J.C. Kannemeyer, *A History of Afrikaans Literature*, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter & Shooter, 1993

J.C. Kannemeyer established himself as the pre-eminent historian of Afrikaans literature with the publication in 1978 and 1983 of his two-volume *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse literatuur* and *Die Afrikaanse literatuur 1652-1987* in 1988. He has now published an English translation of a short history of Afrikaans literature, which should be welcomed as authoritative and as a gesture of courtesy to readers of English. (It is now almost 70 years since the first chapter of Manfred Nathan's *South African Literature: a General Survey* dealt, among other things, with 'The Literary History of Afrikaans'.) Recent South African history has put Afrikaans and its literature in a new light and given it a new interest at home and abroad. As Kannemeyer writes in his 'Introduction',

> Afrikaans is a language in which a meaningful discussion about South Africa has been conducted, a debate that is evident from the virtually endless variety and kaleidoscopic variations in approach to the South African reality...

Although in about 170 pages this *History* cannot do justice to the detail and nuance covered by Kannemeyer's original Afrikaans volumes, 'using chronology as far as possible as the basis for demarcation' (Introduction), it covers over 350 years of South African writing. The earliest author is Jan van Riebeeck (1619-1677) and the latest is Pieter van der Lugt (born 1961). The earliest Afrikaans book is Meurant's *Zamenspraak tusschen Klaas Waarzegger en Jan Twyfelaar* (1861) and the latest is Chris Pelser's *Don de Ridder* (1990). Naturally the *History* devotes progressively more space to recent developments, getting quite quickly over 'The Origins of Afrikaans Literature (1652-1875)' (4 pages), 'The Period of the First Afrikaans Language Movement (1875-1900)' (4 pages) and 'The Second Language Movement and Independence (1900-1930)' (19 pages). The bulk of the text is devoted to 'The Thirties and Further Developments' (61 pages), where the stars are the 'Dertigers', the Louws, Uys Krige and Elisabeth Eybers, and then Ernst van Heerden and D.J. Opperman. 'The Sixties and Contemporary Literature' (76 pages) follows, where the stars are Etienne Leroux, André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, Antjie Krog, Sheila Cussons and Wilma Stockenström.

The interest and energy of this *History* lie in the accounts of the work of individual authors. Kannemeyer writes so as to make one want to read further the work of particular writers. He seems to me particularly engaged with Opperman, Peter Blum and Antjie Krog; there are points at which his kind of explication comes alive, more often with poetry, in my impression, than with prose fiction. The English versions of a number of poems in the text make the book a small illustrative anthology of Afrikaans poetry. In this respect the *History* may serve well as a reader's guide, alphabetically indexed according to author; the literary historical explanation is comparatively straightforward (managing without reference to romanticism or modernism), as is the social explanation. So, for example, in Kannemeyer's account of Cape society after Dutch settlement

> ...there were two parallel groups in the society from a relatively early stage: officials, serving only in a temporary capacity, whose lifestyle and conventions came direct from Europe, and free burghers, who began to develop along their own lines as they adapted to local circumstances, and gradually became less dependent on Europe in social and cultural terms.

In *Die Groot Afrikaanse Woordeboek* 'Afrika' is defined as 'Die groot wêrelddeel wat ten suide van Europa geleë is', but the Africa-Europe relationship might have made a leitmotif for this history. Kannemeyer (or his translator) renders *Die Afrikaanse Patriot* as 'The Afrikaans Patriot', but the ambiguity of 'Afrikaans' (both 'van... Afrika' and 'van... die blanke bevolkingsdeel van Suid-Afrika wat afstam van die Nederlanders...' at least makes 'The African Patriot' a possibility. In *Die Afrikaanse Volkslied*, Pannevis and others wrote 'Ons woon op Afrikaanse strand', and Hoogenhout's 'Ons Toekomstige Volkslied' relies on a contrast between 'Europa' and 'Afrika', as does J.R.L. van Bruggen's sonnet 'Aan die graf van 'n onbekende boerseun in Vlaandere'. Perhaps this tension continues at least until the Sestigers.

It pains me to record my judgment that J.C. Kannemeyer has not been well served by his translator, his editor (if he had the services of a publisher's editor), his proof-reader, and hence his publisher. Starting with the absolute and ambiguous opening sentence ('This book is the first work to contain a complete description of the history of Afrikaans literature in English') and continuing particularly in the first half of the book, there are enough errors and opportunities lost to regret that the work has not been more professionally done. N.P. van Wyk Louw's 'Die Beiteltjie' which gives the *History* its cover and a kind of sub-title, is a metaphor for art, or language itself, which, in a binary split, opens up a whole alternative

reality. The stark binarism of this phase of van Wyk Louw's poetry may not be quite what the new South Africa is looking for, but readers of English will be grateful to Kannemeyer for opening up Afrikaans literature in this way.

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***Alan G. Morris, The Skeletons of Contact*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, 1992**

The only useful thing to have emerged from that loathsome disease of intellectual life known as postmodernism - this bug has many guises but can usually be diagnosed by the indiscriminate use of the prefix 'post', as in poststructuralist, postmarxist, postfeminist, and so on - is the notion that writing embraces more than just the graphic representation of the spoken word. In anthropology, where the effects of the 'post' contagion have been particularly nasty, this one redeeming feature of a renewed attention to writing in its many aspects seems to have survived the ravages of the disease. Theory in social anthropology has become dominated by writing about writing, and where this is not self-indulgent it has led to some interesting and fruitful research.

In physical anthropology things are a little different. On the one hand it has been less prone to infection by the postmodern malaise but on the other hand its practitioners seem not to have woken to the possibilities of rethinking their subject in the metaphors of writing. After all, is not physical anthropology the study of that most essential form of writing, namely the inscriptions that time has made on our very flesh and bones? There is however a curious lack of sophistication in the theorising of physical anthropology, and this is made all the more evident by huge and rapid advances in empirical findings and methodology.

Physical anthropology has to be one of the most exciting sciences of our time. Drawing on the technical advances of genetics, archaeology and statistics, it has developed powerful tools to detect and explain patterns of change in the physical characteristics of human populations. We can for instance soon expect to know with a high degree of accuracy exactly when and