

The Rediscovery of the Ordinary— Remarks about a Literary Debate in South Africa

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I

As early as 1967 Lewis Nkosi, in his essay 'Fiction by Black South African Authors', remarked that in most literary texts produced by black authors 'the journalistic fact parade[s] outrageously as imaginative literature' (Nkosi 1981:222). What results from this, in his view, is that the 'social facts' are not, or only superficially, transcribed or transformed into the appropriately literary shape of 'artistically persuasive works of fiction' (Nkosi 1981:222). Considering the writers Nkosi is referring to in his essay—among others he mentions the names of authors as important as Alex La Guma, Richard Rive or Ezekiel Mphahlele—his statement is somewhat too acerbic. However, what vents itself here is a certain dissatisfaction with a specific kind of South African *écriture* that years later was taken to task by John M. Coetzee in quite a similar vein for its 'refusal to create a structure in which there is some centre of intelligence' (Coetzee n.d.). It must be granted that in his case the criticism seems to be levelled, with perhaps more justification than in the previous case, at some of the black authors of the Seventies, such as Sipho Sepamla and Wally Serote with their Soweto novels *A Ride on the Whirlwind* and *To Every Birth Its Blood*. From roughly the mid-Eighties onwards Njabulo Ndebele, in his dual capacity as creative writer as well as literary critic, has joined this debate with a number of articles and lectures that, in 1991, were collected under the title *Rediscovery of the Ordinary. Essays on South African Literature and Culture*. One of Ndebele's most incisive remarks reads as follows:

Literature appears not to have found a place in the development of contemporary African culture in South Africa. Instead [...] literature has located itself in the field of politics. And it has done so without discovering and defining the basis of its integrity as an art form. Its form, therefore, has not developed, since to be fictional or poetic was to be political (Ndebele 1991:85).

The result of this, according to Ndebele, is 'a literature of surface meanings' (Ndebele 1991:35) where the roles of oppressor and oppressed are assigned on the basis of the all-too-well known political circumstances, where the divide between justice and injustice, right or wrong is demarcated, purely along racial lines, between Black and White, and where the actors in a narrative are *a priori* defined in terms of their assumed political orientation. Thus they can be used as so many pawns in the novelistic game of chess, the inevitable result of which is predetermined from the outset. All of this, of course, happens with the avowed purpose of 'bearing witness to, and telling about, South Africa' (Attwell 1993:11).

The self-imposed limitations inherent in this expressive ('bearing witness') or referential ('telling about') realism vis-à-vis a reality that is, indeed, worthy of being critically exposed on all counts, have remained a constant feature of South African fiction, as David Attwell has rightly observed, whether in the white liberal tradition that began with Olive Schreiner and reached its apogee with the radical liberalism of Nadine Gordimer, or whether in the black tradition that extends from the elegiac protest of Sol Plaatje to the militant radicalism of the 'literature of liberation' in the Sixties and Seventies (cf. Attwell 1993:12). The very fact that South African literature in English has always tended to be the more or less direct representation of political concepts in the shape of literary characters plus their actions and milieus may be due to its being, after all, a 'minor literature' in the sense formulated by Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. In their essay *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* these two authors, in drawing on the example of the German-speaking Jews in the Prague of the days of the Austro-Hungarian empire, have described what the 'deterritorialized' use of a 'great' language by a linguistic minority that is removed from the actual centre where the language has originated is capable of leading to. The parallels with South Africa are there to grasp:

In them [the minor literatures] everything is political. In the 'great' literatures, particular instances (the individual concerns of the members of a family or the problems in a marriage etc.) have the tendency to be linked with other individual matters, with the social milieu serving as a kind of general framework or backdrop This is completely different from what goes on in a 'minor' literature: There the narrowness of its space has the effect that each individual problem is directly related to politics. The individual event thus becomes all the more relevant and indispensable, becomes blown up out of all proportion, and it gets, as it were, put under the microscope, in order for it to be made to stand for a totally different story. (Deleuze & Guattari 1975:25; a.t.)

