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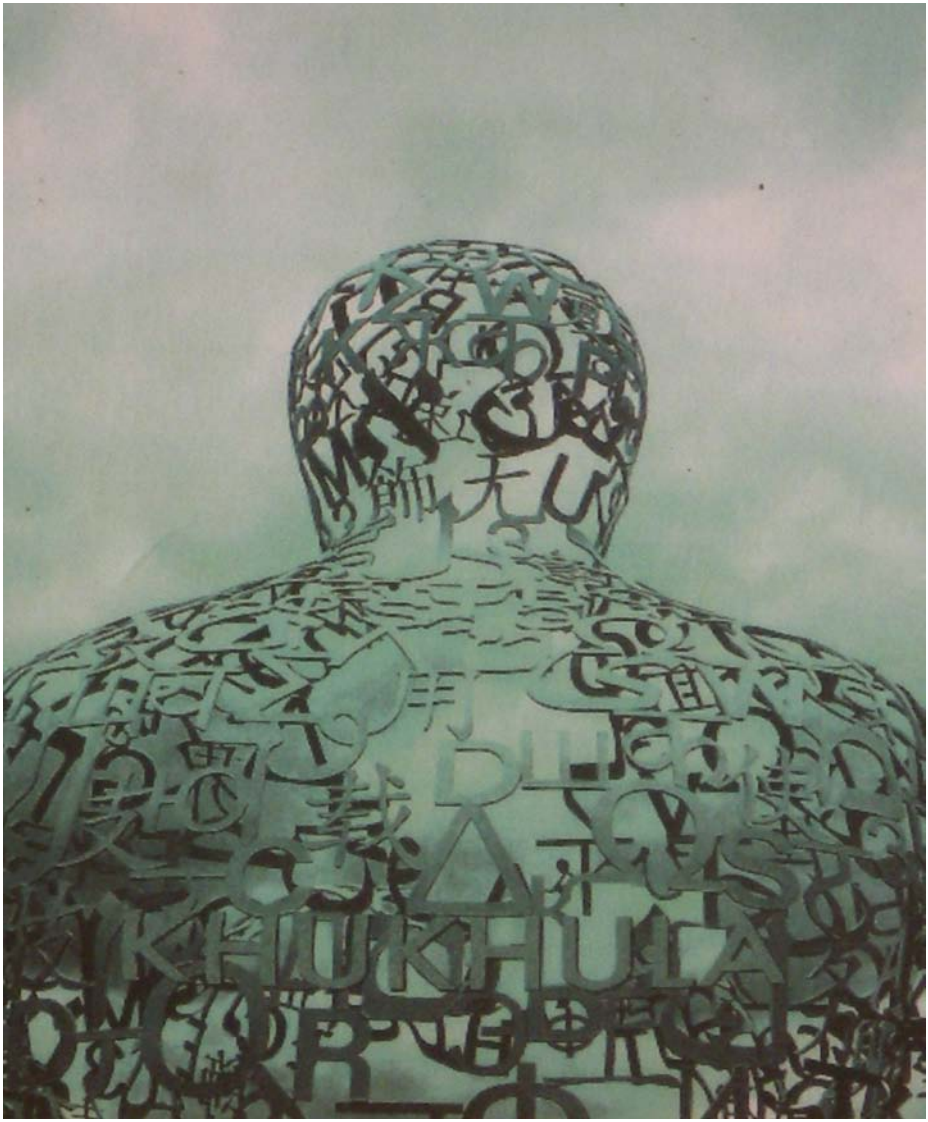

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Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa

Literature, Language and Cultural Politics

Guest Editors
Jabulani Mkhize, Corinne Sandwith and Shane Moran

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CSSALL
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Introduction

Jabulani Mkhize,
Corinne Sandwith and
Shane Moran

> We are in dire need of dedicated, patriotic and action-oriented young intellectuals who will contribute to building the kind of prosperous and successful society we envisage (Jacob Zuma, University of KwaZulu-Natal SRC awards ceremony, 07/05/2005).

This edition of *Alternation* consists of essays that were submitted without any pre-determined theme or topic. Something along the lines of the ubiquitous 'culture and politics' was the proffered remit given to numerous enquiries. It soon became clear that three lines of enquiry were emerging around questions of language, literature and cultural politics. The history of the journal and its reputation undoubtedly played a part in attracting certain contributors. Part of this history is, in addition to the standard refereeing procedure, the policy of providing detailed critiques and constructive suggestions to first time authors unfamiliar with the conventions of the academic essay. The positive result of this ethos is that new voices are brought into the academic arena on a continuous basis, and hopefully new perspectives too.

Looking over this edition, the variety of the essays—their subject matter and their mode of address—is striking. This is as it should be in a context where academic debate is marked by radically different priorities and perspectives. In this sense the apparent unevenness of the following

assemblage of essays is itself a reflection of the discordant nature of intellectual enquiry in a society scarred by a racialised past and the persisting legacy of massive inequalities. What does it mean to study and write about language, literature and cultural politics in such a fraught context? Or even to participate in the niceties of academic discourse at all? While no context ever saturates completely, the singularity of the post-apartheid context has left its imprimatur on the current edition. Such is one of the benefits of withholding any binding editorial consensus that would filter out or massage contributions in accordance with some presiding view-point. At best flickering points of affinity between the various contributors emerge, briefly, only to withdraw leaving the impression of an emerging horizon of interpretation.

For example, particularly notable is an implicit tradition that sees the connection between the aesthetic and the reconciliation of necessity and freedom. Exploration of the nature of the literary and the nature of politically engaged literature evidences the continuity of debates around the relevance of literature and literary studies. While the institutional aspect of this crisis is often allowed to recede into the background, the stakes in terms of the interrogation of meaning and the imperative of critical engagement with moral and political issues remain very much to the fore. At the immediate level this nexus of concerns indicates both continuity with the past and a renewed attempt to reflect on the process of reading and interpretation in a post-apartheid context. What the literary foregrounds are the ways of (mis)reading that are not restricted to the literature found on library shelves or served up on the internet. The act of reading overflows the written text, and involves dispute over meaning and hermeneutic authority. What is tied up with this activity is what is at the same time secured by it: the legitimacy of the intellectual engaging in the networks of the academic market-place.

Whether concerned with the minutiae of the canonical text or the fine grain of political analysis, the legitimacy of the academic writer is put into play. Thus each contributor to this edition engages either consciously or inadvertently with the issue of the function of intellectuals and the nature of cultural criticism. This does not mean that all authors take, or should take, a position on the usefulness or relevance of their work. Still less does it entail reading into every text a political position, not least for the simple reason

that if everything is political then nothing is political. This applies as much to an analysis of South Africa and Africa and black political thought as to a report and reflection on teaching poetry. At the minimum, each contributor included here adopts the posture of principled critic contributing to scholarly debate which is also a form of public engagement, however circumscribed its audience and limited its immediate effects.

With this in mind, the reader of the following essays cannot but be aware of the lack of any sense of intellectual community between the various writers. One can speculate that the eclectic bias of the editors and the range of interests and foci make such dissonance inevitable. Perhaps. But beyond an operative commitment to truth and a vague sense of justice indicative of liberal scholarship, this diversity is itself very much a product of history. Not only of the wider post-apartheid moment—which in its stratifications and overlapping currents requires careful delineation—but also of the shifting nature of South African academic discourse. For not only has there been a shuffling of personnel, but also a merging of institutions that has mainly impacted upon former historically black universities that have been swallowed by their generally more powerful historically white neighbours. What has been swept away and what has been uncovered is only now becoming visible. Even within the newly emerged entities a range of distinct intellectual traditions exist uneasily side by side and have not yet fused into one offspring.

We wish to acknowledge this diversity and observe that, while it may not yet amount to anything more that a bare, functional unity in diversity, it does indicate a critical mix that may yet produce great things. A modest step in this direction is to gather these various voices together, inevitably jostling each other, and allow the reader to experience not only the impediments of our present disjuncture but also, hopefully, its creative potential.

If this collection of essays bears the marks of a particular post-apartheid moment, it is equally a product of the peculiar dynamics and tensions of the postcolony. This is registered most clearly in a sense of disquiet and unease, a noticeable circumspection about what can be claimed, a cautious rather than an overtly polemical academic pose and a variety of articles in which the work of the intellectual comes under troubled scrutiny. A further measure of this unease is suggested perhaps by the comparatively

small number of articles devoted to literary-cultural critique. Another is the turn to the past, whether it be to the resources of traditional African epistemologies, the contributions of African intellectuals such as Anton Lembede and John Langalibelele Dube or the work of white literary critics in the 1940s. Evincing a similar sense of disquiet are those studies which revisit more contemporary academic exchanges, in particular those which touch on the ethics and effects of intellectual enquiry itself. Interestingly, of all those exploring avenues beyond intimations of the dead ends of post-apartheid society, only one contributor has exploited the experience of other postcolonial countries such as Kenya and Tanzania.

As this collection also illustrates, a further source of disquiet in the post-apartheid context are the questions of language and pedagogy, in particular the dominance of English over other indigenous languages. That these questions continue to exercise South African scholars in the present is testament not only to how little real movement there has been on this issue, but also to the impasse between academic reflection and government policy-making. At a recent meeting between the ANC and South African academics, ANC President Jacob Zuma called for a more direct engagement between government policy-makers and the intelligentsia, suggesting perhaps a greater commitment on the part of government to take seriously the work of South African academics. Coming after a period in which academics have largely been relegated to the backwaters of political influence, this may suggest one way in which to renew a sense of intellectual and political purpose and to claim an audience beyond the confines of academia.

In the first essay in this collection, Brian Fulela revisits Jacques Derrida's meditation on apartheid, its critique by Rob Nixon and Anne McClintock, Derrida's response to that criticism, and more recent interpretations of that dispute. At issue is an understanding of the nature of apartheid and the role of intellectuals. Digging beneath the scars of polemic, Fulela analyses the various refusals to read enacted by the disputants that point to the lasting stakes of this exchange. These include not only the nature of apartheid, but also the question of historical context and the likely political effect of intellectual production. South Africa—demonized, sealed in its exceptionalism, or elevated as symptomatological exemplar—is seen to be at the centre of motivated interpretations that bring to the fore the

question of the ethics of discussion. How this is related to postcolonial theory and the political consequences of deconstruction forms the conclusion.

Corinne Sandwith continues the exploration of the role of the intellectual, the work of cultural critique and the genealogy of South African literary criticism through a contextualized re-reading of the 1940s periodical, *The South African Opinion*. Noteworthy as one of the first South African literary-political journals to engage seriously with South African writing, *The South African Opinion* has significance not only as an early instance of South African canon-formation but also as a key moment in on-going efforts to define a national culture in contexts of dissonance and inequality. To return to the magazine is to unearth some of the shaping values of present-day literary criticism in South Africa; it is also to observe the gradual narrowing of a polyglot political community and its replacement by a liberal consensus. Finally, a re-reading of the journal invites renewed consideration of the social position of the critic, the postures and contexts of critical reflection and the enabling conditions of intellectual production.

Claudia Mamet examines the fictional representation of Durban's Grey Street complex in Imraan Coovadia's novel, *The Wedding* as part of a broader concern with the cultural construction of South African urban Indian space and an on-going interest in the connections between writers, place and identity. Drawing on a productive tension between Foucault's theorization of the rigid urban panopticon and De Certeau's emphasis on the liberating and destabilizing possibilities of city walking, Mamet reads Indian urban space in Coovadia's novel as an inclusive diasporic space, a repository of memory, a cultural 'contact zone' and a crucial means of subverting the 'totalisations' of apartheid rule. In conclusion, Mamet extends her concern with the literary figurations of apartheid urban space to consider the on-going processes of urban re-shaping (and re-naming) in the post-apartheid present.

