rudeness, the braggadocio of the mild-mannered man safely entrenched behind his typewriter (Eliot 1961:14).

If, in discussing the subject of literary criticism, 'we cannot escape personal bias' it is also opportune to bear in mind that there are other standards besides that of literary merit; 'it is impossible to fence off *literary* criticism from criticism on other grounds, and that moral, religious and social judgements cannot be wholly excluded' (25). In other words, literary criticism cannot in all sincerity pretend to be disinterested in the Arnoldian sense<sup>1</sup>. The 'Critic with Gusto', according to Eliot (1961:12), is not called to the seat of judgement but is rather the advocate of the author whose work she expounds<sup>2</sup>. While this object of endeavour may be a

<sup>1</sup> 'And how is it to be disinterested? By keeping aloof from practice; by resolutely following the law of its own nature, which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches; by steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them ...' (Arnold 1864:12). *The Sacred Wood* adjudges that, in practice, Arnold, in his destruction, 'went for game outside of the literary preserve altogether, much of it political game untouched and inviolable by ideas' (Eliot 1920:xiii).

<sup>2</sup> This partisan sleight of hand, however, is part of the life-blood of the critical game, with its own rules and limits which are there, in a certain way, to be transgressed: 'Every writer is accustomed to seeing his words quoted out of context, in such a way as to put an unintended construction upon them, by not over-scrupulous controversialists' (Eliot 1961:14). Rather this, as Eliot says, than the claustrophobic atrophy of criticism in the labour of obnubilation.

marginalised author it can also be an established, canonical author thought to be in need of defending; in which case *Gusto* can be combined with the defensiveness of the 'Critic as Moraliser' (Leavis being the model of the type). While it may aspire to transcend factionalism and avoid the erection of personal preference into the edicts of judgement, criticism, simply put, involves taking a position on issues of the day; a position that, since inconsistency does not mean incoherence, can be modified. Both writer and reader share, up to a point, a horizon of interpretation, and communication may well take place, but will explain nothing.

Now it might seem strange to begin a consideration of Coetzee with a disquisition on Eliot, and it may appear that most of what I have said, while it may have some bearing on the appreciation and understanding of literature, has very little to do with creative writing. But this is part of the larger question of the relation between criticism and literature. In 'The Function of Criticism', Eliot (1923:23) states, with the pontifical solemnity of the early essays, that, like tradition, 'the function of criticism seems to be essentially a problem of order too'. Criticising Arnold for artificially cleaving criticism and creativity, he stresses the capital importance of criticism in the work of creation itself. But the fusion of criticism with creation does not entail the fusion of creation with criticism, for a work of art is 'autotelic' while the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste that is criticism, by definition, is about something other than itself. Ten years later Eliot (1933:388) makes explicit what had always guided his criticism: 'Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint'. In this case, a Christian standpoint: 'The artistic sensibility is impoverished by its divorce from the religious sensibility, the religious by its separation from the artistic' (Eliot 1968:99). Ultimately the concept of 'dissociation of sensibility' moves from the realm of literary phenomenon and sensibility to be located in the socio-political realm as the consequence of a state secularised, a community turned into a mob, and a clergy disintegrated<sup>3</sup>. Tradition (fidelity to form) is translated into orthodoxy (fidelity to doctrine), and Eliot has moved from literary criticism to general and cultural criticism. The fetishizing of form, always indissoluble from order and tradition, is refined as Christian orthodoxy and the substitution of literary sensibility

<sup>3</sup> Even thoughtful attempts like Geertsema's (1996) to recuperate Eliot from this type of critical reading invariably side step the implications of Stephen Spender's observation that Eliot was, in the strictest sense of the term, reactionary. Leavis (1955:314) raises the pertinent issue in his defence of Lawrence from Eliot's sustained attacks: 'Snobbery, in fact, seems to be the natural trait of the consciously privileged whose social advantage gives them their assurance'. E.M. Forster described Eliot as a 'spider'.

for religious belief is a bridge to the reinstitution of (Christian) community. Where does this leave the political aspect of criticism?

The Introduction to *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* may open with the assurance that '[t]he present lectures will have no concern with politics' (1933a:13), but it goes on to claim that literary taste cannot be isolated from one's other passions; 'it affects them, and must be limited as one's self is limited' (36)—politics, like poetry, undoubtedly being a passion. Indeed the felicitous stress on historical context ensures that Trotsky's literary theory is superior to Richards's valorisation of art as saviour: 'Trotsky, whose *Literature and Revolution* is the most sensible statement of a Communist attitude that I have seen, is pretty clear on the relation of the poet to his environment' (135). Addressing the topic 'The Literature of Politics', Eliot (1955:136) comments dryly on the observation by a columnist that he had not previously addressed politics: 'Well, I intend to be just as political, and not a jot more so, than I have been in some of my prose writings which perhaps the writer ... has overlooked'. However, 'all political thinking must in the end be judged' in terms of the 'pre-political', the 'domain of ethics—in the end, the domain of theology' (144). We need not untangle the knot of Eliot's attempt to free literature and its criticism from subjection to politics to sense the force of the ambiguities at work. I shall argue that a comparable if simplified phenomenon is to be found in the defensive appreciation of Coetzee.