In other words: Normally the literariness of literature, its 'aesthetic surplus'—in the sense of Theodor Adorno—is supposed to reside in its particularising resistance to the trite universality of that which is conceptual. Form, again invoking Adorno's testimony, therefore is what establishes the autonomy of art *vis-à-vis* that which is merely given (Adorno 1970:10f). Aesthetic form thus is a differential term because of its contingent, i.e. unforeseeable, deviation from any conceptual or referential norm. The very opposite applies in a minor literature where the aesthetic particularity of literature is constantly made subservient to the generally accepted conceptuality of political alignment, which in turn becomes the measure of its worth.

It is small wonder that 'writing black' (Richard Rive) should, in the face of the mimetic constraints implicit in the avowed aim of 'bearing witness', should have been predominantly autobiographical, whether it be in the shape of coming to terms with the indignities and humiliation inflicted on individuals by apartheid, or the experience of exile, or the representation of political resistance in the 'literature of combat' (Watts 1989:17). This tendency applies to prose writing and poetry alike.

The damage inflicted on literature through this political instrumentalisation—'literature as a weapon in the struggle' is an ever-recurring metaphor—has been considerable, as Albie Sachs has noted in his article 'Preparing ourselves for freedom', which was initially written as an ANC in-house positional paper. There he states:

In the first place it [the political instrumentalisation] results in an impoverishment of our art. Instead of getting real criticism, we get solidarity criticism. Our artists are not pushed to improve the quality of their work. It is enough to be politically correct The range of themes is narrowed down so that all that is funny or genuinely tragic in the world is extruded. Ambiguity or contradiction are completely shut out, and the only conflict permitted is that between the old and the new, as if there were only bad in the past and good in the future (Sachs 1990:21).

What gets formulated here in negative terms, as that which is deplored as missing, is—put positively—the credo of all struggle literature, or as Michael Chapman, one of its advocates, has put it: 'the authority of experience, rather than its transformation into the art object, has become the real locus of power' (Chapman 1988/1989:14). Somewhat maliciously Gareth Cornwell has summarised the consequences to be drawn from this absolute supremacy of the political over the aesthetic as follows: 'bad writing on an important subject was more important than good writing on non-revolutionary subjects' (Cornwell 1990:28). Given such a horizon of expectation, any kind of literature that does not fulfil these referential requirements, such as J.M.

Coetzee's postmodern novel *Foe* with its plot that can only be related to the South African situation in a highly oblique or allegorical fashion, gets dismissed offhand, again citing Chapman, as 'a kind of masturbatory release ... from the Europeanising dreams of an intellectual coterie' (quoted after Cornwell 1990:29).

II

In summing up the preceding debate, the scene presents itself as follows: Translated into the terminology of the Prague school of semiotics, all this means that in most South African literary texts, especially in those produced by black authors, the aesthetic function of language recedes into the background or is subordinated to the pragmatic as well as communicative functions of linguistic utterance. Or to put it in terms of insights provided by the new discipline of systems theory: This kind of literature lives by and from its 'external or outward referentiality' in that it is mimetically focused on the reality 'out there' which it is charged with faithfully rendering. By contrast its 'self-referentiality', which can be variously defined as the insistence on the 'specific obstinacy of the aesthetic' (Habermas) or its artistically contrived form or its linguistic opaqueness resulting from this or its innovatory use of the various secondary linguistic codes literature is made up of, all this gets played down almost completely. In the Barthesian sense most South African writers therefore tend to be '*écrivants*' who use language for some ulterior purpose such as conveying a political message, as opposed to '*écrivains*' for whom language is an end in itself (Barthes 1964:151-153).

Depending on the aesthetic as well as political premises brought into play, this state of affairs can be welcomed or deplored, as the case may be. Accordingly, self-referentiality can be seen as something to be desired, as in Albie Sachs' insistence on literature's integrity as an art form, or as something to be rejected, as in Chapman's charge of literature's 'masturbatory' tendencies of looking in on itself and playing its own game (with itself). Conversely, external reference can be positively regarded as the inalienable and indispensable 'truth of experience' on the one hand, or negatively as the obligation to be 'politically correct' that is the bane of artistic creation on the other.