Thabo Tsehloane's central thrust in his essay is reading the oppositional in South Afircan Black intellectual responses to British imperialism and colonial discourse in general. Tsehloane identifies two strategies of counter-discourse adopted in different historical eras in these responses, the first being the assimilationist option as represented by John Langalibalele Dube based on the notion of faith in universal brotherhood and Anton Mzwakhe Lembede's broader African nationalist option, even as he

interrogates their essentialism. Despite his critique of the modalities of these two phases of anti-colonial discourse, Tsehloane remains curiously optimistic regarding a world in which genuine cosmopolitanism, unsullied by any will to power and desire to dominate, is both possible and feasible.

Taking the analysis of African intellectual traditions in a different direction, Mokong Simon Mapadimeng intervenes in a controversial debate about whether African cultural value-systems are antithetical to socio-economic development. The article takes the form of a critical review of the existing literature and offers a summary of the key positions in the field. Against a view of African epistemologies as inherently conservative, overly reliant on religious explanations and resistant to questioning and change, Mapadimeng highlights an important counter-tradition. Drawing on the arguments of Amato, Sogolo, Wiredu, Hannerz and Hallen he foregrounds some of the conceptual limitations in the former debate, particularly the reliance on a rigidly 'dichotomising' approach, the failure to acknowledge the dynamism, fluidity and complexity of African knowledge-systems and the simplistic conflation of the West with 'modernity' and Africa with 'tradition'.

Shane Moran uncovers connections between metropolitan academic debates concerned with postcoloniality and local institutional politics. The linking thread is the various readings of South Africa and the animus of academic identity politics. In an argument that shuttles between the personal and the political, Moran uncovers questionable presuppositions regarding the nature of the anti-colonial struggle. Moving from heated debates between Benita Parry and Gayatri Spivak, to its aftermath in the polemic between Robert Young and Laura Chrisman, the stakes of identity politics are shown to involve an elision of the forces confronting the desire to exorcise colonialism. The South African debate around the idea of internal colonialism points the way out of this impasse, and the post-apartheid stalemate of institutional politics parades recognizable features of a complex yet to be transcended.

In the first of a series of articles on South African pedagogy, Karen Haire and D.S. Matjila use Sol T. Plaatje's original and translated version of Setswana stories to argue for the inclusion of bilingual stories and proverbs from an African culture in multilingual South African classrooms. Drawing on the educational principle of moving from the known to the unknown, they

suggest that proverbs, songs and stories in the vernacular, rather than an exclusive focus on Western pedagogy and aesthetics, can be culturally relevant and restore a sense of the viability of institutionalized South African multilingualism.

Continuing this theme, Thabisile Buthelezi explains how indigenous languages could be empoweringly developed further in the scientific domain. Buthelezi relies on Conceptual Blending theory, especially as advocated by the theorists Fauconnier and Turner, to show how this interface of concepts could help make isiZulu scientifically user-friendly. Using a number of examples from isiZulu Buthelezi delineates various dimensions of Conceptual Blending theory to demonstrate how such a discourse could help broaden the scope of scientific terminology of other indigenous South African languages.

Returning to the literary text, Richard Lee provides an interesting dimension to all hitherto published readings of Alex la Guma's *The Stone Country* by focusing on what he perceives as the most neglected figure in prison narratives, viz. the guard. Reading la Guma's text as a deceptively ironic prison novel, its subversive power lies in its inversion of 'binary codes'. Even as it employs those same codes to create the novel itself, Lee argues that la Guma's work is underpinned by the interface between prisoner and guard, inside and outside, orality and discourse, which he identifies as 'locations', and which his text investigates.

Craig Mackenzie pursues his interest in what he terms 'oral-style stories' by examining the modalities through which Mphahlele's 'Mrs Plum' renders visible the contradictions of white liberalism in apartheid South Africa. In his reading of Mphahlele's most popular short story Mackenzie focuses on the narrative voice to show how the oral element in this story is brought to the fore in the author's use of first person narrator as well as 'the cadences and styles of oral speech'. It is this narrative style, Mackenzie argues, that provides insight into the protagonist's consciousness and, thereby, makes the story more effective.

Dianne Shober explores Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in terms of Ellison's own experience and his articulation of broader forms of discrimination and rebellion. Arguing that Ellison's text has lessons for the present, Shober ties the psychological elements of the novel to issues around black identity.

J.A. Kearney's article explores a number of strategies for poetry teaching in South African schools from junior to more advanced levels. Kearney's disquiet regarding the present state of poetry teaching is prompted by his recent experiences as Faculty of Education lecturer in the discipline of English and his many observations of student teaching sessions in South African schools. Amongst the many problems in poetry teaching in South Africa, Kearney lists the sterile application of rigid formulas, the tendency to treat aspects of the poem in isolation from the whole, the fallacy of searching for the 'deeper meaning' and an overly teacher-centred approach which denies learners the pleasure of making discoveries for themselves. In contrast, he advocates a 'wholehearted' contact with the poem in its own right, a lively and enjoyable search for meaning, and a guided process of interpretation based on careful consideration of several key areas of concern.

Emmanuel Mgqwashu explores postcolonial language policies in Southern Africa in order to assess the viability of delivering on indigenous language education in South Africa. By way of a comparison of Kenyan, Tanzanian and Namibian language policies and experiences South African language-in-education-policies are confronted with their postcolonial contextual restraints. Moving between considerations of principle and practicality, Mqwashu argues that there is no compelling evidence in any postcolonial African country to suggest that indigenous languages can compete with non-indigenous languages where the primary desires are fuelled by capitalism.

Rajendra Chetty and Dominique Mwepu take up the language issue from a similarly contentious angle, arguing that the case against the predominance of English in education is flawed. Taking issue with the pronouncements of Ngugi and others, Chetty and Mwepu assert that indigenous African languages can co-exist with the maximum exploitation of English. This is not simply reducible to the supposedly misguided perception that English is the gateway to upward mobility. Rather, language teaching needs to be underpinned by radical and critical educational studies to ensure that it serves emancipatory interests. In a multi-lingual context when any language, foreign or indigenous, is chosen as the official or unofficial national *lingua franca* there are casualties in the form of less promoted languages. Whether English is to be a liberator or a gatekeeper is to be

decided in the class-room and lecture hall where other languages are drawn upon as resources of knowledge and critical thinking is promoted.

Camille Tabosa-Vaz pursues a feminist, postcolonial reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. In an unexpected move, the conventional postcolonial tropes of homelessness and marginality are mapped onto the nineteenth-century novel for the insights they might reveal about the economic, legal and social insecurities of nineteenth-century women. In this way, the argument explores possible correspondences between the exclusions of gender and those of race. Tabosa-Vaz then explores the ways in which a reading of homelessness in Brontë's novels can be brought to bear on contemporary constructions of home, marginality and the subaltern in apartheid South Africa. This she does via a comparative reading of Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, a novel which is centrally preoccupied with the marginal subject, the instabilities of the domestic space and the loss of homes.

In a detailed reading of the debate around Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', Pravina Pillay traces a concern with textuality and signification, and the question of literariness. Beginning with a critical evaluation of Jacques Lacan's reading of Poe's story, Pillay draws out the criticism of that reading offered by Jacques Derrida. At issue in this exchange are the notion of textuality and the role of the theorist. Rather than a cloistered debate about the merits of Lacanian theory or the sign, what is at issue here is the role of the theorist *per se* and the nature of truth. Pillay follows the defense of Lacan mounted by Slavoj Žižek and considers the mutual accusations of misreading.

Sikhumbuzo Mngadi locates Lewis Nkosi's *Mandela's Ego* within current cultural debates including Nkosi's own interventions. Central to Mngadi's reading of Nkosi's novel is how it negotiates the tension between the politics of masculinity and nationalism. Acknowledging the abundance of irony in this work, which has become the hallmark of Nkosi's writing, Mngadi interrogates the logic of the text which seems to gravitate towards a potentially conservative discourse because of its lack of a viable social analysis. Underpinning Mngadi's critique of Nkosi's novel is a pertinent question: what does Nkosi bring into the post-apartheid novel form? His conclusion, at least with regard to this novel, is that *Mandela's Ego* falls into the same trap of petty realism that Nkosi would rather consign to the

claustrophobic colonial cauldron.

Hailing the publication of critical perspectives on Lewis Nkosi as a milestone for researchers with a keen interest in Nkosi's *oeuvre*, Jabulani Mkhize's review article delineates the dominant logic of most of the critical essays included in the collection. Mkhize concurs to a large extent with the arguments of the bulk of the essays but takes issue with some of the gaps and silences that he finds glaring in some of the essays.

At the time of writing, students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal are protesting. Outside the offices, chanting and singing seek to unify recurring grievances including financial exclusions and accommodation shortages, to name a few. On this the second day of disruptions to the academic programme, the university management has notified academics by email that they are awaiting a formal list of grievances from the student representatives. Nervous students crowd the corridors concerned that they will be victimized if they proceed to lectures and seminars. The institution in which learning and research takes place is assuredly a contested space permeable to the struggles and imbalances that mark the broader social context. In this instance the ivory tower reverberates here as much as in other contexts, the difference being that here there is a metonymy of struggle that is read as indicating more than the dissatisfaction of a relatively privileged minority. At one and the same time, the university is the exceptional microcosm and the barometer of discourses and actions that can pass beyond the security gates. The following essays can be read in part as reflecting aspects of the post-apartheid challenge; working within the precincts of established scholarship with a sense of the broader context, its fated particularity and the need to articulate its cosmopolitan generality. A moment in which the conflict of the faculties vies with the tension between the demands of scholarship and the demands of the state.

Howard College
20th March, 2009

Checking the Post: Derrida and the Apartheid Debate

Brian Fulela

> There is no one, single deconstruction. Were there only one, were it homogeneous, it would not be inherently either conservative or revolutionary, or determinable within the code of such oppositions. That is precisely what gets on everyone's nerves …. As deconstruction is inherently neither 'conservative' nor the contrary, the political evaluation of each of the gestures called deconstructive will have to depend, if it is to be rigorous and in proportion to what it is addressing, upon analyses that are very difficult, very minute, very flexible with regard to the stereotypes of political-institutional discourse (Derrida 1988:141).

The text of *apartheid* continues to be an important source of critical investigation and contention within contemporary South Africa because of the history of race classification whose effects and affects counter-sign the constitution of a democratic post-*apartheid* South Africa. This paper is an investigation of Jacques Derrida's intervention into the debate on *apartheid* in the mid 1980s. Although my own discussion of the debate will proceed through analysis of the three major texts informing the debate—that is, Derrida's 'Racism's Last Word', Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon's response, 'No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Rascime"', and Derrida's scathing rejoinder, 'But, Beyond … (Open Letter to Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon)'—I will

not follow the debate to the letter. As the text of the debate on *apartheid* neither begins nor ends in *Critical Inquiry* I will variously draw from other contributions. At issue are four major questions.

Firstly, I examine how the misunderstanding of the deconstructive reevaluation of the question of '(con)text' informs the debate. Secondly, I argue that Derrida's gesture in 'Racism's Last Word' is not an attempt to (dis)place the text of *apartheid* as distinctively South African. His gesture is not, as it were, a characteristic reticence or denial of the question of complicity by the metropolitan intellectual. Thirdly, prompted by the interpretive violence of the interlocutors—which should not be separated from the emotive subject of the debate—I consider the question of an 'ethics of discussion' to which Derrida elsewhere states his commitment. Finally, I discuss the denigration of deconstructive practices as unethical, apolitical, conservative or anti-revolutionary, and the related question of the demand made by some commentators that Derrida explicitly declare his politics in the conventional terms of political philosophy, or even political activism.