## II

Coetzee's (1993:11) 'What is a Classic?', referring to ways of reading Eliot, draws attention to 'the transcendental-poetic and the sociocultural' approaches to interpretation, and makes a case for an historically sensitive version of the former. Like Eliot, Coetzee is interested in 'the idea of form' (13), and historicity<sup>4</sup>. Eliot's fetishizing of form is echoed in Coetzee's identification of form with affectivity and communication, an interpellative 'being spoken to across the ages' (18). Form, then, as the transcendental-poetic, has to do with sensibility, more specifically aesthetic sensibility. Community of sensibility is linked to the possibility of a moral community, a duty or 'imperative, a transcendental imperative' (Coetzee 1992:340) to which the writer responds; not, in Kantian terms, in order to represent freedom as such, but rather to give intimations. This kind of subtlety has provoked the charge of ideological dilettantism, elision of the socio-political realities of the apartheid state, and effectively passing off privilege as methodological exigency. The response to the tokenisation of Coetzee as the condensation of a particular form of scrupulous

<sup>4</sup> Which does not prevent Coetzee's omission of the fact that Eliot did in fact visit South Africa (cf. Moran 1994).

liberalism retreating under the banner of ethics before the messy business of commitment to the imperfect political means of approximating the ethical has been to marshal the counter-charge of political supervision.

Certainly Coetzee has been attacked with vehemence but there is also an evangelical fervour mobilised in his defence that appears commensurately disproportionate to the task, and signals the dynamics of a battle for legitimacy and the exclusion of heterodoxy. Is it possible to disentangle the net of ambiguous symbolic resistances and transference that attend a living author; particularly when the author, like his critics, is an academic? The attempted vindication of Coetzee can be traced in two strands of criticism concerned with alterity and community characterised, respectively, by a concern with the exegetical and the testamentary. The two writers chosen below employ widely different critical registers yet, I argue, they share a common tropological destination.

For Derek Attridge '[i]n a sense, the "literary" is the ethical' (77), and Coetzee's fiction is implicated in a post-structuralist reading of the post-colonial other:

otherness is always *perspectival* [and] is always *produced*. First, there is no transcendent other (except in certain kinds of religious discourse); there is only an other that presents itself to a specific subject in a particular place and time; otherness is always otherness to someone (who inevitably, and by virtue of the existence of the other, is put in the position of the self and the same). And, second, the other does not come from elsewhere, but is a product of the identical constituting act that has produced the self-same (Attridge 1994:65).

In the name of prioritising ethics over politics Attridge appeals for the recognition of 'trust in the other' beyond 'a vague liberal humanist truism, urging individuals to behave justly towards others', in the context of South Africa as the exemplar of 'the acute ethico-political trauma of the postcolonial world' (65, 66,76)<sup>5</sup>. However, the ethics of literature can smoothly reconstitute its traditionalist form even in the most theoretically self-conscious approach.

<sup>5</sup> See also Attridge's (1992:248) claim that 'literature can act powerfully to hold the political and the ethical up for scrutiny by means of its power of suspension, momentarily dissociating them from their usual pressing context, performing the ethical decision and the political gesture'. Cf. also Attridge's (1992a) discussion of the cultural exclusions of canonicity. David Attwell (1993:10) sees in Coetzee's fictional oeuvre 'ethical questions fasten tenaciously to forms of reflexive play'.

'Levinas, Blanchot, and Derrida' (69) are cited as authorities for the ethics of the other. Although Heidegger's *Gelassenheit* is briefly evoked (70), the politically compromised philosopher of temporality is absent from these authorities—as is Hegel, the thinker *par excellence* of identity and difference, and inspiration for Marx. This is curious because Attridge stresses the modality of temporality as distinctive of otherness and endorses Levinas's cryptic claim that 'The other is the future' (80 note 17). Moreover the triumvirate of thinkers of alterity noted by Attridge refer critically and constantly to Heidegger, and in Derrida's criticisms of Levinas Heidegger is the specific resource for a critique of the ethics of the other<sup>6</sup>. Despite Levinas's strictures against *identifying* the Other (the very source of violence: there is no concept of the other), Attridge conceives of an 'other' with 'black voices' (76)<sup>7</sup>. Derrida (1978:101) comments on Levinas's formula 'Absolutely present, in his face, the Other—without any metaphor—faces me': the face of the Other as substance amounts to 'The face is presence, *ousia*'. This is a criticism of conceiving of the Other as self-present subject, as consciousness (exemplified in the privileging of the self-presence of speech), which only makes sense within a critical relation to Heidegger's *destruktive* analysis of the determination of Being as presence. In deconstructive terms, re-installing the anthropological other in place of the transcendental other is hardly an advance. These problems apart, the tendency of criticism to slide into mystagogy via the ethical can yield more predictable results.

In her essay on 'Coetzee, Eliot and the Private Mode' Myrtle Hooper (1999:31) elaborates the relation between Eliot and Coetzee by arguing that 'the theory of a "dissociation of sensibility" has uses for the study of Coetzee in South Africa at the turn of the century'; because it 'directs us to seek explanations of characteristic features of the writer within the mind of the writer', and to seek 'explanations for such features in the readership to whom the writing is directed (or at least by whom it is influenced)'. We are here in the realm of what Eliot identified as 'psychological criticism' (the interest in the mind of the writer) and 'sociological

<sup>6</sup> Attridge draws heavily on Simon Critchley's *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (1992) which largely consists of a defence of Levinas against Derrida's critique. This naturally presents tensions within Attridge's strategy of combining Levinas with Derrida. Also doesn't the attempt to utilise Levinasian insights in a colonial post-colonial context need to address Levinas's strong support for the State of Israel?