Putting this South African context in a wider perspective, one soon realises that what is here being discussed as a totally new phenomenon is not so new, after all. On the contrary, the same process can be observed in other *Third World Literatures*—I am using this term without the universalising meaning bestowed upon it by Fredric Jameson: In *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said has developed a sequential model of 'decolonizing cultural resistance' (Said 1993:259) that in quite a number of ways refers back to Frantz Fanon's 'symbolic reversal' attendant upon any cultural emancipation, but it is more precise in elucidating the early stages of this

process that he defines as follows: 'Local slave narratives, spiritual autobiographies, prison memoirs form a counterpoint to the Western Powers' monumental histories' (Said 1993:260). It would seem that Black South African literature still finds itself in such an early stage, and taking into account its preoccupation with 'bearing witness' it becomes evident that this is the first literary manifestation of a developing literary counter-discourse from which more is to follow in the subsequent stages.

There are other parallels with the wider context of *Third World Aesthetics*: All over the African continent literature as struggle literature or literature of protest forms an integral part of the political project of decolonization. Accordingly Chinweizu et al. formulate their 'nativist' political aesthetics as the task 'to systematically destroy all encrustations of colonial and slave mentality' (Chinweizu et al. 1) Chidi Amuta in his turn defines an 'aesthetics of resistance' as 'a reactive stance towards major historical experiences ... as slavery, colonialism, cultural emasculation, political corruption, apartheid, class antagonism and imperialism' (Amuta 1989:81). Put more succinctly, the whole purpose of this enterprise is the emancipation of the marginalised and suppressed history of the colonised from the sway of a dominant European master narrative. It has become an act of 'writing oneself back into history' (Gugelberger 582).

Again widening the perspective beyond the immediate concerns of postcolonial writing, it soon becomes evident that an emancipatory struggle literature is nothing but a variant of *littérature engagée*, or to use the classical formula of Jean-Paul Sartre: '*L'écrivain "engagé" sait que la parole est action: il sait que dévoiler c'est changer et qu'on ne peut dévoiler qu'en projetant de changer*' (Sartre 30). Accordingly Sartre postulates a use of language that, in a centrifugal movement, is directed outward to address the world of objects, as opposed to a centripetal closing in upon itself of language that, in his view, amounts to 'a sickness of the words': '*Appeler un chat un chat*' (Sartre 341)—this is the proper way of writing. There are certain affinities of this definition with a Marxist aesthetics according to which literature is conceived of as a social practice geared to expressing or implementing specific class interests. Another classical formulation of *engagement*, translated into English as 'commitment' or 'alignment', has been supplied by Raymond Williams: 'Alignment ... is no more than a recognition of specific men in specific (and in Marxist terms class) relations to specific situations and experiences' (Williams 1976:199). Seen in such a wider context, the present South African literary debate is nothing but a re-enactment of the Twenties debate between Brecht and Lukács as to which kind of literature is best suited to further the advance of legitimate social interests. In other words: We are dealing with the conflict between realism and symbolism, and it all boils down to the question as to which of both *écritures* is the one that can be negatively defined as being affirmative and ideological or which, conversely, carries the positive charge of being truly revolutionary.

The argument in favour of 'social realism' mainly derives its momentum from the opprobrium of literature having severed all its ties with socio-political experience, which process began and eventually culminated in the nineteenth century. This has been variously described by critics as different as Michel Foucault and Raymond Williams: For the former it takes the form of '*un retour du langage*', i.e. a self-sufficient, opaque linguistic artistry that is only there for its own sake and which, according to Foucault, is ideally embodied in the writings of Mallarmé; for the latter 'the superior reality of art' that is capable of transcending the trivia of social determinants is a result of Romanticism. Culture, or the sphere of the aesthetic, thus becomes divorced from the social sphere, in the process becoming an autonomous or even autotelic entity whose sole concern is with socially abstract human values or with language, or as Terry Eagleton has put it: 'art is thereby conveniently sequestered from all other social practices, to become an isolated enclave within which the dominant order can find an ideal refuge from its own values of competitiveness, exploitation and material possession' (Eagleton 1990:9).