1

In her translator's note to 'Racism's Last Word', Peggy Kamuf gives a brief genealogy of the paper and reminds the reader that it was a translation of 'Le Dernier Mot du Rascime', which was written for the catalogue of an international art exhibition against *apartheid*. The particular purpose of 'Le Dernier Mot du Rascime' was, then, to introduce the project of the travelling exhibition, described by the organisers as awaiting (in transit) and seeking to hasten the day when it could be 'presented as a gift to the first free and democratic government of South Africa to be elected by universal suffrage' (1985:290). Derrida's own reckoning of the exhibition is that it is not a presentation, as nothing 'is delivered here in the present, nothing that would be presentable'. His opening (textual) analysis of *apartheid* begins with the appeal that it remain,

> from now on, the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many. May it thus remain, but may a day come when it will only be for the memory of man … Confined and abandoned then to this silence of memory, the name will resonate all

> by itself, reduced to the state of a term in disuse. The thing it names today will no longer be (1985:291).

Derrida argues *that* the name has never been translated in other languages possibly signals a lexical defence and submits that the untranslatability of what is named (by) *apartheid* constitutes 'a violent arrest of the mark' within the abstract realm of 'confined separation' (1985:292). The consequent corruption by the word of this separated separation into what he calls 'a quasi-ontological segregation' is due precisely to its hypostasisation or essentialisation of being apart.

For Derrida, the outrage of this political idiom, extreme though not dissimilar to other racisms, lies in its naturalisation of segregation. 'A system of marks', [racism] outlines space in order to assign forced residence or to close off borders. It does not discern, it discriminates (1985:292). *Apartheid*, then, is also 'the last' for the pageantry of its political constitution; its status as the only racism 'on the scene that dares say its name and to present itself for what it is: … a juridical racism and a state racism' (1985:292). It is precisely for this reason Derrida argues *apartheid* is a 'European 'creation' and goes on to expose the complicity of a large part of Europe with *apartheid*. Despite the 'symbolic condemnations' of the Pretoria regime issuing from Europe, he analyses a number of the contradictions of the geopolitical/ economic/ theological discourse informing the text of *apartheid*. For Derrida then, the complexity of this text, its alterity as such, which resists most conventional forms of analysis—here, dialectical reason and humanism coming for particular censure—is precisely what 'calls for another mode of thinking'[1].

In their response, 'No Names Apart', it is clear that McClintock and Nixon locate their complaint against 'Racism's Last Word' in the second part of their title: 'The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Racisme"'. It is not so much that they doubt Derrida's 'signal opposition to the South African regime', for they recognise in their introduction that his paper 'is tendered as a call to action' (1986:140).

[1] In order to evaluate an attempt to read *apartheid* in deconstructive mode, I will return in the conclusion to this paper, to Aletta Norval's *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* (1996).

(Neither is it insignificant that they choose to refer to his paper by the antecedent French title that appears in the catalogue of the exhibition—which I will return to later.) However, they find, in what one (in error) could call the 'philosophical' tenor of his arguments, the preponderance for merely examining 'certain metaphysical assumptions' without pointing 'to something *beyond* the text, in this case the abolition of a regime' (1986:140). They argue Derrida's gesture lacks an analysis of the diachrony and politically formative functions of the discourses of South African racism. This deficiency requires a serious consideration of what they call his 'method'. Their prognosis of the latter is that it 'entails, in particular, pondering the political implications of both his extended reflection on the word *apartheid* and his diffuse historical comments' (1986:140). In their understanding at least, the remedy is probably that of the enterprising 'historical materialist':

> For to begin to investigate how the representation of racial difference has functioned in South Africa's political and economic life, it is necessary to recognize and track the shifting character of these discourses. Derrida, however, blurs historical differences by conferring on the single term *apartheid* a spurious autonomy and agency (1986:140).

This is precisely why they find it necessary '*to part ways with* him' (e.a.) in order 'to face the challenge of investigating the strategic role of representation' by examining *apartheid* 'in the context of developing discourses of racial difference' (1986:141). A differential reading of their phrase, 'to part ways with', could of course highlight that this phrase is symptomatic of their whole reading strategy. That is, what McClintock and Nixon part ways with here (but also from the beginning of their paper) is nothing short of reading 'Racism's Last Word'. As such, 'No Names Apart' is not a 'response'; the texture of a response is one of responsibility, of duty, to reading. Derrida suggests as much in his rejoinder when he states that they 'quite simply *did not read* [his] text, in the most elementary and quasi-grammatical sense of what is called *reading*' (1986:157).

To be sure, I will not be parting ways with 'Racism's Last Word', choosing rather, to read it *partially* with their response. This strategy is then

not only rhetorical, but also has the pragmatic effect of saving space by introducing some of Derrida arguments from his rejoinder, where he himself already closely reads 'No Names Apart'. *Partially* then, in both senses of this term: it both already prejudices and i(nte)rrupts McClintock and Nixon's arguments, and disjointedly, thus incompletely, reads Derrida's response. Their 'politically' interested refusal to read is, once again, motivated by, for them, the necessity of chronicling and periodising the changes to the rhetoric, ideology and lexicon of racism in the official discourse of the South African regime:

> If an examination of South Africa's representation of racial difference is to be at all *politically* enabling, the changing hegemonic functions of the word *apartheid* and its kindred terms must be investigated in the context of an active, social language (1986:145, e.a.).

As I will show, and as Derrida himself argues, the 'enabling politics' McClintock and Nixon refer to are other than the politics that motivate their response.

McClintock and Nixon challenge the accuracy of 'Derrida's claim that South African racism is "the only one on the scene that dares to say its name and present itself for what it is"' (1986:141f) and therefore find misleading his reference to *apartheid* as the 'order's watchword'. Surprisingly, this is in spite of their reference to *apartheid* as the name of South African racism: 'South African racism has long since ceased to pronounce *its own name*' (1986:142, e.a.). That is, McClintock and Nixon acknowledge that '*apartheid*' is precisely the name (for itself) that South African racism seeks to disavow. Though they seek to deny it by delineating the disappearance of the name from the official discourse, McClintock and Nixon's acknowledgement that *apartheid* is the name of South African racism is precisely contained within their phrase 'its own name'. Indeed one could also argue that by italicising the word '*apartheid'* within the terms of their own response, McClintock and Nixon concur with Derrida's argument on its 'apartitionality' and 'untranslatibility'. The particular function of italicisation would here be the foregrounding of a certain typographic metonymy.

Finally, McClintock and Nixon are satisfied that their own response and analysis does not separate 'word and history', given that they have regarded 'with a historical eye the uneven traffic between political interests and an array of cultural discourses' (1986:154). For them, it is precisely due to his inattentiveness to 'racial and class difference' and a largely singular attention to the 'solitary word *apartheid*' that his 'method' carries no 'strategic force'. Whence issues their assertion that Derrida's singular attention to the 'solitary word *apartheid*' blinds him to the nuances of its historicity? As I have illustrated, Derrida is precisely aware of the complexity of the text of *apartheid*. In part, what seems to authorise McClintock and Nixon's complaint against Derrida's gesture in 'Racism's Last Word', is a pre-theoretical apprehension of the 'historical' and what constitutes the 'political'. That is, they appeal to the historical as mere datum or archive and the political as self-evident quotidian episteme. It thus seems—and Derrida argues this much in his response—that McClintock and Nixon's complaint is directed at their conception of 'post-structuralism' rather than to Derrida's text in particular.

Not content to disguise his ire, Derrida's belligerent rejoinder identifies a number of fundamental reading errors in McClintock and Nixon's response, which he argues is exemplary for it reflects the willed interest of both the 'Left' and the 'Right' 'to represent deconstruction as a turning inward and an enclosure by the limits of language'. On both sides of this 'political' divide the impatience with deconstructive practices arises from the (denegated) recognition that the latter,

> are also and first of all political and institutional practices … [that create the space for and even necessitate] the most open kinds of political (but not just political) practice and pragmatics
>
> ….
>
> But that is no reason—on the contrary—to give up reading books and writings still found in libraries. It is no reason to read quickly or badly or to stop learning how to read otherwise other texts—especially if one wants to better adjust one's political strategies (1986:168f).

It should be clear that Derrida's remarks in the above—and this is consistent with the whole texture of his rejoinder—highlight the bitterness that characterises the debate. His damning suggestion here is that the disciplinary and institutional politics to which McClintock and Nixon's response adheres, (uncritically) follows the logic of *apartheid*. Derrida's rather severe assertion underscores the question of an 'ethics of discussion', a discussion to which I will later return.

To be sure, the scant criticism and commentary there is on the present debate, is to varying degrees united in the assessment of McClintock and Nixon's response as (not) completely missing the point—although I am not asserting that this consensus somehow renders their response wrong in advance. The chronologising of the lexical denegations of *apartheid* in the discourse of the South African regime does not constitute in any way a critique of Derrida's gesture in 'Racism's Last Word', as he himself undoubtedly (and quite forcefully) illustrates in his response. There are four major questions that the debate raises which I would like to expose more closely here.

The first of these is none other than the question of (con)text. It should already be clear that for Derrida the context and mode of his appeal are quite determined, thus his assertion that McClintock and Nixon's misapprehension of this leads them to 'take a *prescriptive* utterance for a *descriptive* (theoretical and constative) one'. This does not mean, as Paul Cilliers seems to think in 'On Derrida and Apartheid', arguing with himself in the most confused fashion, that Derrida's justification of the appeal constituted in the first line of 'Racism's Last Word' is an attempt to extricate prescription from description. Derrida is precisely aware, as Cilliers himself acknowledges, that the distinction between prescription and description is irreducible:

> It is prescriptive concerning the *name* of the ultimate racism, but the statement is descriptive of what the ultimate racism *is*, namely Apartheid (Cilliers 1998:81).

Cilliers' objection is thus unclear. For Derrida, 'although it is not limited by the form of descriptive observation, [his] "appeal" in no way contradicts the

historian's truth' (1986:158)[2]. Thus, the mistake or 'enormous blunder' that McClintock and Nixon make is the degree to which they take his 'appeal' to be *only* a descriptive utterance.

Cilliers usefully notes that the 'context in which McClintock and Nixon, as well as the rest of us, encounter 'Racism's Last Word' is *not* in the catalogue, but in the pages of *Critical Inquiry*, an academic journal' (1998:80). He adds,

> there is nothing wrong with an academic article, especially one with an ethical focus, in the form of an appeal. The point here is that Derrida was, *by his own lights*, a little more than unfair to chastise McClintock and Nixon for not realizing what the *correct* context of his text was—a context that should apparently have fixed their reading of the text (1998:80, first e.a.).

'By his own lights' then, for Cilliers seeks to argue that Derrida is in contradiction with his own assertion in 'Afterword: Toward an Ethics of Discussion' (the Afterword to *Limited Inc*) which reflects on, among other things, an earlier debate with John R. Searle. Here, Derrida asserts that 'the simple recalling of a context is never a gesture that is neutral, innocent,

[2] So too is Rosemary Jolly's objection in 'Rehearsals of Liberation: Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse and the New South Africa'. She argues, 'the academy needs to accept as its crucial project the task of promoting a language that ruptures the division between the prescriptive and the descriptive on which Derrida's defense of 'Racism's Last Word' rests. The acceptance of such a language would mean that the theoretical would no longer be confined to the descriptive and opposed to the prescriptive, as it is in Derrida's formulation' (1995:24). Jolly even goes so far as to add that Derrida's 'error' reflects Stanley Fish's claim 'that, theoretically, his own arguments have 'no consequences'—despite his extraordinarily public persona' (1995:28). However, as I have shown, Derrida nowhere commits such an 'error', nor does he claim that his arguments have 'no consequences'. Derrida acknowledges McClintock and Nixon's assertion that his text is of 'limited strategic worth', but asserts that the strategic worth of his text 'would be far from nil' (1986:157).

transparent, disinterested' (1988:131). However, to remain faithful to reading Derrida or to remedy what he sees as a contradiction, Cilliers would have to contextualise Derrida's above statement:

> The reconstitution of a context can never be perfect and irreproachable even though it is a regulative ideal in the ethics of reading, of interpretation, or of discussion. But since this ideal is unattainable … the determination, or even the redetermination, the simple recalling of a context is never a gesture that is neutral, innocent, transparent, disinterested … The putative or pretended … reconstitution of a context always remains a performative operation and is never purely theoretical … [It] may not be something 'politically suspect' to be sure, but it also cannot be apolitical or politically neutral (1988:131f).