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Attwell (1993:121): 'The Other in *Age of Iron* is no longer the historical Other of colonialism, with black speech fully "represented", the interlocutor changes as well, becoming the taciturn derelict Vercuiel, Elizabeth's consort and Angel of Death'. Attwell (1998) repeats this argument.



criticism' (interest in the field of context and reception). The extrapolation from Eliot's revisionist polemic services a recuperative reading intended to rebut the hackneyed accusation of political quietism<sup>8</sup>. The seductive process that 'allows us to recognise ourselves as a "vicarious audience" to whom Coetzee's text is "in some sense related"' (Hooper 1999:42) reaches a climactic crescendo of inclusive pronouns that 'allows us to address questions of readership', to 'remind us' that 'we might find ourselves as readers of Coetzee's text interpellated not across a national boundary, but across a margin of personal experience at the point of its translation into the public domain of death' (Hooper 1999:42-3). The inflation of the recuperative capacity of reading evidences an obsessional intrasubjectivity that reproduces the mirage of the pre-political literary community: 'Without our reading such translation cannot take place' (43). Reaffirmation of the covenant between reader-author-reader grounds the fantasy destination of an alternative locus of shared values and consensus. Our witnessing presence, which enables works of fiction to come into being, is complimented by a final anagogic ingredient: 'Yet the metaphor given to God is that of "author", who employs several "translators" of life into death' (42). The terminus of the sodality of recognition in this and other readings of Coetzee is the very pseudo-religious approach to literature that Eliot criticised in Arnold and Richards as blinding the critic to the intervention of textuality.

Such assumptions seem to be part of the missological texture of literary criticism; the wish-fulfilment fantasy of literary culture exemplified in Leavis's 'disinterested clerisy' is part of the legacy of English literary studies<sup>9</sup>. What is more interesting is not so much the rejection of politics for its crudity, complicity with bias, prejudice, generalisation, authority, opportunism, etc., but the unstated assumption that lingering in the precincts of pseudo-religious election somehow escapes the stigma of dogmatism. Is it too much to hope with Eliot that literary critics at least care to make different mistakes from those of their predecessors—this time including the ethical as the pre-political, and critically addressing the slide from

<sup>8</sup> The spurious claim that Coetzee's 'return to South Africa in the early 1970s predates but is by no means completely distinct from that of exiles returning home in the 1990s' (Hooper 1999:37) surely raises more questions than it answers. This is the latest version of Attwell's (1993:125) strained iconography: 'In hindsight we can see that Coetzee's return to South Africa at the start of the 1970s had the effect of ensuring that his fiction would escape the consequences of the "posthistorical" age'.

<sup>9</sup> As Said (1983:290-92) notes, religious criticism is part of the social imaginary that circulates in literary culture. See Graham Pechey's (2000) discussion of *The Master of Petersburg* for a refined type of this literary-critical devotional ascesis.

the ethical to the theological?<sup>10</sup> As the protagonist of *Disgrace* puts it with characteristic lack of originality: 'The more things change the more things stay the same' (Coetzee 2000:62).

### III

Professor David Lurie, aged 52, author of three scholarly books, is sick of literary criticism: 'The truth is, he is tired of criticism, tired of prose measured by the yard' (Coetzee 2000:4). Languishing in a 'transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning' (4), he thinks more about 'Emma Bovary, coming home sated, glazen-eyed, from an afternoon of reckless fucking' (5):

He earns his living at the Cape Technical University, formerly Cape Town University College. Once a professor of modern languages, he has been, since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalization, adjunct professor of communications. Like all rationalized personnel, he is allowed to offer one special-field course a year, irrespective of enrolment, because that is good for moral. This year he is offering the Romantic poets. For the rest he teaches Communications 101, 'Communication Skills', and Communication 201, 'Advanced Communication Skills' (3).

Existing in a flurry of promiscuity and entitlement, concerned to reconcile the imagination and the onslaughts of reality, he fucks a student—'Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core' (25); 'Unequal: how can he deny that?' (53). In his own estimation 'Not a bad man but not good either' (195), he doctors her marks and attendance, is reported for sexual harassment, and refuses to recant ('It reminds me too much of Mao's China .... These are puritanical times' (66)). As his ex-wife comments: 'The whole thing is disgraceful from beginning to end. Disgraceful and vulgar too. And I'm not sorry for saying so' (45). Some readers have agreed, extending the excoriation to the novel as a whole and censuring Coetzee himself for writing it. The novel, like its reactionary and elitist central protagonist, not only invites censure but seems to crave it.

Retreating to his daughter's farm outside Grahamstown, Lurie overcomes his impatience with animal-welfare—'Everyone is so cheerful and well-intentioned

<sup>10</sup> To return to what Eliot (1933a:36) termed 'a large and difficult question: whether the attempt to teach students to appreciate English literature should be made at all; and with what restrictions the teaching of English literature can rightly be included in any academic curriculum, if at all'.

that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat' (73)—to the point of ambivalent identification with the maligned dogs he helps to exterminate: 'They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things' (78). Moreover, arguing for 'the rights of desire' (89), he feels another affinity: 'No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts' (90)—a dictum brutally realised in the rape of his daughter by two black men and an adolescent, 'Like dogs in a pack' (159):

It happens every day, every hour, every minute, he tells himself, in every part of the country .... At risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes cigarettes. Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day. That is the theory; hold to the theory and to the comforts of theory. Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes; women too. There must be some niche in the system for women and what happens to them (98).