A Marxist inspired social realism, by contrast, is diametrically opposed to such a bourgeois ideology of the utter self-sufficiency of art in insisting on the social relevance as well as referentiality of art: 'Because [Marxism is an] attempt to understand literature in relation to society, [it is] ... a form of social "realism" or materialism' (Brantlinger 1990:70). Seen as such, literature is concerned with exposing existing power structures, it is imbued with what Habermas has termed 'an emancipatory a priori' (Habermas 1972:28). This applies, as Patrick Brantlinger has argued, specifically to the Third World Writer who more often than not has recourse to a realist *écriture*: 'a critical social realism or mimetic representation can be critical of the very sources of cultural and political authority' (Brantlinger 1990:156). This is precisely what most black South African writers are concerned with, since to castigate and expose certain abuses takes absolute precedence over the imaginative transcendence of reality (cf. Nkosi 1981:77ff).

However, by way of complicating matters, the other side, i.e. those in favour of a self-reflexive, symbolist kind of writing, can equally as well charge realism with playing, however unwillingly, along with the existing order, thereby getting itself ensnared in an ideological aporia. In this view any kind of realist *écriture* effects nothing but an affirmative perpetuation of reality such as it exists, which is of course itself an ideological construct, even though the content and intention of the realist texts involved may openly proclaim their critical attitude: 'Realist texts ... may attack social injustices, but reinforce the structures of the real by treating them as inescapable, without alternative' (Brantlinger 1990:166). In other words: The literary grammar of realism with its constituents of character, action and milieu, which is largely in line with the linear logic of conventional sentence syntax—moving from subject via predicate to object—is ultimately the encoding of bourgeois agency in its

relationship with the surrounding world, which according to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is a rather illusory or erroneous way of conceptualising a universe that is utterly contingent. It is therefore, however unconsciously, an 'ideology of form', as Fredric Jameson (1989:76) has put it, that is fundamentally anti-revolutionary.

But apart from the ideological content inherent in what we normally perceive as an innocently transparent way of rendering what goes on in the world, it is ever since the insights provided first by Saussure and much later the Deconstructivists that we can no longer assume language to be the mirror of an extralinguistic reality simply existing 'out there'. Due to the materiality of language and its internal workings as a symbolic system, what we perceive as reality is not an unmediated object of mimetic representation or the uncontaminated well-spring of individual experience. These basic assumptions underlying what has come to be called 'expressive realism' (Belsey 1980:11) has been rendered null and void by the insight into the materiality as well as self-reflexivity of language, which goes a long way towards disproving the validity of essentialising terms like 'truth' and 'experience' that most of the struggle writers constantly invoke. The literary reality thus represented as being utterly true is therefore only the tautological copy of that copy which, as Roland Barthes (1970:61) argues, our ideological and conventionalised perception of reality deludes us into taking for the real real in the first place. In spite of all his professed love for truthfulness the realist author thus succumbs to the danger of putting up an unwarranted 'resistance to new meanings and new ways of analyzing the world' (Belsey 1980:46), a project which can only be achieved as a result of new constellations of, and correlations between, signifiers and signifieds, i.e. new literary codes. Or as Adorno has put it: Literature has to free itself from 'the heteronomy of representation' by resorting to 'the unfettering of its aesthetic forces of production', which would be a way of anticipating the unfettering of such forces in material terms (Adorno 1970:56). There are resonances of this in Njabulo Ndebele's demand that South African literature 'should probe beyond the observable facts, to reveal new worlds where it was previously thought they did not exist, to reveal process and movement where they were hidden' (Ndebele 1991:72).