Perhaps I did not need to reconstitute the context of Derrida's statement to the extent that I have in the above quote. For Derrida already states, in the fragment supplied by Cilliers, that what is at issue is 'the simple recalling', or as the rest of the quote affirms, the 'putative or pretended reconstitution of a context'[3]. Derrida's own comments to McClintock and Nixon about the criterion of context are far from simple and putative. They are not merely a supposedly apolitical theoretical gesture but a political evaluation, however overdetermined. Derrida does not affirm, as Cilliers offers, anything like 'the *correct* context of his text—a context that should apparently have fixed [McClintock and Nixon's] reading of the text'. No, not fix their reading of the text, but to some extent inform their reading, especially since, as Derrida reminds, they 'are concerned not to dissociate words and history' (1986:157). In a not merely superficial sense then, Niall Lucy correctly assesses that McClintock and Nixon's reference to Derrida's paper 'by its

[3] Of course then, my own recalling of the context of Derrida's statement is not arbitrary. It serves to pre-empt and modify the discussion of Cilliers and Jolly's respective (though coterminous) assertions that Derrida's meditations in 'Racism's Last Word' and his rejoinder effectively place *apartheid* 'over there, in South Africa', and that it sought to construct South Africa as the 'atavistic other'.

(original) French title in the catalogue and not by its (translated) English title in *Critical Inquiry*' problematises the chronology of 'the object of their critique in relation to the critique itself' (1995:2). Their reference to the French title of 'Racism's Last Word' is significant, for it bears directly on the question of (con)text.

The second critical issue raised in the debate, related to the first, is question of whether Derrida's appeal has the effect of (dis)placing *apartheid* as 'an untranslatable name for the evil perpetrated by *them*, "*over there* in South Africa"' (1998:82), as Cilliers argues—or as Jolly asserts, seeks to construct South Africa as the 'atavistic other' (1995:19f). Cilliers however, who positions himself as 'sympathetic to the strategies of deconstruction', admits that some 'aspects of this reading may seem too deliberate … and are perhaps at times unfair' (1998:83) and as such offers that Derrida could with some justification defend against them. Once again, it is not difficult to ascertain precisely why Cilliers should pen his text of complaint against Derrida's gesture in 'Racism's Last Word'. For Cilliers hastens to add that his 'target is not the person Jacques Derrida, but those who preferred to see apartheid as something perpetrated *only* by a specific group of (white, South African) people' (1998:83).

Given that Cilliers himself argues that Derrida is not one of '*those* [metropolitans] who preferred' (e.a.) to extricate themselves from *apartheid* his precise objection is against no one in particular. But then again 'those' who sought to displace *apartheid* as specifically South African are never named. Consequently, the rhetoric of Cilliers' objection could be seen as effectively arguing the opposite of what he contends he is asserting—for Derrida is exclusively named. It soon becomes clear that Cilliers' interest is to motivate for a species of geopolitically disseminated *apartheid*: 'there is a serious danger involved in reserving the notion of apartheid for that specifically South African thing', and, 'Apartheid, as a modernist strategy to structure and control, was never confined to South Africa' (1998:85). Of course, but only to a point. A point to which I will soon return, as it goes directly to Derrida's articulation of *apartheid* as a 'unique appellation'. As I have alluded, Jolly is also concerned that *apartheid* not be seen as phenomenally South African.

Jolly considers the rhetorical effects of Derrida's gesture in 'Racism's Last Word' as,

> analyzed in the context of [its] performance, [to be] radically at odds with its stated goal, the condemnation of racism … This plea certainly invites readers to be complicit in the text's condemnation of apartheid, but it does so by appealing to South Africa as spectacularly other (1995:19).

Jolly's problem is thus located in the exhibition: 'The authority of the art exhibition, once used to construct the other, must now deconstruct it' (Jolly 1995:20). Rather than an ethico-political intervention, she argues that Derrida's text is 'neocolonial', as it simultaneously invites the reader to 'condemn' and 'dissociate' herself from *apartheid*. For Jolly, Derrida's assertion 'that the aforementioned exhibition exposes and commemorates, indicts and contradicts the whole of a Western history' is indicative of his anxiety not to afford the audience 'the comforts of such dissociation' (1995:20). However, it should be clear that Jolly elides Derrida's own arguments about the exhibition. To recall: for him, the exhibition, 'beyond the present of the institutions supporting it or of the foundation that … it will itself become … neither commemorates nor represents an event' but rather, it calls forth or 'commemorates in anticipation' (1985:298f). Christopher Fynsk's discussion is instructive on this point:

> Thus the exhibition, *exposition* in French, presents nothing that is, Derrida says, describes or illustrates nothing present—since truth is no thing that is; if the exhibition *exposes* a present, it does so in projecting upon a future of which it presents no images. The exhibition does not work in the manner of a representation of any kind, or points beyond, for example, its various representations of atrocious suffering in South Africa (1989:4).

Derrida's formulation of *apartheid*, as 'the unique appellation for the ultimate racism in the world, the last of many' should be clear, although Cilliers continues to be baffled:

> We are still trying to figure out *why* anyone would refer to apartheid in South Africa as the 'ultimate racism' without condemning, referring, or comparing it to any other specific form of

> racism … why, for what reason, would someone transpose the worst evils of racism onto a single term, and then situate that term in one specific context *outside* of himself, even if he is correct on a purely descriptive level? (1998:85f)[4].

To be sure, already in 'Racism's Last Word', Derrida offers *apartheid* as 'the essence at its very worst—*as if* there were something like a racism par excellence, the most racist of racisms' (e.a.); or a page later, '*Apartheid* is *famous*, in sum, for manifesting the lowest extreme of racism' (e.a.). That 'as if' and 'renown'—or as he offers in 'But Beyond …', 'the history of *apartheid* (its 'discourse' and its 'reality', the totality of its *text*)' (1986:165)—is precisely what Derrida asserts no serious historian can call into question. As this is insufficient for Cilliers, Lucy puts it quite succinctly:

> What if the word 'apartheid' is so saturated with history, like the word 'Auschwitz', that it seems to stand apart from history and to stand in for the ultimate form of its type? … Each word is the extreme form of a (different) same … only on the basis of the *history* that each records and which separates it from other words. For although there are other forms of racism, there is no *single* word for the injustice of all racisms that bares the history of the word 'apartheid' (1995:16f).

However, I should state my own reservation regarding two points Derrida makes in his appeal. The first of these is his reminder that *apartheid*,

> is also daily suffering, oppression, poverty, violence, torture inflict-

[4] Cilliers also argues that the terms of Derrida's rejoinder make it possible to read 'Racism's Last Word' as 'an example of an attempt by the West to deny their complicity in perpetrating apartheid themselves'. However, it is strange that his assertion is not modified in the least by a reading of the 'post-script' to Derrida's response. Here Derrida forwards two cursory reasons why *apartheid* is also an 'American problem'. Of course Cilliers has read the 'post-script', for it is indeed here that he finds the quote he decontextualises, 'over there, in South Africa', and on which his deliberate reading rests.

> ed by an arrogant white minority (16 percent of the population, controlling 60 to 65 percent of the national revenue) on the mass of the black population (1985:293).

This does perhaps highlight an oversimplification of the political allegiances or otherwise, of the white minority in South Africa, and seems to somewhat paint all white South Africans as identifying with *apartheid*. Also, in a certain sense, everyone (some more than others) suffers under *apartheid*; something like Fanon's exposition of the alienation and, obsessional neuroses and psychoses sometimes suffered by both the coloniser and colonised in colonial social relations, or the tortured and the torturer during the armed struggle for liberation[5]. Nevertheless, one could also see Derrida's assertion as an appeal to the empirical fact of the effects of the renowned and obsessive juridico-legislative apparatus that was *apartheid*. As such, this (unpleasant) assertion could be rescued by reference to the fact that Derrida also states, 'that a *certain* white community of European descent imposes *apartheid* on four-fifths of South Africa's population' (1985:294, e.a.). Of course one could still complain about the unclear specificity (or homogenising tendency) within that 'certain white community', as well as the reference to four-fifths.

Derrida's statement that 'the white resistance movement in South Africa deserves our praise' is, however, more problematic. I agree with Cilliers to the extent that he notes that the above statement implies 'a divide between those worthy of praise and those who feel that they are in a position to hand out praise' (1998:85). Certainly, the meting out of praise 'is not the same as declaring one's solidarity', but it does not necessarily imply, as Cilliers goes on to offer,

> that some have the ability to escape the messiness of interaction with the other, to reach some higher ground where they are morally safe (1998:85).

For to claim this Cilliers has to temporarily forget the ethico-political impe-

[5] See Fanon's comments on the effects of the violence of decolonisation in his psychiatric case studies at the end of *The Wretched of the Earth*, in the chapter entitled 'Colonial War and Mental Disorders'.

rative of the text of an appeal, which he himself earlier acknowledges in both that Derrida's approach is 'ethical through and through' (79) and that Derrida takes a 'firm ethical position on an abomination' (83). No 'escape from the messiness of interaction with other' then, if one already acknowledges an ethical relation—which, of course, is already a declaration of solidarity. In this view, to commend the merits of white resistance can be seen as supplementing the ethical relation—as recognition (or appeal) that white resistance, whose 'members' constitute part of the juridico-legislated 'beneficiaries' of *apartheid*, might hasten its end.

It should be clear that I have not discussed the question of the texture of Derrida's response—its 'style', its 'rhetorics'. For some critics, Derrida's response is not responsible, as it does not remain faithful to the 'ethics of discussion' that he proposes in the 'Afterword' to *Limited Inc*[6]. This can be seen in among other things, the texture of his response (its infantilising and unkind terms), and his reiterated contention that McClintock and Nixon 'have no serious objections' to make to him.

There is perhaps the need to recall, as Lucy does, that 'not all debates are necessarily productive or transforming; not all debates are conducted with good will' (1995:19). For Cilliers then, there is a contradiction between Derrida's reiterated charge that McClintock and Nixon consistently read him in 'bad faith' given his 'bad faith' reading of them, and his commitment to an 'ethics of discussion'[7]. Reed Way Dasenbrock's paper, in 'Taking it Personally: Reading Derrida's Responses', does not specifically examine,

> the exchange with McClintock and Nixon over *apartheid* in detail

[6] 'I think it is possible, if not for McClintock and Nixon, then at least for some other readers [of Derrida's rejoinder], to be a little more than unhappy with *how* Derrida did what he did in this case. In sum, his reaction was not responsible' (Cilliers 1998:83).

[7] A prior occurrence of the question of an 'ethics of discussion' was illustrated in the earlier encounter between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Derrida—see *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter* (1989). See also Gadamer's later disappointed reflection on the encounter, which Derrida characterised as a 'non-event', in *Gadamer in Conversation: Reflections and Commentary* (2001:61f; 66-69).

> since the substance of this exchange is at some remove from the more technical debates over meaning and interpretation on which the others focus (1994:264)[8].

However, Dasenbrock is given to argue that Derrida is either in contradiction, or that he is a 'recanting revolutionary' (273). For Dasenbrock, any assertion or complaint of 'bad faith' reading issuing from Derrida is counter to his earlier insights about authorial intention and textuality; most notably, the manner in which Derrida reads Searle in *Limited Inc*. That is, Dasenbrock's complaint is directed at Derrida's insistence on an 'ethics of discussion' and his assertion of the necessity to read in 'good faith'. However, in order to declare a contradiction here, it is necessary to ignore Derrida's thinking on ethics. Geoffrey Bennington is relevant here:

> Ethics, then, is ethical only to the extent that it is originarily compromised or contaminated by the non-ethical … [T]he chance of avoiding the worst violence is given by a compromise involving an acceptance of, and calculation of, the lesser violence … In this case, Derrida will say that ethics is essentially *pervertible*, and that this pervertibility is the positive condition … of all 'positive' values (the Good, the Just, and so on) ethics enjoins us to seek (Bennington 2000:42).