Surprisingly Lurie is able to indulge in didactic reverie during the attack and to reach the conclusion: 'missionary work: what has it left behind, that huge enterprise of upliftment? Nothing that he can see' (95). A second disgrace: 'Locked in the lavatory while his daughter was used .... Lucy's secret; his disgrace' (109). And Lucy will keep her secret—'what happened to me is a purely private matter'—because of '[t]his place being South Africa' (112), 'I am prepared to do anything, make any sacrifice, for the sake of peace' (208). She does not want to invite retribution—'I think I am in their territory. They have marked me. They will come back for me' (158)—and will be willing to marry into the family harbouring one of her assailants (and also with designs on her property) for the sake of her own safety and that of her child. To Lurie the rape that was 'meant to soil her, to mark her, like a dog's urine' (199), to leave her with nothing, 'Like a dog' (205), is a part of 'war reparations; another incident in the great campaign of redistribution' (176). 'It was history speaking through them'. (156)

In *Disgrace* black characters are insistently compared to dogs, but then so are other characters; canine animality marking the limits of the human where humanism is stripped of its obfuscation and confronted with the crudity of reality. Lurie becomes what 'Petrus once called himself', a 'dog-man' (146). Petrus, recipient of a Land Affairs grant and not 'an old-style kaffir' (140), combines race

with the theme of land hunger. Is Lurie a racist? Working at the animal clinic leads him to the conclusion that the dogs he sees suffer 'most of all from their own fertility. There are simply too many of them' (142). A few pages later we read: 'The dogs are brought to the clinic because they are unwanted: *because we are too menny*' (146). Is this snide mimicry aimed at second-language English speakers in 'a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man' (110)?

Some readers will respond to the testimony of white *angst* and victimisation by uncritically identifying with Lurie. Others will dismiss that character and its author as reactionary and racist. Both recognitions take Lurie, the unreliable narrative focaliser, at face value and turn the novel into a *Roman à clef*. The tissue of praise and execration represses the fact that he is a cipher for a type of embittered white marginalisation; 'A figure from the margins of history' (167) speaking a language tired, friable, eaten from the inside: 'More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Stretches of English code whole sentences long have thickened, lost their articulations, their articulateness, their articulatedness' (117). Any identification has to swallow Lurie's callous misogyny—'Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow' (105)—as well as a subliminal racism that prevents the acknowledgement of the violation of black women, white on white violence, and white on black.

The defensive exoneration of Coetzee from any complicity with the sensibility of Laurie is equally unconvincing since, as I have noted, the identification of Coetzee with his unreconstructed white liberal protagonist is positively invited. So we have a possible interpellated schizoid community of readers split between uncritical identification with Lurie's limited point of view and its rejection, along with that of the novel as a whole, on the grounds of its distortion of reality, contributing to South Africa's negative image, etc. Is Lurie's despairing viewpoint Coetzee's? The affinities are seductive:

The demons do not pass him by. He has nightmares of his own in which he wallows in a bed of blood, or, panting, shouting soundlessly, runs from the man with a face like a hawk, like a Benin mask, like Thoth .... He has, if the truth be told, been putting it off for months: the moment when he must face the blank page, strike the first note, see what he is worth (121).

But there are points at which the implied author can be distinguished. Lurie, a classicist, does not register the significance of the name of the youngest rapist—'He was there to learn' (159): 'Pollux', 'P-O-L-L-U-X' (200). Pollux or Polydeuces, one of the Dioscuri (sons of Zeus), is brother to Castor, Helen and Clytaemnestra. Zeus seduced his mother Leda, wife of Tyndareus king of Sparta, in the form of a

swan. When as a child Helen is abducted by Theseus Castor and Pollux rescue her with the help of Academus. As for the learned Professor Lurie: 'He gives the boy a good, solid kick, so that he sprawls sideways. Pollux! What a name!' (207).

Lucy reads Dickens's last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*: not what he would have expected' (76), and after the rape: 'Of *Edwin Drood* there is no more sign' (114). The significance of a half-finished book regarded by Dickens's friend Wilkie Collins as the melancholy work of a worn-out brain is multiple. *Drood* concerns guilt, pathological obsession, and the mystery of an unresolved crime, themes that resonate in *Disgrace*. The main suspect is Jaspers, an opium addict with violent and erotic dreams, who has been interpreted as the embodiment of the submerged part of Dickens himself, his own animal nature. Dickens's heavy irony about those who misguidedly respected black people in the novel is a symptom of his hardening racism<sup>11</sup>. The *Drood* mystery hardly deflects the charge of racism that Coetzee masochistically appears to encourage. But how to prove one is not a racist? After all, 'the town of Salem on the Grahamstown-Kenton road' (59), established by the 1820 settlers, has a meaning other than 'peace'. None of this 'intellectualism', of course, means that Coetzee is in control here, and the meta-textual games are weak enough to avoid obstructing a more forensic interpretation.

Finally, is the representation of South Africa in *Disgrace* realistic? The indictment of the brutality and inhumanity that is the legacy of colonialism, the lethal symbolism attached to attritional violence, particularly against women, the whirl of myriad persecution complexes on all sides, wounded forgiveness fuelling revanchist ardour—all form part of a jeremiad that has a characteristic weakness. Coetzee, in his destruction, gives a fiercely one-dimensional indictment of the inhumanity of post-apartheid South Africa that inevitably feeds into the trough of gleeful pessimism that nourishes opponents of black governance. Hence the charge of irresponsibility leveled at Coetzee. That is to say, this very writing may be a specimen of the kind of paranoid discourse it seeks to describe. Ulterior, political, practical considerations, certainly, but constitutive of a charge that, once one has assumed the mantle of the transcendental imperative, does find purchase. Nothing positive issues from the wreckage of Lurie's anaemic liberalism (and his type is legion)—except, perhaps, the fact that it will no longer serve. More importantly, since there is little hope of salvaging a responsible or ethical implied author in the wake of this text it is surely time to relinquish yet another consoling fetish of criticism.

<sup>11</sup> Angus Wilson (1993:24) suggests 'that Dickens had, perhaps partly consciously, become very mistrustful of fiction, of the art he practised, of the fancy and the imagination as weapons on behalf of the good in life'.