III

Let us summarise at this stage: Depending on one's perspective either position can claim to be emancipatory or revolutionary, just as much one can blame either for being complicit with reactionary ideologies. This means that 'neither realism nor avant-garde is "intrinsically progressive"' (Hoyles 1982:47) because just as little as it is possible to determine the immanent measure of a text's 'literariness' can one

abstractly gauge the potential for political and social change any kind of literature might possess.

Both styles of writing are therefore equally ideological because they are culturally determined forms of representing reality, and both are equally political because, in truly dialectical fashion, even the most apolitical text that seems far removed from any concern with reality at all is the manifestation of a 'political unconscious' (Jameson 1981:1989) that prevents it from being politically explicit. In numerous of his brilliant formulations Adorno has insisted on both the aesthetic autonomy and the social involvement of art in general and literature in particular, of which the following seems most pertinent to the matter in hand: 'There is nothing in art, not even in its most sublimated form, that is not of this world; nothing of this, however, remains untransformed' (Adorno 1970:209). If we conclude from what has been said so far that there exist no intrinsic criteria for the social involvement of art and that, conversely, art is political precisely because of its seeming autonomy, then Tony Bennett's dictum applies: 'different literary political strategies might be appropriate in different historical contexts or in relation to different groups of readers' (Bennett 1982:226). Thus placing the literary text in its social context, it becomes relevant for the sociologist of literature to ask 'why and when ... an over-emphasis of form comes about, and when and for what reason it became literature's major concern how textual representations could best be made to mirror as realistically as possible the world, i.e. society' (Jaeggi 1972:78; a.t.).

In this way the apparent essentialism of opposing our two kinds of writing becomes historically relative: It was especially in the early stages of South African literature, which we have already referred to, that the realist *écriture* fulfilled an important part in setting up a counter-discourse to white hegemony. What was at stake in this case was to acquaint a white readership, who were often ignorant of the hardships Africans had to endure in their country, with the prevailing state of affairs. The appeal of this literature could be summarised as: 'Look at what you've done to us.' Somewhat later, when the addressees were largely black, the message was geared to bring about a process of conscientisation, according to the formula: 'Look at what they are constantly doing to us.' In order to get across both of these messages, which are somehow complementary, a realistic kind of writing was best equipped because, through representing aspects of reality that were familiar to writer and reader alike, an interface between text and context could be created that made it possible to view the context in the light of the message propagated by the text, and vice versa.

This greatly facilitated the communication about the context because, as Hans Robert Jauss has put it, 'especially recognisably familiar situations that he is constantly involved in' enable the reader aesthetically to distance himself from the constraints of everyday life and critically question their justification (Jauss 1982:33f). At the same time it is the linear logic of realist narration with its reliable time-space

co-ordinates that enhances the communication between text and reader. In modernist or postmodernist types of writing with their confusing discontinuities this kind of understanding would have to be established by the reader at great pains and against numerous resistances put up by the text.

Beyond this it has to be borne in mind that for a long time in English South African literature, whether it be by white or black authors, the realist narrative mode was the only one available because experimental Anglo-American forms of literature were a long time in taking root at the periphery. Equally it must be conceded that in an early 'imitative' phase of postcolonial emancipation, as Fanon has argued, the harkening back to an earlier indigenous tradition like oral literature usually does not yet occur because this belongs to a later stage of development. Patrick Brantlinger has aptly summarised the advantages of realism in a postcolonial situation as follows: 'The people need realism; the people are realistic; realistic forms of narrative are more apt to be popular than those based on abstruse, rarefied aesthetic theories' (Brantlinger 1990:169).