In this view then, his commitment to an 'ethics of discussion' does not preclude their 'pervertibility'. Nor does it entail a contradiction of the kind asserted by Dasenbrock[9]. It is not so much that Derrida's rejoinder

[8] This assertion is untenable, for I have already illustrated that the exchange with McClintock and Nixon is itself quite technical and is at its core a debate about meaning and interpretation. See Niall Lucy (1995:7); and although at times apparently and self-admittedly reductive, see Fynsk (1989:4).

[9] Despite assertions of contradiction by detractors and (some) commentators alike, for Derrida on why 'it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy', see Derrida (1988:146) in 'Afterword'.

responds to McClintock and Nixon, but rather that theirs is not a 'response' as such. That is, as Lucy asserts, their 'response' is 'irresponsible'. Lucy is correct in noting that the belligerence of Derrida's response illustrates him losing 'patience with those who (in 1986, still) read him so perversely … that they have clearly not registered at all the significance of the word "text"' (1995:20). Derrida might argue his response involves 'an acceptance of, and calculation of, the lesser violence' compared to McClintock and Nixon's own. He does indeed argue this when he charges that 'the effect [McClintock and Nixon] want to produce is quite determined, but in order to arrive at it, [they] are willing to put forward any kind of countertruth'. In this view, his rejoinder is an extreme form of the manner in which they presume to give him a lesson on history and politics.

Finally, the opposition to deconstruction (in general) or, as McClintock and Nixon figure it (and in this they are not alone), something called Derrida's 'method' (in particular)—on the supposed basis that it is 'apolitical' or that its implications are 'politically suspect' and thus supposedly 'textualist'—forms part of a desire (by both those opposed and some sympathetic commentators) for Derrida to explicitly declare his politics. I agree with Bennington's suggestion that what these commentaries fail to grasp is precisely the trajectory of Derrida's thought. The demand is for Derrida not to largely deal with questions of politics, ethics or justice obliquely, as he admits[10]. This would require that he enunciate the political of his thought through the inherited terms and modalities of a tradition of (political) philosophy whose hierarchal oppositions and very 'oppositionality'—Bennington's term (2000:9)—he has spent his intellectual

[10] For Derrida's own discussion of why deconstruction *seems* to deal with the questions of justice (and thus of politics, ethics, responsibility and duty) obliquely, see 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' (1992:9-10; 15-16). For commentary on how 'the political' is figured in Derrida's thought, see Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida & the Political* (1996). For a lengthier discussion of 'the political demand' (made of Derrida) or the 'political imperative' within humanities scholarship see Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (2000:18-33), and Niall Lucy, *Debating Derrida* (1995:72-98).

career questioning; concepts whose nonessentiality and deconstructibility he has already attempted to demonstrate.

Catherine Zuckert's discussion in 'The Politics of Derridean Deconstruction' is an example of this 'political demand', here articulated in accusatory mode. She argues that far from being 'radical', Derrida's work 'has an anti-activist, if not strictly speaking conservative thrust'. Zuckert then turns tack and argues that if Derrida's work 'is not conservative … [then it is at least] profoundly anti-revolutionary' (1991:354f). Although I hope to have sufficiently demonstrated it in my analysis of the debate, perhaps I need only recall Derrida's reminder:

> There is no one, single deconstruction. Were there only one, were it homogeneous, it would not be inherently either conservative or revolutionary, or determinable within the code of such oppositions (1988:141).

In her own manner, Zuckert follows McClintock and Nixon in what Lucy offers is 'the one (mis)taken-for-granted assumption about Derrida's work … is that it bears no relation to pragmatic politics' (1995:1). Why the oblique, indirect address of the questions of politics and ethics? Because for Derrida, in a logic he already sets out as early as *Of Grammatology*, ethics, like justice, is an experience of the impossible. This aporetic moment of undecidability is necessary if an ethics is to be true to its name; that is, if it is to exceed mere calculation or subsumption to some prior rule, norm or case.

Can it still be said that Derrida's work or deconstructive practices in general are lacking in 'political implications' (or otherwise apolitical), and say nothing on 'ethics'? Certainly. Only if the deontological responsibility to read with rigour and patience is ignored in favour of partisan politico-institutional imperatives. Only if the ostentatious reference to 'politics' is enough, by itself, to insure some sort of self-congratulatory radicality. That is, only if the inherited concepts of politics and of ethics are to remain unquestionable, occupying, as Bennington's exposition on Derrida thought testifies, a position of 'transcendental contraband' (2000:19). To ask the question of politics and of ethics is not in itself already political or ethical—that is, cannot propose or institute a politics or ethics. It precisely exceeds proposition and institution, in striving, as Bennington notes, 'to keep open

the event of alterity which alone makes politics possible and inevitable, but which political philosophy of all colours has always tried to close' (2000:33). But how useful is this in a postcolonial context?

Of course Derrida's intervention into the debate on *apartheid* is not articulated in the familiar terms of postcolonial theory. However, it is possible to argue—and I have shown that Derrida suggests this—that *apartheid* is the manifestation and crystallisation of a particular instance of the European imperial and colonial mission in South Africa. As an intervention into the text of South Africa, Derrida's text and the debate that it initiates, seems to highlight the kinds of issues with which postcolonial theory engages. 'Racism's Last Word' irrupts into the purview of '(post)coloniality' not merely as a reading of the text of *apartheid*, but in large measure as an ethico-political call for the demise of *apartheid*, a summoning of a future responsibility to the memory of its anteriority; it illustrates how deconstructive reading practices might be useful for postcolonial analysis[11]. Nevertheless, I should have stated from the outset that I do not wish to reclaim or refashion Jacques Derrida as a postcolonial theorist. The following paragraph is precisely an attempt to put the latter assertion under something like a probative erasure; an attempt to post the Derridean text—all the while not forgetting that 'Jacques Derrida' is both the corpus and the person.

2

One can leverage a deconstructive reading of the discourse of colonialism in a reading that would demonstrate deconstruction as already in decolonisation. Perhaps the movement of such a reading would, among other things, trace in the discourse and reality of colonialism, and its counter-discourses—what Derrida in his text on *apartheid* calls 'the totality of its text' (1986:165)—something like the call of decolonisation as a call to

[11] 'In the different texts I have written on (against) *apartheid*, I have on several occasions spoken of 'unconditional' affirmation or of 'unconditional' 'appeal'. This has also happened to me in other 'contexts' and each time that I speak of the link between deconstruction and the "yes"' (Derrida 1988:152).

justice, and an appeal for an ethical relation with the Other in the dismantling of colonialism. Here, decolonisation could be seen as a 'paragon' for deconstruction. In what is more than a strained metaphor—given Derrida's sometime reminder of his Franco-Maghrebian status—decolonisation and deconstruction (or Fanon and Derrida) would, in this reading, meet somewhere on the scene of the Algerian movement for liberation. In proposing such a reading, I am of course relying heavily on Derrida's enunciation of the deconstructive engagement with/to the question of ethics and justice, in his essay 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"' (1992). The conditions of possibility for the reading of decolonisation I have sketched would have to be mindful of not uncritically deploying some set of procedures labelled deconstructive. It would have to heed the following:

> The difference of other cultures is other than the excess of signification, the *différance* of the trace or the trajectory of desire. These are theoretical strategies that may be necessary to combat 'ethnocentricism' but they cannot, of themselves, unreconstructed, represent that otherness. There can be no inevitable sliding from the semiotic or deconstructionist activity to the unproblematic reading of other cultural and discursive systems. There is in such readings a will to power and knowledge that, in failing to specify the limits of their own field of enunciation and effectivity, proceed to individualise otherness as the discovery of their own assumptions (Bhabha 1983:197).

In reading Homi K. Bhabha's caution against the grain one could note that Robert Young's *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (1990), is precisely (although partially) such a reconstitutive analysis of the conditions of emergence of poststructuralist theories in general, and Derrida's work in particular. Here, Young already offers something like the possible reading I offered for apprehending deconstruction as already in decolonisation. Young himself acknowledges that it is not merely the aforementioned title—taken from a chapter of Derrida's *Margins of Philosophy* (1982)—that he gleans from Derrida's work. For Young, the point missed by criticism of Derrida's work that asserts Derrida merely

reinscibes the hegemonic discursive authority of the West or that his work involves only the critique of 'Western metaphysics' as such—and this, I recall, is precisely the criticism expressed by McClintock and Nixon—is that his critique of logocentrism is at once also a critique of ethnocentrism (see Young (2004:49). Young thus has recourse, in the opening of *White Mythologies*, to highlight the colonial provenance of what came to be known under the rubric of 'poststructuralism':

> If so-called 'so-called poststructuralism' is the product of a single historical moment, then that moment is probably not May 1968 but rather the Algerian War of Independence—no doubt itself both a symptom and a product. In this respect it is significant that Sartre, Althusser, Derrida and Lyotard, among others, were all either born in Algeria or personally involved with the events of the war (2004:32).

Young's essay, 'Subjectivity and History: Derrida in Algeria', as the title undoubtedly suggests, is a singular engagement with the assertion he set out earlier, in *White Mythologies*. Here, Young is concerned to argue for Derrida to be seen as a postcolonial theorist and for poststructuralism to be apprehended as 'Franco-Maghrebian theory' (2001:414). That is, Young's task is to illustrate the historical links between the philosophers and theorists who came to be known as poststructuralist and Algeria, or the war for Algerian independence. Derrida was there, Young argues, on the scene of the unthinkable violence that was the Algerian Revolution:

> Others, such as Fanon and Lyotard, went to Algeria to work or on military service and became actively involved with the revolution … and saw Derrida frequently when he had returned to Algeria to do his military service there (2001:414).

Young is at pains to assert that Derrida's marginality, as part of the 'Jewish' population of colonial Algeria, further meant that his identity was cut through by ambivalent identification within colonial relations (see Young (2001:425-26).

> The Jews live in … an in-between limbo world in which on the one hand they identify with the colonizer with whom they can never be fully assimilated, but whose life they try to live in abject mimicry, while on the other hand they remain always condemned to live the life of the colonized (2001:422)[12].

In this homiletic manner, Young hopes to demonstrate that Derrida's work—even in its earliest articulations—is distinctly postcolonial.

> From the first, then, your target was, we would say these days, western globalization, conceptual in form but material in its effects, and the eurocentricism of western culture (Young 2001:412).

In this vein, the poststructuralist interrogation of,

> the idea of totality was born out of the experience of, and forms of resistance to, the totalizing regimes of the late colonial state, particularly French Algeria (415).

This re-vision of the conditions of possibility of deconstruction is aimed particularly at postcolonial intellectuals who reject postcolonial theory as 'Western', and therefore incapable of answering to the questions of the 'Third World'—incapable of partaking, to paraphrase Ato Quayson, in the native's discursive modalities.

I would suggest that although Young's essay is an important historical intervention into the debate about the eurocentricity of postcolonial theory, what remains disquieting is the possible slide towards conflation that occurs in Young's effort to reclaim deconstruction as postcolonial. Thus although Young acknowledges the differences between the anti-colonialist discourses of liberation and poststructuralist deconstructions of the ideas and ideals of Western philosophy and culture, they are too easily enunciated together in the following:

[12] Given Young's claim for Derrida's colonial Algeria connection, he could have included Fanon's analysis of Jewish Algerians in *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, 'Algeria's European Minority' (1989:153-157).

> Many of those who developed the theoretical positions subsequently characterized as poststructuralism came from Algeria or had been involved in the war of independence. Fanon, Memmi, Bourdieu, Althusser, Lyotard, Derrida, Cixous—they were all in or from Algeria (2001:413).