## conclusion

The avoidance of politics in *Disgrace* has not saved it from political recrimination. (Curiously Zakes Mda's attack on the new political elite has failed, so far, to hit the same raw nerve.) For the blinkered Lurie the inequities of 'a vast circulatory system' fail to explain the ferocity of evil and the powerlessness of the good. Politics recedes behind the limitations and intensities of the personal. While this might promise to put the question of individual autonomy before the programmatic generalisations of political rhetoric, it has the contrary effect of securing a fatalism that reduces freedom to the negativity of desiccated subjectivity. I would suggest that although this short-sightedness limits the realism of the book and pushes it toward naturalism—confirming Lukács's thesis that the subjectivism of (post)modernism tends toward nihilistic naturalism—it also renders it timely. *Disgrace* affords the reader opportunity for a precise and relentless confrontation with the ideological capillaries embalming the possibility of community. 'What if ... what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on?' (158).

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## Book Reviews

### Literature and transformation

*The Heart of Redness*

by Zakes Mda

Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 320 pp.

ISBN: 0-19-571477-6

Reviewed by Venetia Dlomo

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They had often discussed prejudice and the dangers of generalising about a people (Mda 2000:191).

Apart from his other artistic talents, Zakes Mda has published three novels within five years. *Ways of Dying* (1995) focused on South Africa during the transitional periods of 1990 –1991, and *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995) explored political instability, social injustice and corruption, cultural changes and dysfunctional families. The latter also powerfully highlights the determining effects of the Lesotho landscape and harsh weather on social life and developmental progress. *The Heart of Redness* relates the story of Nongqawuse, the 19<sup>th</sup> century prophetess who convinced the Qorlasha Xhosa people that they should drive all the white people to the sea and destroy all livestock and crops so that a new Eastern Cape would arise. This, she claimed, was her prophetic message from the ancestors. Drawing extensively on the work of historians, Mda focuses on the effect of this vain prophecy, the conflict amongst the influential families, and how the traumas of the past reverberate in the present.

In *Ways of Dying* Mda foregrounds black on black violence – Hostel dwellers against Township people – and the material poverty and imaginative richness of those living in informal settlements. The love triangle between Toloki, Noria and Jwara highlights the rural community life versus the slum capitalistic town life of the big South African city. All of this coming to a point in the criticisms of the

failings of the government of the day in South Africa. In *She Plays with the Darkness* he incorporates the instability of the Lesotho government, the role of the monarchy and the corruption of civil society. The love triangle of Radisene, Tampololo and Troopet Motsali spans the urban lowlands and the rural mountain lands, shaped by the dependency of Lesotho on both South Africa and the weather for social development and daily life. It is here that Radisene laments:

We live in an age when a woman can do no wrong. When things go badly in a relationship people automatically take her side. She is the innocent party. Its payback time for all the centuries of oppression women have suffered. A woman is no longer a human being with human flaws (Mda 1995:194).

British colonialism and the effects of its control in the Eastern Cape are explored through the lives of the influential families of Twin and Twin Twin.

Mda's experience of exile is reflected in *The Heart of Redness* when the protagonist Camegu reflects his experiences as an ex-exile, spiraling into disenchantment as he lobbies endlessly for jobs he is qualified for. *The Heart of Redness* accuses the post-apartheid government of distributing job opportunities according to those who are, according to its own criteria, believers and those who are non-believers. This is the pastness of the present and the presence of the present in the past that Mda recovers in the story of Nongqawuse. In many ways *The Heart of Redness* is a text preoccupied with women and representations of women, and the theme of gender is articulated with issues of class and race. Mda resurrects the legendary status of mountain Women, and the Caves of the Barwa and Zim 'for whom the living slaughter animals so that he may communicate their message to Qamata' (Mda 2000:315).

On a note of criticism, one wonders if all urbanised Africans are as alienated as Mda suggests. There is also an unsettling sentimental aura around female characters as Mda's heroines are musical dreamers, dancers, and singers; earthy and supernatural. In *The Heart of Redness* the educated woman Mitsi is brought to earth by ancestral intervention, and female empowerment is represented by a chieftainess who is addressed as 'Father'. These representations of black female characters contrast unfavourably with those of, for example, Sembène Ousmane who has given women leading roles in his narratives of the struggle against oppression. Gender stereotyping is accompanied by a racialised sentimentality about land as blacks are, once again, sons of the soil able to draw on the limitless powers of autochthony. But this exclusivity may be negotiable, as the character John Dalton (married to an Afrikaner) remonstrates to his English liberal friends on the subject of

'Everyone is leaving':

'I'm staying here,' says Dalton. 'I am not joining your chicken run. This is my land. I belong here. It is the land of my forefathers.'

'That is self-delusion, John,' warns the first emigrant.

Dalton is now getting angry. Against his better judgement he raises his voice and says, 'The Afrikaner is more reliable than you chaps, he belongs to the soil. He is of Africa. Even if he is not happy about the present situation he will not go anywhere. He cannot go anywhere' (Mda 2000:160).

Is this romanticisation endorsed by Mda? The multiple levels of *The Heart of Redness* do not offer any solutions or easy answers. But what is consistently opposed to colonialism in its past or present forms is a faith, despite the formidable obstacles, in the creative power of grass-roots organisation and an unwavering commitment to the future of South Africa.

So far Mda has produced a significant trilogy of political novels aiming to comprehend the present with the help of the past, interweaving anecdotal episode and epic narrative. Like Tutuola, he is an inspired storyteller who remodels traditional narrative techniques and goes on to ground them in specific areas and definite political and cultural issues. If the element of 'magic realism' is a striking feature of these texts then so too is a complex social realism. In this sense Mda contributes to the development of a committed African literature as described by Chidi Amuta (1989:8): 'Literature is in addition one (only one) of the instruments for the sharpening and mobilisation of social consciousness in pursuit or negation of qualitative change, an instrument for the preservation or subversion of the existing order'.