What also has to be taken into consideration is the fact that the much criticized 'artlessness' or 'lack of refinement' on the part of black writers was not just due to the unavailability of more 'refined' literary models or certain mimetic constraints. It rather seems that this *écriture* was a conscious transformation of European realism, especially in its variant of 'liberal realism' with its predominant interest in individuals fulfilling their own potential. Lewis Nkosi has once remarked that for Blacks in South Africa kafkaesque situations do not have to be invented because they are already part and parcel of their everyday experience. Accordingly the free unfolding of a person's human potential liberal realism makes so much of for them is only available in its negative form of anomy and the struggle to overcome this situation. But in addition to this experiential argument which is based on the assumption of there existing a thematic homology between text and context, one could adduce a valuable insight provided by some sociologists of literature (cf. Link 1980:378-385; Bourdieu 1992:249-292). According to them certain kinds of *écriture* are not developed or employed because of their natural affinities with the prevailing sentiment or spirit of a particular epoch or class. More often than not they are used just because, within a spectrum of available literary styles, the ones predominantly employed are contaminated by their associations with particular class interests. Following this line of reasoning the 'artless' literary realism as evolved by black writers, along with the binarism underlying their unequivocal plots and the abundance of details taken directly from the everyday milieu, consciously sets itself off against the established literary discourse of liberal realism with its 'artful' characterisations and the complex psychological and social causalities of its plots as used by white writers.

IV

However, having said this, it becomes obvious to what an extent any kind of political struggle literature requires some sort of opposition as its *raison d'être*, and that this kind of literature gets into trouble once it has lost its opponent, such as seems to have happened in the 'new' South Africa. At such a juncture one cannot help realising the extent to which—in the 'old' South Africa—the social subsystems of politics and literature were inextricably entwined, again to invoke the terminology of systems theory. Because of this, the literary system, which under normal circumstances is more or less exclusively concerned with following its own internal rules, is press-ganged into fulfilling an additional function within the socio-political sphere, its avowed aims being the 'instruction' or 'conscientization' targeted at a specific political group's supporters, or the 'diffamation' of the political opponent, and such like. What gets disregarded under these circumstances is the fact that the subsystem of politics and literature use totally different binary codes for their respective ways of generating meaning: The code employed by politics is 'power' (in the sense of having or not having it); the code relevant for literature is the difference between 'beautiful' vs. 'ugly' or 'interesting' vs. 'boring'. It is evident that these two codes give rise to vastly different sequential operations: In politics these are geared to maintaining the possession of power, in literature to safeguarding a continuous level of aesthetic beauty or interest.

For as long as the black majority in South Africa was oppressed and was not in possession of institutionalised political power, literature as a kind of Ersatz-medium was called upon to serve an important socio-political function, and it was produced and read because it was an indispensable way of voicing the Blacks' discontent with the state of affairs prevailing at the time. It was thus a form of political opposition. In the meantime, however, under the new dispensation in the political power game the political demands of the majority have to, and more importantly can be, processed via the proper constitutional channels set in place for that purpose. Under such circumstances it is no longer sufficient for literature to be politically correct and opposed to the system in order to assert its relevance. This new state of affairs in many ways resembles what happened in the ex-communist states in Eastern Europe, or to formulate it again in the terms of systems theory:

The differentiation between politics and literature leads to the reduction of functional redundancy or crossing of boundaries between the two subsystems. From now on the opposition is handled by the institutionalised opposition. Literature therefore has to go in search of its own proper function—it is no longer the political orientation that determines the 'value' of a text, but rather its aesthetic qualities as 'pure' literature. This does not necessarily mean that, on a secondary level, literature cannot serve a

political function, since literary texts, after all, are inscribed within the larger context of political communication (Plumpe 1993:22; a.t.).

Or, as the followers of the Prague school of semiotics put it, who always insisted on literature having, besides its aesthetic function, a communicative or practical one: The practical function must always be dominated or controlled by the aesthetic one in order for art to qualify as art.

V

This begs the question what an 'autonomous' literature is to look like in the South African context or, in other words, in which direction the 'freed imagination' invoked by Njabulo Ndebele and Albie Sachs is to lead. Njabulo Ndebele has submitted a whole catalogue of supposedly 'new' but in reality quite old themes for literature to deal with, which has gained him André Brink's charge that his sole concern is with purely thematic instead of aesthetic issues (Brink 14):

Will I like my daughter's boyfriends or prospective husbands? how do I deal with my attraction to my friend's wife? what will my child become? Relatives can be a nuisance; someone I despise has a better car than mine; the principal is messing up the school, I am going to try to be the next principal. The list is endless (Ndebele 1991:53).