Not only is Derrida offered as theorising postcoloniality, it would seem that Fanon and Memmi are now also poststructuralist.

It is of course imperative to attend to the historico-political conditions of possibility of work that has come to be called 'poststructuralist'. I cannot in the last instance dismiss Young's historico-political re-visioning of deconstruction. In my reading, however, deconstructive practices, as theoretical demonstrations/interrogations of the questions of politics, ethics, culture, economics, literature or whatever, should stand or fall on the basis of the flexibility with which they facilitate the posing of the latter questions, rather than on their geographical provenance. It should no longer be necessary to state that theoretical interrogations are not self-sufficiently or exclusively theoretical. My reservations here do not yet run counter to my earlier discussion of the question of context. What I remain uneasy with in Young's reading of Derrida in Algeria is the manner in which Young's argument strains towards an assertion of context as the final determinant of Derrida as a postcolonial theorist.

3

What then of South Africa, a country that is in need of urgency? Some perhaps would cry out (and they already do, everyday) a state of emergency. It is, in fact, a country where the National Democratic Revolution—that principle, alliance, and movement for liberation—took place, some might say, without revolution. That is, how quickly it became (necessarily?) married to (others say marred by) democratic-capitalism. Here, we have the socio-economic state policies of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) and Affirmative Action (AA) 'to address the imbalances of the past' or 'level the playing fields'. On the one hand, to the rural and poor these policies mean, among other things, improving sanitation

through the elimination of the 'bucket-system'—a euphemism that should never elide the quotidian humiliation—within a timeframe that continues to be officially revised as the state strains to deliver on its mandate.

On the other hand, the rise of a black elite, the embourgeoisement, the creation of a black-capitalist class—somehow the term Black Diamond is coined to identify it. (There is a history that inhabits that term, no less than the coining—who is coining it in South Africa, and why? That history calls for reading.) Here, the current practice of AA has led the Black Management Forum to call for the exclusion of white women from the category of 'previously disadvantaged'[13]. Here too, on the one hand a chronic lack of human capital—a 'skills shortage' in the official idiom—lived by half the working-age population as an unemployment rate of around 42 percent under the broad definition (or the no less salutary figure of around 31 percent in the official calculation)[14]. On the other hand, the exclusivity, the barriers to entry, of tertiary education—whether these are seen as economic, linguistic, institutional culture or whatever. Here too, a grave HIV-AIDS pandemic, where the former state president enters an ideological debate about the efficacy and dangers of international (pharmaceutical) prescriptions.

The economy of the text of contemporary South Africa highlighted in the above ruminations is at best, rudimentary. It also deliberately foregrounds the text of the political economy of contemporary South Africa. Perhaps, no less than anywhere else in the world today, South Africa is a country where, to paraphrase Gayatri C. Spivak out of context, one cannot not read the material. Although now, the textuality of the material would be

[13] The High Court ruling which determined that South Africans of Chinese descent should be explicitly included in the definitions of 'previously disadvantaged' in terms of employment equity and economic empowerment legislation, is an interesting direction in South Africa's socio-political terrain.

[14] See Patrick Bond's discussion, in *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa* (2005), of what he calls the South African 'government's semantic dance', in its calculation of the 'narrow' definition and refusal of the 'broad' definition of unemployment in 2003 (2005:263; 363). For similar figures and assertions about South Africa's economic indicators, see also MacDonald (2006:150-152).

posed as question and thus no longer be (and never really was) self-sufficient in a stasis that would merely appeal to its massively present reality. The postcolonial intellectual as an elite member of South African society is implicated within an order of social and economic relations marked by disparate class and race inequality. In light of this, Spivak's insistence that intellectuals mark their political positionality becomes critical. The South African case necessitates that postcolonial critics realise, following Bhabha, that the urgency called forth in/by the country is also a question of emergence into an otherwise.

Finally, Aletta Norval's *Deconstructing Apartheid Discourse* is precisely such an attempt to read the complexity of the text of *apartheid* through an inheritance to deconstruction. The title of her book seems to suggest this much. I should say however that this paragraph is not yet a close critical analysis of the contribution of Norval's contribution to the debate on *apartheid* in South Africa. That is the work for another occasion. Rather, all I wish to comment on is the extent to which this contribution is a critical extension of the insights I have argued are to be gained from returning to the debate between Derrida and, McClintock and Nixon. One would perhaps have thought that given Derrida's own intervention within the latter debate, Norval would have been concerned to meditate upon it and Derrida's gesture in particular, or even the work of deconstruction in general. There is no such meditation or demonstration here. Deconstruction within Norval's project finally appears to be merely titular. Among other things, perhaps the most telling example of this is the extent to which the notion of discursivity is not problematised within her study. I contend that this, when taken together with her final plea for post-*apartheid* South African democracy to be informed by some species of what she calls 'radical pluralism'—whose theoretical basis is not substantively argued—does not begin to exhaust the possibilities of a deconstructive postcolonial analysis of the text of *apartheid* and its wake.

It is for these reasons that I hope to have shown that it is necessary to reread the debate between Derrida and, McClintock and Nixon. To revisit the debate would require something other than the facile institutional and disciplinary politics that informed their response. The debate calls forth a responsibility to the memory of *apartheid* because, as I said in the beginning, the legacy of race classification still informs contemporary South Africa in ways that are not opened up by obstinately orthodox reading practices. To

say the debate highlights the deontological responsibility of the postcolonial intellectual is not to say deconstruction merely calls for a politics of reading. Rather, it is to partially keep open the question of the realm of effectivity of intellectual work so as to resist the sort of self-aggrandising praxis that authorises McClintock and Nixon. And yet I still hold that the task of the South African postcolonial intellectual is precisely to think through the difficulties of the post-*apartheid* 'imagined community' of what has been called 'the New South Africa'. I hope to have illustrated that it is precisely a deconstructive postcolonial reading that would be germane to the reading of those difficulties. The slogan of the state's media campaign to foster something like an African-national consciousness, uttered by none other than former state president Thabo Mbeki, assures us that South Africa is 'alive with possibility'. To follow Derrida's apprehension of the complexity of the question of *apartheid* is perhaps to begin to read the heterogeneity of *that* possibility, the striking complexity of the text of contemporary South Africa and the difficulties facing a deconstructive postcolonial analysis to come.

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The Work of Cultural Criticism: Re-visiting *The South African Opinion*

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The South African Opinion (later re-named *Trek*) was one of the first periodicals in South Africa to give serious attention to South African writers. As such, it has significance as a founding moment in the history of South African canon-formation and the development of a distinctive South African aesthetic. To revisit *The South African Opinion* in the present is not only to witness the early articulations of an indigenous South African criticism, but also to re-enter a moment of acute cultural anxiety—the efforts of English-speaking South Africans to forge a 'national culture' and the associated struggle to define an indigenous South African 'essence' or 'geist'. This early English South African National project takes on additional interest in the light of more recent attempts to define an inclusive South African nation in the post-apartheid period. Genealogies of South African criticism aside, to return to *S.A. Opinion* in the present is also to confront the figure of the English-speaking white South African literary critic engaged in the business of criticism. It is here that the magazine raises a set of issues which speak directly to contemporary concerns—the social position of the critic, the postures and contexts of critical reflection, and the on-going work of cultural criticism itself.

S.A. Opinion was launched in November 1934. Its editor, Bernard Sachs—less famous brother of radical trade unionist Solly Sachs—ran the paper for twenty years, no mean achievement for a periodical of its kind. *S.A. Opinion* began as an English bi-monthly literary-political review covering local and international politics as well as the arts. Described by Stephen Gray as 'embattled' and 'courageous' (Gray 2002:15) it faced the

usual difficulties of any serious publication in South Africa: lack of advertising support, paper restrictions during World War 2, and a small reading public easily tempted by a less arduous read. In August 1937, unable to impress its advertisers sufficiently to count on their support, it found itself in serious financial difficulty, and was forced to close down. Resurfacing briefly in the early 1940s as *The South African Spectator* and *The Democrat*, respectively (Gray 2002:15), *S.A. Opinion* was officially re-launched in March 1944. The second series, which now appeared once a month, offered a more attractive layout, a wider pool of contributors, and interesting visual material, that included hand-drawings, black and white photographs and wood-cuts, as well as dramatic and memorable cover pages depicting images of South African life, and some excellent political cartoons. In 1947, *S.A. Opinion* merged with *Trek*, a left-leaning bi-monthly critical review which had recently lost its editor, Jacques Malan, after a costly libel suit brought against the paper by four Johannesburg mines[1]. Claiming to combine what was best in both publications, the new magazine was in fact a continuation of the old *S.A. Opinion* under a new name. What is particularly significant for the shape and direction of its cultural discussion is that, in 1950, the editor decided to drop all political content, with the new *Trek* focusing exclusively on literary-cultural issues. The fruitful proximity of a cultural and political discussion which had been such a successful innovation of both publications was replaced by a cultural debate which had less and less to say about contemporary socio-political affairs.

The 1929 Wall Street Crash, the world economic depression, and Hitler's unexpected success in winning a frightened German middle class to the cause of National Socialism were the decisive elements in the early formation of this long-running South African periodical. In the early period at least, local politics took something of a backseat as the magazine negotiated the threat to democratic ideals posed by world economic crisis and the rise of Fascism in Europe. In the words of the opening editorial: 'These are confused and unsettled days when ideals and traditions which past generations have taken for granted are being ruthlessly tested for their right to survive' (1 November 1934:1). Politically, the magazine positioned

[1] For a discussion of the history and significance of this publication, see Sandwith (1998).

itself within the broad ambit of a 'progressive' or 'liberal' outlook, while simultaneously asserting the virtues of its impartial, 'non-political' stance. Like many liberals, it sought to occupy the higher ground of the reasoned moderate who, from a position above vested interests, offers dispassionate comment, avoiding the perils of both partisanship and fanaticism: 'Our task [is to] supply an ordered interpretation of vital issues, based on fact, and informed with a progressive point of view'. With 'no axe to grind', and 'committed to no platform', the paper sought to bring a 'calm and reasoned logic' to bear on contemporary social questions, thus maintaining a balance between the various 'extreme viewpoints to which our disturbed epoch has given rise' (1 November 1934:1)[2].

A critical review rather than a newspaper, *S.A. Opinion* offered clarification, interpretation and critique in the interests of democratic change. In an effort to garner support for what would be a fairly risky venture, its opening editorial sought out both the concerned liberal and the cultural snob, addressing itself explicitly to

> those thoughtful South Africans who refuse to be smothered in the complacency of the closed mind and who do not derive aesthetic pleasure from endlessly eating chewing gum while reading endless stories of snakes, tigers and more snakes (1 November 1934:1)[3].

Progressive politics were allied to a 'high-brow' cultural aesthetic, forged in response to commercial culture and a substantial appetite amongst white South Africans for exotic colonial fare.

The marked preference in *S.A. Opinion* for the apparent virtues of the moderate 'middle way' can be traced to the personal history of the editor himself. Sachs's autobiographies, *Multitude of Dreams* (1949) and *The Mists of Memory* (1973) offer interesting accounts of the origins of the periodical.

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[2] This self-positioning as a neutral, reasonable voice in a sea of rabid extremisms was not an uncommon rhetorical strategy during the period. See, for example, *Trek*-forerunner, *The Independent* and United Party publication *The Forum*.

[3] It is possible that the popular South African magazine, *Outspan*, was the target of this particular attack.