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## Investing in South Africa

*Against Normalization. Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa*

by Anthony O'Brien

Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2001, 333pp

ISBN 0-8223-2571-3

Reviewed by Shane Moran

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Anthony O'Brien writes with moving commitment on a range of South African literary and cultural texts; from the reactions of writers such as Brink and Sachs to the 1994 elections, Ndebele's neo-Arnoldian prescription for a post-apartheid literature, the worker-poets and grass-roots cultural activism of the 1980s, the representations and elisions of race in Beckett, Havel and Maponya, South African feminisms, the work of Bessie Head, Arthur Nortje, Dambudzo Marachera, and Nadine Gordimer. If these are largely familiar and well-worn critical sign-posts in South African English literary studies, O'Brien succeeds in both elegantly summarising familiar critical debates and, here and there, adding an original insight (see particularly the Beckett-Havel-Maponya connection). While South African literary scholars will find the gaps and misreadings of local debates irritating – and the selection of the 'most radical texts in South African literature of the eighties' (5) is highly contentious –, there is here a genuine attempt to grasp the complexity of the South African context.

Apart from the competent reading of literary texts, as an 'outsider' O'Brien is forced to rely on selective perspectives for the political context he wishes to foreground. It is at this level, where O'Brien takes the greatest risk in attempting to distil the meaning of a dynamic historical moment, that his study is both provocative and revealing. This is a book that extols virtues of diacritical debate, seeing in it the potential spark of critical and transformative praxis, and it is on this level of constructive engagement that I would like to note some productive weaknesses of *Against Normalization*. As an outsider to South Africa myself I sympathise with O'Brien's misreadings – indeed many of them are recognisable as more refined versions of my own mistakes – but I would also like to propose a somewhat harsh corrective to a few wide-spread misconceptions.

O'Brien's foreword tells us that the book is the result of 'several trips to South Africa, Botswana, and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the

University of London', as well as 'the University of Dakar (as it was called then) in Senegal', and Botswana (X). In South Africa O'Brien visited the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Cape Town, the University of Fort Hare, Rhodes University, and the University of Natal (both its Durban and Pietermaritzburg campuses). The latter appears to have provided the most productive environment and gratitude is expressed 'particularly [to] Margaret Daymond, to whom I owe a deep debt of gratitude .... The influence of her beautifully edited collection of *South African Feminisms* can be felt throughout this book' (xi). I mention these prefatory details in order to introduce the theme of location and solidarity which is essential to O'Brien's study. Foregrounding the question of positionality is the central modality of *Against Normalization* which is informed by an inclusive partisan intent and a complex and shifting temporal and emotive register.

The confessional opening words of the 'Introduction' lay out the key terms:

The shape this book has taken reflects the momentous changes in South Africa during the time of its composition. Writing between 1992 and 1998 on radical impulses in South African literature and politics in the 1980s, I began with a sense of the high tide of antiapartheid struggle in the late eighties as the vivid present, both of South African culture and of its representations abroad. Gradually, however, it became clear that 1990. With the release of Mandela and the somewhat demobilizing onset of negotiations, marked the waning of the resonant insurgency and militant hope of the Mass Democratic Movement of that period. With a growing awareness of how the South African transition was shifting the questions posed to radical imagination and interpretation (including their ramifications in global culture and politics), the book became more and more a *retrospect* on the 1980s ... My readings of the radical eighties ... are thus embedded in an engagement with a putatively "normalized" postapartheid culture, and came to be a contestatory argument precisely *against* any normalization of the present that would foreclose "radical democracy", my shorthand for the spirit of eighties culture and a term whose scope is developed chapter by chapter in the book through the different and distinctive meanings each of the writes gives it .... The book is thus the record of one reader's engagement with the literary South Africa that emerged for cultural critics steeped in the antiapartheid movement of the North (1-2).

Written between 1992 and 1998, O'Brien's text retrospectively looks back to the radical eighties as the high-point of antiapartheid struggle. We do not learn if the author was actually in South Africa during the eighties. The process of negotiated settlement further intensifies the sense of retrospection and 'the book became more and more a retrospect on the 1980s'. However, since the focus was already in the first place retrospective the 'waning of militant hope' appears to have provoked an intensification of retrospection, moving from the celebratory to the valedictory. Mourning the 'spirit of eighties culture' combines the commemorative with a sense of belatedness as the revolution deferred becomes all too clearly the revolution defeated. Hence the intransigent '*against*'. But this is not a defeatist melancholia:

To return to periodization: the periods before and after the transitional years 1990-1994 seemed to come together around a question that was prominent in South African cultural critique well before the final phase of apartheid and persists well after the watershed election of 1994, namely, how to construct an expressive culture that springs from, and responds to, and shapes visions of economic and political democracy deeper than ballot box democracy, parliamentary representation, liberal capitalism, cultural pluralism, and the Enlightenment discourse of rights .... Here my assumption is that we have much to learn from the South African case about the general debates that rage today over social explanation and the interpretation of culture, especially in African and postcolonial studies (2-3).

The South African settlement, the stalemated revolution, is simultaneously seen as an exemplary moment and the vindication of progressive democratic struggle: 'The South African case is wonderfully instructive, in a time when the great oppositional political movements and the acuity of the theory they gave rise to seem to have failed to bring in lasting radical change ...' (8). This is not least because of the 'relative strength of Marxism' in 'the South African cultural economy' (7). Although O'Brien concedes 'I am conscious that the left in the North is tempted to project onto places like South Africa its own failed hopes', the process of "globalization from below" (8) is taken to mean that deep structural connections can be made between the various components of the global cultural economy.