Through thus listing the assumed thematic preoccupation of a small black bourgeoisie he tends to universalise class-specific interests by reducing them to their common 'human' denominator, thus excluding the problems of a dispossessed and disadvantaged black proletariat. In any case, a 'new' South African literature cannot just rest content with rediscovering and wallowing in such 'delights of ordinary life'; to use a formula coined by Thomas Mann.

Where this journey of rediscovery might be capable of leading to becomes a bit clearer when we take a look at the authors whom Ndebele considers to be exemplary of a new kind of writing: Michael Siluma, Bheki Maseko and Joël Matlou. It is precisely the latter's collection of short stories bearing the title of *Life at Home and Other Stories* which goes to show that the discovery of new themes can and must be concomitant with a new narrative style. One single short passage may serve to illustrate this: 'I never slept on the road during the night because I knew that female animals would rape me continuously. I didn't want to father an animal child' (Matlou 1991:34). This short passage goes to confirm what Dorothy Driver has said about Matlou: 'he has written the "ordinary" in a way which extends, rather than conforms to, the critic's [Ndebele's] decree' (Driver 1992:117).

It thus becomes obvious that, whereas Ndebele seems to have developed his ideas along the lines of liberal realism, Matlou seems to have taken a direction that shows numerous parallels with the African tradition of oral narrative such as Amos Tutuola's *Palm-Wine Drinkard* or Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. This trend seems to confirm Fanon's three-stage model whereby after an imitative phase of cultural development there inevitably ensues a phase of retrospectively reactivating almost forgotten indigenous art forms. However, in addition to this and looking ahead, such a development seems to be in line with the hybrid conditions obtaining in many other postcolonial societies, or to use Homi K. Bhabha's formula:

the margins of the nation displace the centre; the people of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis 'Magical realism' after the Latin American Boom becomes the literary language of the emergent post-colonial world (Bhabha 1990:7).

This statement is reminiscent of Albie Sachs' recommendation, issued at the famous Victoria Falls conference 'Writers meet the ANC', that Latin American magical realism might conceivably be the suitable literary model to be adopted by a 'new' South Africa with its numerous ethnic groups and its equally as numerous conflicting constructions of reality (cf. Coetzee & Polley 1990:197ff). This would run counter to the monological tendencies inherent in European realist writing where a unified perception of reality is allied to a simplistically linear concept of time and its corresponding sense of causality. By contrast, magical realism lives by the dialogical or plurivocal concert of competing or coexisting realities as well as the achronicities and acausalities resulting therefrom. Put differently, South African literature—whether by white or black authors—had so far been caught up in the Lacanian '*fascination spéculaire*' of the mirror-stage where the self only can obtain its identity via negatively defining itself against the other, in which process it became at the same time alienated from itself.

It is to be hoped that South African society as well as its literature can now enter into the more 'mature' symbolic stage where—beyond the narrow confines of binary oppositions—all the cultural groups are capable of living together under the protection of the requisite legal and societal mechanisms, or as Albie Sachs has put it rather idealistically: 'Black is beautiful, Brown is beautiful, White is beautiful' (Sachs 1990:27). Correspondingly, what Edward Said has demanded from all postcolonial societies is 'another way of telling' (Said 1990:259) whose characteristics are given as follows: 'innately ambiguous, hence negative and anti-narrativist', which narrative style alone is capable of doing justice to 'the exilic, the marginal, subjective, migratory energies of modern life' (Said 1994:259). Incidentally, such a decentred kind of writing is not only adequate for the *condition*

postcoloniale in particular but also for the *condition postmoderne* in general, which is proof of the fact that the different kinds of worlds—first, second and third—are beginning to become merged in one single hybrid world.

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