As he describes it, the start of the magazine marked a turning point in his own political and intellectual life, when after many years of conscientious involvement in left-wing politics, a growing disillusionment with the Communist Party led to an outright rejection of socialism. Bernard Sachs was born in Lithuania in 1905, one of the many Jewish immigrants to South Africa who went on to make a significant contribution to South African life, particularly in the forging of political resistance. Sachs grew up in the Johannesburg working-class suburb of Ferreirastown and attended Jeppe High School where he met Herman Charles Bosman, with whom he shared a long (if not always harmonious) friendship. Inspired by the drama of the 1922 Johannesburg strikes, Sachs joined the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1923. As he wryly recalls, the extent of his youthful activism during this period was confined to anti-war demonstrations and meetings in front of the City Hall. Nevertheless, his commitment to the cause of social justice, heightened by his family's experiences of persecution and oppression, was always sincere.

Like many others around the world who had been inspired by the events of the Russian Revolution, Sachs watched the changes under Stalin in the early 1920s with growing trepidation. For Sachs, it was a tragic decline as the tremendous hopes of the Russian revolution of 1917 were gradually replaced by power struggles, paranoia, and increasing bureaucratisation. The vilification of that most splendid example of Bolshevik heroism', Leon Trotsky, was something which he found impossible to accept:

> One of the saddest moments of my life was the news … that Trotsky had been banished, first to Siberia and then to Turkey. A whole world, into which had gone my most precious dreams and the full ardour of my spirit, was visibly collapsing before me. I continued to hang on to my membership of the Party. But there was no longer any enthusiasm or a will to sacrifice myself (1949:158).

By contrast, Stalinism was like 'dust and ashes from which no phoenix could rise' (160).

As a member of the CPSA, he felt the immediate effect of the 'revolution betrayed' in the arbitrary and authoritarian way in which Comintern policies were handed down to the South African Party, often with

very little knowledge of local conditions. The controversial 'Native Republic Thesis' of 1928 was especially problematic as was the Party's increasing bureaucratisation and coercive reach (Drew 2000: 94-108). In his autobiography, Sachs finds an echo for his deep pessimism and despair in the character of Prince Andrew in Tolstoy's *War and Peace* who, after witnessing the collapse of Europe at the hands of Napoleon Bonaparte, turns his back on politics, choosing instead to 'live for [him]self' (cited in Sachs 1973:155). As he goes on to explain, an overwhelming interest in politics and philosophy during his years as a 'dedicated soldier' in the war against capitalism had eclipsed any desire to read 'pure literature' or to engage with 'the mysteries and mystifications of the human soul'. In fact, as he records, his attitude and that of his fellow comrades towards the middle-classes 'was one of utter and complete hostility'. As 'the propertied section of society' they were amongst those 'whom history had consigned to the dustbin'. Furthermore, since the established literary canon 'dealt almost entirely with the hopes, fears and iniquities of this class, it was of no greater concern to us than the fate of an African is to an Afrikaner in our remote hinterland'. After his eventual emergence from the Communist Party, he writes, 'it was as if something constraining me had snapped' and he was free to 'bound forward into a new area of interest and a clime much more equable and suited for reflection' (1973:157). Significantly, for Sachs, this meant the previously scorned examples of bourgeois high culture: *Madame Bovary*, *Crime and Punishment* and *Sons and Lovers*.

Whether it was the disaster of the Stalinist period, or the familiar tempering of youthful radicalism that was to blame, by 1932, Sachs had abandoned left-wing politics altogether. In one sense, then, the periodical, which was to occupy him for the next twenty years, marks a significant rupture, its inception coinciding with a conscious retreat from any kind of political involvement save that which was the accidental result of his brother's continued activism. Equally significant, as his autobiographies make clear, the appreciation of literature and leftist politics are understood as belonging to entirely separate realms. If for Sachs Communist sympathy entailed the stifling of literary and aesthetic reflection and pleasure, the abandonment of left-wing activism marked his entry into the world of the imagination and the unfettered exploration of individual as opposed to communal concerns. In its immediate location in this 'post-Trotsky'

moment, then, *S.A. Opinion* was a reaction to Stalinist constraint, and its basic opposition between Communism and individual human freedom provided the blueprint for its engagement with South African politics and culture. While Sachs retains a strong commitment to social justice, the 'narrow' obsessions (and failures) of twentieth-century Communism are cast aside in favour of a more 'humane', more open, and more individual response. His position could only have been strengthened by Hitler's rise to power, providing as it did yet another powerful confirmation of the need to champion the rights of individuals in the face of looming totalitarian rule. These sentiments form the broad backdrop of Sachs's own worldview. However, in so far as one can infer a unitary 'voice' or 'persona' from the many contributors to the periodical, a similar consensus emerges: *S.A. Opinion* is a magazine which regarded its own political approach as more reasoned, accurate and objective than that of a range of left- and right-wing 'extremisms', and as the years went by, its opposition to left-wing politics became more and more entrenched.

In his introduction to a collection of Bosman's sketches and essays—part of the recent centenary re-publication of the complete works of Herman Charles Bosman by Stephen Gray and Craig MacKenzie—Stephen Gray provides a glimpse into the early twentieth-century Johannesburg literary and social scene as a backdrop to Bosman's life and work. According to Gray, *S.A. Opinion* formed a significant part of this world—a Johannesburg paper[4], it reflected in detail on the local socio-political and cultural scene and, fortunately for Bosman, offered a platform for his various literary interests which became something of a lifeline in what was always a precarious career. *S.A. Opinion* combined the talents of what Gray describes as 'those three B's of the South African newsprint industry' (2002:17), Bernard Sachs, Edgar Bernstein and Herman Charles Bosman. While Sachs and Bernstein concentrated on local and international politics, Bosman took care of the newspaper's literary and cultural offerings. Bosman's contribution to *S.A. Opinion* was substantial: as literary editor, he was in charge of the overall cultural content which included regular cinema, theatre, and book reviews; he also contributed short stories, reviews, essays, poetry

[4] The paper had a branch office in Cape Town in the mid-thirties, but the centre of command was always in Johannesburg.

and sketches under the various by-lines of Herman Malan, C.M. van den Heever and 'Spectator'. His presence in the periodical was clearly a strong selling point: Gray describes him as the paper's 'star-turn', his latest contributions eagerly awaited by enthusiastic fans. The combination of political comment and cultural analysis which characterised *S.A. Opinion*, at least in its early years, was adopted by many other South African publications including Jacques Malan's *Trek*, *The Forum*, and *Fighting Talk*.

While Sachs's brief induction into the world of the South African Left made him less, rather than more, likely to champion a left-wing approach in his magazine, his indebtedness to Marxism is nevertheless very apparent. Sachs's political editorials in the mid 1930s offered a left-of-centre interpretation of local and international events, which drew at times on a Marxist approach. His economic analysis recognised the failings of Victorian economic liberalism, which had led to world economic crisis, widespread unemployment, and the paradoxical problem of 'too much capital seeking foreign markets' (28 December 1934:1). Instead of looking to the 'revolutionary impulses of Communism', however, he argued in favour of a Keynesian 'planned economy', and advocated international economic reform. In the mid-1930s, Sachs was deeply troubled by the growing talk of war amongst the European powers and the failure of international peace efforts. Locating Hitler's rise to power in Germany's economic collapse, he drew on a Leninist understanding of the function of war in the modern global economy:

> We must make it abundantly clear … that if South Africa is to sacrifice the flower of its manhood, it will not be in a war where behind glittering facades painted with such fine phrases like 'Freedom of the Seas', 'Make the World Safe for Democracy' or 'National Honour', fresh markets are being conquered apace (8 March 1935:1)[5].

Furthermore, his outspoken condemnation of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia

[5] In this sense, he echoes both the (early) Communist and Trotskyist positions on the war question in South Africa. At the time this was a deeply unpopular response (see Drew 2000:226-238).

demonstrated an acute understanding of the function of Europe's colonies in the grand scheme of imperial squabbling.

Reflecting a common tendency in many publications of the time, Adolf Hitler and Nazism were the frequent recipients of satirical cartoons and scorching critique, as were the many local Nazi sympathisers in Malan's Purified National Party (which emerged in 1939, a breakaway from Hertzog's National Party). As you would expect from a liberal publication, the magazine's political analysis drew much of its force from its reaction to an insurgent Afrikaner Nationalism. Here, the likes of Oswald Pirow were easy targets in an economic analysis which emphasised the absolute necessity of South Africa's transformation from a 'feudal', agrarian economy (based on an outdated racism) into a modern, industrialised nation (14 June 1935:1). Like many liberals in South Africa, Sachs believed that the segregationist goals of a powerful South African land-owning class were detrimental to the political and economic progress of the country. This argument, which drew on the lessons of the American Civil War, became one of the periodical's strongest themes, increasingly defining the ambit of its political engagement in the 1940s, the preoccupation with modernity and industrial progress gradually taking it further and further away from an explicit engagement with questions of race or class. Whilst many of the discussions of the 'Native Question' during the 1940s have all the benevolent patronage, muted Social Darwinism and tell-tale vagueness of the South African liberal tradition, the editorials of the pre-war years freely exposed the disingenuousness of South Africa's racial policies and condemned the farce of South Africa's race relations. For Sachs, the notorious Native Bills, passed in 1936, for example, 'would do justice to Hitler himself' (22 February 1936:1). A paper which consistently promoted the value of democracy over other available alternatives, and which was frequently critical of developments under Stalinism, it was nevertheless careful to retain a distinction between 'dictatorships from the left and from the right', asserting that while Nazism 'is but the gigantic preparation for war, the world would some day profit in one form or another from the vast social experimentation that is the feature of Soviet Russia' (4 September 1936:1). The article, however, goes on to suggest that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two dictatorships, stating further that Stalin's efforts to reassure the West of its non-imperialist aims

was a strategic ploy to secure much-needed support[6].

In addition to the threeB's', the periodical relied on contributions by Witwatersrand professor and liberal philosopher R.F.A. Hoernlé, art historian Dr. Joseph Sachs, Professor Max Drennan (Head of English at the University of the Witwatersrand), Professor J.Y.T. Greig (Drennan's successor) and A.C. Partridge (lecturer in English at Pretoria University). It also attracted the notice of some of South Africa's leading Left intellectuals. These included J.G. Taylor (lecturer in Psychology and husband of Marxist literary critic and activist, Dora Taylor), Benjamin Farrington (Classics lecturer at the University of Cape Town who was closely associated with journalist, Ruth Schechter), Eddie Roux (one-time Communist Party member and author of *Time Longer than Rope*), and Frederick Bodmer (Physics lecturer at UCT; for more on this group, see Baruch Hirson (2001). Whilst their contributions remained small (many of them did not submit more than one article), they were a noteworthy and often controversial feature of the periodical in its early years. Some of the more contentious issues which these, and others, took up included women's oppression, censorship and free speech, the so-called immorality of contemporary cinema, the causes of poverty, Olive Schreiner's interest in socialism, and Karl Marx's association with South Africa. For the rest of the magazine's contributors, the great socialist experiment on the other side of Europe was viewed with caution, and some distrust. If there was interest, it is tempting to see it as part of the general upsurge of 'Left' commitment which characterised the 1930s Popular Front period when even the most resolutely apolitical were forced into some kind of heightened awareness as Fascism strengthened[7].

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[6] Hyman Basner, a Johannesburg lawyer and member of the Communist Party, wrote a scorching reply in the following edition, in which he accused the editor of being a Fascist.

[7] One particularly intriguing discussion which I think was more indicative of the peculiar strains of this historical moment than suggestive of any genuine engagement with socialist ideas is to be found in an article on democracy and Fascism by A.C. Partridge in which he offered a left-wing attack on the limitations of democracy while at the same time rejecting the ignorance of 'mob' leadership and advocating the rule of an intellectual aristocracy (*S.A. Opinion* 17 April 1937:7-9; 1 May 1937:5-6).