O'Brien's oscillation between a sense of failure and the euphoria of victory usefully captures the contradictions and torsion prevalent in debates concerning South Africa. Flickering between loss and vindication, resentment and inspiration, *Against Normalization* levels out history into a fatalistic moral fable concerning the

opportunism of erstwhile revolutionaries and the mendacity of fellow-travellers. The complexities of history are smoothed over; for example, the use of violence by the liberation movement at Quatro and the sometimes lethal achievement of hegemony at the expense of radical Trotskyite grouplets in the Western Cape. The violence of the struggle was not unidirectional or containable, which is one of the reasons that the historic compromise was embraced, it seemed to me, with exhausted relief rather than total satisfaction.

O'Brien defines the normalisation that he opposes as the shift from the redistributive RDP (Reconstruction and Development Plan) to the market-oriented GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution):

To return to the concept of normalization: there is normalization of ends and normalization of beginnings. The sort of making normal that ended the abnormalities of apartheid no one could possibly be against. It is the normalization – or the norming – of *beginnings* that is pernicious, the circumscription in advance of just where a search for deep democracy could lead in politics, in economics, and in culture (7).

Is it possible to disengage these two processes of normalisation so neatly? The death-throws of the apartheid system did not simply unleash a vista of opportunity, rather it could be argued that the demise of apartheid intensified levels of crime and social trauma as the containment of the townships crumbled. These consequences hardly presented an environment conducive to deepening participatory civil society, and the ANC has openly articulated its achievement as one of stabilisation rather than immediate social justice. However one feels about the frustration, if not betrayal, of struggle hopes the limited choices presented by political and economic realities must be taken into account.

O'Brien notes that the phrase 'radical democracy', borrowed from Laclau and Mouffe, is used 'in the spirit of nineteenth-century term "social democracy" or the notion of economic democracy (neither ever yet attained by even the most advanced capitalist formations' (7). South Africa, so exemplary in its struggle credentials, fits routinely into the normalising global pattern of inequity. But is the alternative destiny so fervently endorsed by O'Brien really any more radical than current conditions? Are 'economic democracy', 'social democracy', 'deep democracy', posited as incompatible with reformed property relations within the envelope of neo-liberal capitalism? These slogans are in fact frequently mouthed by South African politicians on both the right and the left, in fact by anyone touting the free-market system as the antidote to apartheid. Doesn't the claim to be 'radical' –



within the context of capitalist democracy - require more than a commitment to democratic reformism within the economic shell of the old regime?<sup>1</sup>

Endorsing the wry observation that it takes anti-colonial struggles to produce neocolonial conditions, O'Brien argues that normalisation must be consistently interrogated '(most importantly "from below" by radical trade unionists and intellectuals)' (4). But if academics are to be included in the category 'intellectuals', in what sense can they be said to be working from below? Since universities here are dependent on State patronage it is only necessary to jerk the purse strings and threaten the jobs of academics to stifle criticism. At a time when 'it should no longer be possible to pursue oppositional intellectual work without taking into account the institutional conditions of the production of that work' (8), O'Brien overestimates the radical potential of academe.

In his visits to South Africa - 'I have been making research trips to many South African universities' (8) - he appears to have taken in only two historically black campuses. This might explain the mistaken, if gracious, attribution of radical credentials to his avowedly liberal white hosts. This mirrors the somewhat predictable attribution of a radical (i.e. socialist) tendency to the black masses, despite the obvious and eager embrace of capitalist consumerism by this potentially revolutionary agency. *Against Normalization* raises provocative and timely questions about how South Africa is misread, and how local academics collude in the construction of flattering portraits of their own activities. Today, when it is safer to lament the corruption of the ruling party than question the macro-economic policy (GEAR) which leaves apartheid-garnered wealth undisturbed, O'Brien's argument usefully recalls both the energy and the terrain of struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> In what sense is the following institutional perspective a radical departure? On the occasion of a symposium at the University of Natal, June 24, 1998, on "Academic Labor and Neo-Liberal Transformation of the University, South Africa/USA", the 'radical solution' embracing meaningful redistribution in South Africa lapses into the tight-fisted: 'Anthony O'Brien: OK, but it strikes me that we fight this battle [of redress] all the time: do we level up or level down? You don't want to get into a 'race to the bottom', taking from UND to give to the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) or to the technikons or the teacher-training colleges, but rather: level up' (<http://www.workplace-gsc.com/workplace2/undsymp.html>).

## Sound and Fury

*Fury*

by Salman Rushdie

London: Johnathan Cape, 2001, 259pp

ISBN: 0224061593

Reviewed by Pravina Moodley

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In an April 1999 interview with Charles McGrath, Booker prize winner author Salman Rushdie expressed the view that the subject of India seems to have temporarily departed from his mind in favour of puzzling over Western experiences. This preoccupation comes to fruition in his latest novel *Fury* released in the first week of September 2001. Rushdie's earlier novels tended to be allegories about a particular set of historical circumstances. *Midnight's Children* explored the story of its hero's spiritual decline as a parable of Indian history since independence in 1947, and *Shame* could be classified as a baroque incarnation of the history of a country that was 'not quite Pakistan', and *The Moor's Last Sigh* was a metaphorical display of India's recent political turbulence. *Fury*, like *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, focuses on the fevered triviality of contemporary life. *Fury* is very much an American novel, a satirical picture of a cluttered but vacuous American society in the opening years of the twenty-first century.

This novel contains diverse elements, delving into the dark side of human nature and concurrently focusing on a compelling bitter-sweet love story. The protagonist of *Fury* is Professor Malik Solanka, an historian of ideas and a doll-maker par excellence. He abandoned his wife and three year old child, Asmaan, in England because he found himself standing over them in the dead of night wielding a knife. Engulfed by fury and fear, he believes that he presents a danger to those he loves and arrives in New York City hoping to dissolve in the great metropolis, seeking above all the juxtaposition to his feelings of fury. Needless to say this is the most unlikely destination to find tranquility and he discovers that New York City is the melting pot for every degree of fury. There is a metaphoric fury raging in the city engulfing all its inhabitants - a fury of lust, greed and viciousness. Cab drivers are

consumed with fury, spewing out entertaining expletives. A serial killer or killers are at large, murdering women with a lump of concrete. Meanwhile Malik Solanka has a love-hate relationship with New York City. He is charmed by the vibrancy of the city, but, at the same time repelled by its decadence. His romantic liaison with the mega-beautiful Neela, whose roots lie in the far side of the world and whose serene exterior belies the deep-seated fury within, draw the Professor towards a different fury.

Rushdie weaves several plot genres together; a mystery, a romance, a satirical portrait of millennial New York, and a sci-fi revolutionary fantasy. However, this frenetic syncretism can at times disintegrate into a disappointing thinness. The mystery of the killer's identity perfectly epitomizes this. Rushdie skillfully presents a scenario that has the hallmarks of an exciting Hitchcockian suspense thriller with Malik Solanka believing that he could be the killer as he cannot recall his whereabouts on the nights of the killings. He has previously found himself wielding a knife over his sleeping wife and son and he is asked to leave restaurants after bursting into torrents of expletives that he is not aware of. This is further accentuated by the fact that it is reported that the killer was wearing a panama hat, something that is part of the Professor's *outré* attire. Sadly, this entire mystery plot falls to pieces when the perpetrators are summarily identified. Although Rushdie typically displays the artifice of plot structures this kind of anti-climax smacks of mishandling rather than post-modernist irony.

*Fury* is not one of Rushdie's best novels and this is most evident in the characters that are secondary to the city which is the impetus for the novel. While this makes an obvious point about the thinness of contemporary psychic life, characters appear to be vague biographical sketches rather than compressed ciphers. Solanka is the exception to this and we explore New York, which epitomizes the Western World, through his sensibility. Although Solanka's observations of American life might seem facile, Rushdie succeeds in drawing attention to such issues as America's selfish disregard of the consequences of its policies, its unresolved race issues, and the narcissistic reveling in consumer capitalism.

Rushdie is known as a master wordsmith and in this regard *Fury* does not disappoint. However, insistently prosaic references to renowned writers, films and singers feel superimposed and hamper the thrust of the narrative. *Fury's* attempts at slapstick humour are also uneven. Men bumping into things while looking at the beautiful Neela is funny the first time but misfires through repetition. The ending of the novel is lacklustre and contrived, as we are transported to the South Pacific, where a thinly disguised Fiji and the *coup* it experienced recently becomes a pivotal event in the denouement of the story. On the positive side, Neela's martyrdom in the end extols the significant role of the woman in fighting oppression. But Rushdie's

pastiche on the permanent ephemerality of consumer capitalism risks succumbing to the very hollowness that it seeks to represent.

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## *Alternation*

### Guidelines for Contributors

*Manuscripts* must be submitted in English (UK). If quotations from other languages appear in the manuscript, place the original in a footnote and a dynamic-equivalent translation in the body of the text or both in the text.

Contributors must submit *one computer-generated and three double-spaced printed copies* of the manuscript. The computer-generated copy may be on double density floppy or stiffie in Word Perfect 5-6, Word for Windows 6 or ASCII. If accepted for publication, 10 original off-print copies of the article will be returned to the author.

Manuscripts should range between 5000-8000 and bookreviews between 500-1000 words. However, longer articles may be considered for publication.

Attach a cover page to one manuscript containing the following information: Author's full name, address, e-mail address, position, department, university/ institution, telephone/fax numbers, a list of previous publications and a written statement that the manuscript has not been submitted to another journal for publication.

*Maps, diagrams and posters* must be presented in print-ready form. Clear black and white photos (postcard size) may also be submitted.

Use footnotes sparingly. In order to enhance the value of the interaction between notes and text, we use footnotes and not endnotes.

Authors may use their own numbering systems in the manuscript.

Except for bibliographical references, abbreviations must include fullstops. The abbreviations (e.a.) = 'emphasis added'; (e.i.o.) = 'emphasis in original'; (i.a.) or [.....] = 'insertion added' may be used.

The full bibliographical details of sources are provided only once at the end of the manuscript under References. References in the body of the manuscript should follow the following convention: Dlodlo (1994:14) argues .... or at the end of a reference/quotation: ..... (Dlodlo 1994:14).

The full name or initials of authors as it appears in the source must be used in the References section.

Review articles and book reviews must include a title as well as the following information concerning the book reviewed: title, author, place of publication, publisher, date of publication, number of pages and the ISBN number.

The format for the references section is as follows:

- Head, Bessie 1974. *A Question of Power*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Mhlophe, Gcina 1990. Nokulunga's Wedding. In Van Niekerk, Annemarié (ed): *Raising the Blinds. A Century of South African Women's Stories*. Parklands: Ad Donker.
- Mngadi, Sikhumbuzo 1994. 'Popular Memory' and Social Change in South African Historical Drama of the Seventies in English: The Case of Credo Mutwa's *Unosimela*. *Alternation* 1,1:37-41.
- Fanon, Frantz 1986. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Markmann, Charles Lam (trans). London: Pluto Press.