One of the journalists who sums up both the openness and the ambivalence of the mid-1930s period is regular literary critic, Cyril Kantor, whose numerous positive reviews of books like L.F. Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night* (16 November 1934:21), Ignazio Silone's *Bread and Wine* (3 April 1937:15), Jack Kirkland's adaptation of Erskine Cauldwell's *Tobacco Road* and Liam O'Flaherty's *Famine* (17 April 1937:14) brought the classic texts of the 1930s muck-raking tradition to the attention of South African readers. Kantor seems genuinely appreciative of a new 'revolutionary trend in modern literature' which is committed to social equality, and seeks a balance in 'our muddled and stormy decade' between rapacious individual greed and communal obligation (12 June 1937:14). Positioning himself as robust people's champion against those '"anaemic" critics who write for the vulture press', Kantor applauds fiction with a radical political purpose and rejects 'escapist' art (17 April 1937:14). On other occasions, however, he struggles to find words adequate to express his antipathy for Marxism and Communism, rejecting Marxist intellectual traditions as programmatic and authoritarian (1 May 1937:8, 29 May 1937:12) and dismissing certain Marxist 'cranks' as 'tract-writing, hair-splitting, platform-strutting socialists … who eulogise the glories of machines and industrialism and splash about in the sea of dialectical materialism' (15 May 1937:14). Kantor's review of socialist theatre director, Andre van Gyseghem's production of *The Hairy Ape* by Eugene O'Neil at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg offers a further elaboration of his position[8]. Invoking the dubious notion of racial 'backwardness', Kantor castigates the director for attempting to 'cram [the] unready minds' of his African cast with 'the half-digested seeds of revolution' (6 February 1937:13). Instead of strutting around as 'revolutionary marionettes… mouthing without feeling or sincerity the diatribes of [left-wing] writers', these African actors, 'but recently emerged from the sanity of the Kraal' should concentrate on the 'unexplored material of their own background' (6

[8] Van Gyseghem was a socialist theatre director from Belgium who arrived in South Africa in 1936 under the auspices of the British Drama League (Couzens 1985:176; Peterson 2000:160). The theatre group with which he worked was the Bantu People's Theatre, not the more well-known Bantu Dramatic Society.

February 1937:13). After at least three years of enthusiastic reviews of the 1930s 'social problem' novel, Kantor almost breathes an audible sigh of relief when, in the late 1930s, he feels able to move on to books 'that are non-political in character and which reproduce the essential beauty of fiction in its pure and uncontaminated form' (12 June 1937:14).

Aside from the articles by the UCT radicals, most of the 1930s leftism of *S.A. Opinion* seems to have been little more than a desperate gesture in the direction of social equality which was provoked by the crisis of a particular moment. With *S.A. Opinion*'s re-emergence in the mid-1940s came a substantial change in political orientation, editorial preoccupations having shifted from questions of social justice to the characteristic caution of South African liberalism. This identity grew more assured as National Party policy began to take shape in the years that followed. This more conservative political direction was cemented in 1947 when *S.A. Opinion* merged with *Trek*. The new magazine was to continue in the footsteps of both its predecessors, but for many of *Trek*'s faithful subscribers, the 'old gods of "Trek"' had been 'effectively exorcised' (*Guardian* 22 May 1947:3).

Its politics aside, *S.A. Opinion* was also noteworthy for its active promotion of South African literature and culture. In this, it shared a preoccupation with several other publications of its day, including *The Forum* (a United Party magazine edited by J.P. Cope); Jacques Malan's *Trek*; *The Touleier* (a Johannesburg magazine edited by Charles Blignaut and Herman Charles Bosman), the Afrikaans literary journal *Standpunte* and *Vandag*, a bilingual literary magazine edited by Uys Krige. This emphasis was conspicuously at odds with an academic orthodoxy (in South African English Departments especially), which insisted on the importance of maintaining cultural ties with Britain, and gave little serious attention to local writers (Doherty 1989; 1990). The opening editorial of the newly-launched 1944 *S.A. Opinion* declared: '[a] field in which we aspire to perform a pioneering role … is in the developing of an indigenous South African approach to matters literary'. This included the 'cultivat[ion] of South African short story writing and poetry that can be truly called South African and attains to the necessary standard of literary quality' (March 1944:1). From its inception in 1934, *S.A. Opinion* had provided a platform for local writers through its regular short story and poetry slots, publishing work by Bosman, Nadine Gordimer, Bernard Sachs and Uys Krige, to name

only a few. In the mid-1940s, this coverage increased dramatically, with writers given further encouragement in the form of short story and poetry competitions, the first of which, launched in March 1944 and judged by Professor Greig, was won by Gordimer for her story, 'No Luck Tonight'. Herman Charles Bosman, as the magazine's enthusiastic literary editor, was at the centre of this cultural project, seeing it as an opportunity to kick-start a South African cultural renaissance (*S.A. Opinion* April 1944:25-26).

An indigenous South African criticism in *S.A. Opinion*—developed mainly in relation to English South African writing—was pursued through regular book reviews and essays on South African literature, theatre and art. The earliest attempts to engage with South African culture in *S.A. Opinion*, however, were much more exploratory, focusing mainly on the preliminary questions of whether there was such as thing as South African culture and, if so, was it any good?[9] Articulating what was a dominant position in South African English departments at the time was Witwatersrand English Professor, J.Y.T. Greig. Largely unpersuaded by the merits of South African literature, Greig was insistent that it retain its position as a minor off-shoot of the dominant British tradition and argued for the maintenance of European-derived standards (*S.A. Opinion* 1 November 1935:17; June 1944:22). Those in the very vocal South Africanist group—which included Herman Charles Bosman, Edgar Bernstein, poetry anthologist and journalist Charles Gulston, Scottish-born poet Francis Duncan Sinclair, and Johannesburg poet and journalist Charles Eglington—defended the existence of an 'indigenous South African culture' and argued that it was going from strength to strength. In the late 1940s, there emerged a much more confident cultural theorising as critics turned their attention to the analysis of individual authors and texts. Most noteworthy amongst these efforts were several pioneering survey-type studies of South African literature and culture. In this regard, Edward Davis's 'English Writers of South Africa' (December 1946-April 1947), Edgar Bernstein's 'Steps to a South African Culture' (March-May 1950), J.P.L. Snyman's 'The Rise of the South

[9] A selection of these include: 'There IS a Growing S. African Culture' (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936); 'This Indigenous South African Culture' (*S.A. Opinion* June 1944:22); 'Steps to South African Culture' (*Trek* March 1950); and 'Is there a South African Culture?' (*Trek* February 1951).

African Novel' (August-November 1950), a series on 'Post-War Literature in South Africa' (March-July 1950) and 'The Pulse of Africa' (May-August 1950) by Joseph Sachs represent some of the earliest efforts to define the content of a national culture.

The intensity of the earlier mid-1930s debates—in which the measured reserve of the anglophiles met the energy and hyperbole of the patriotic South Africanists—suggests that there were larger issues at stake. An important marker of 'civility', literature also acts as a form of 'cultural self-recognition', one of the means by which a national group can 'know [itself] and verify [its] national consciousness' (Lecker 1990:662). The value of a national literature is that 'it reflects the value of the nation' (662). Literary criticism in this context becomes a 'displaced form of Nationalism' (664). For those English-speaking white South Africans who could not rest on the cultural achievements of Britain, the project of identifying and promoting an 'indigenous' culture was an urgent one. This incipient nationalist project was drawn into even sharper focus by the rise of a powerful Afrikaner Nationalist movement—dramatically signalled by the 1938 centenary celebrations of the Great Trek and the National Party victory ten years later. Here too, the proximate example of a vigorous Afrikaans literary tradition was a frequent source of concern and envy, something which put English-speaking South Africans to shame. As one commentator put it, only the work of Afrikaans writers 'rings true' (*S.A. Opinion* 22 February 1936:6)[10].

A further spur to the mainly South African-born promoters of South African literature were the frequently patronising attitudes expressed by members of the dominant British culture towards the lowly cultural efforts of its 'backward' dominions. Here, an English South African literature struggled not only to define itself against the much more powerful English tradition, but also had to contend with condescending English critics who tended to dismiss the cultural products of the commonwealth as second-rate and insignificant. This cultural snobbery was undoubtedly reinforced by the

[10] In the wake of the 1938 centenary celebrations, a number of other English publications in South Africa also woke up to the need to invest more in the promotion of a South African English culture. See for example *The Forum* and *Trek.*

many British-born academics who filled important posts in South African universities at the time. It was also uncritically reproduced by English-speaking South Africans themselves, hoping to bolster their social position at home by insisting on their primary cultural allegiance to England.

The response from the English 'South Africanists' was the reverse of the traditional colonial cringe, a somewhat exaggerated and defensive stance which in its early stages argued its case on the grounds of a popular anti-elitism. Thus Germiston-born Edgar Bernstein, who was the first to take up the argument for an indigenous South African culture, rejected the 'snobbish bigotry' (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936: 11) of men like Greig, and asserted (in a later article) that an indigenous culture cannot simply be 'scoffed out of existence by the higher brow of Johannesburg's Parktown or the colonial outlook of Durban's Berea' (*Trek* March 1950: 24)[11]. Like many others, Bernstein's response to South Africa's cultural snobs was to suggest that in the work of artists, poets and writers like Olive Schreiner, Thomas Pringle, Pierneef, Roy Campbell, and Sarah Gertrude Millin, the foundations of a 'specifically South African culture' had already been laid (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936: 11).

These confident assertions, however, are betrayed by considerable anxiety. Despite their vigorous defence of South African culture, most commentators were in agreement that literature produced by English South African writers was simply 'not South African enough'. These writers, they argued, had failed to come to grips either with their location in South Africa or with the reality of South African experience. Suffering from a kind of 'spiritual colonialism' (*Trek* May 1950: 26), and over-identified with Europe, they relied too heavily on English models with the result that much of their writing was derivative, stereotypical and uninspiring. For Edgar Bernstein, echoing Olive Schreiner's comments in the Preface to *The Story of an African Farm*, '[t]oo many books written before World War II could have been written in London or in Timbuctoo' (*Trek* May 1950: 26). This reliance on imported literary models had given rise to an 'underbrush of

[11] Certainly the periodical (mainly through the efforts of Herman Charles Bosman) revelled in a kind of anti-intellectualism, a carry-over from Bosman's days of writing articles for Aegidius Blignaut's the *Sjambok* (see de Kock 1988).

cultural inconsequence': romanticised portraits of 'sun-dappled farm-houses' and 'rolling veld', and a colonial literature of 'brawny farmers and 'savage' blacks', histories which are 'too often only a whitewash of chauvinism' (Bernstein, *Trek* March 1950:25). Attempts to insert a 'background of local colour' along with a 'few good Zulu or Swazi names' and a little 'folkore' were equally unsatisfactory, serving only to confirm the universality of European themes (Feldman, 22 February 1936:6).

Weighing in on this debate in a highly emotive article published in 1944, Herman Charles Bosman located the problem in a disconcerting cultural hybridity: English South African writing was 'neither European nor African', but rather a 'mongrel product' with little 'survival value as a culture' (*S.A. Opinion* April 1944:25). Using an image which was congenial to many participants in this discussion, he argued that South African literature should be 'rooted' in the South African soil or, in his words, 'torn from the stark womb of the earth', its 'roots deeply entangled with the dark purple of the raw tissue of the life that is at hand' (*S.A. Opinion* April 1944:25-26). In taking this line, *Trek-S.A. Opinion* echoed an embattled minority position in South African English Departments which was represented in the mid-1940s by critics like Guy Butler. At the 1948 conference of English teachers held in Pietermaritzburg, for example, Butler exhorted his audience to remember that '[w]e are Europeans living in Africa'. Like Bosman, Bernstein and others, he criticised the desire to 'escape to Europe in imagination', concluding that 'we should not be exiles on a mental St. Helena—neither Europeans nor Africans' (1949:59).

The notion of a 'truly indigenous' South African culture—and the definitions of 'South African-ness' with which it was inevitably associated—was a multivalent and contradictory idea which simultaneously encompassed a range of political-aesthetic requirements, including, for example, a demand for national identification, the requirement that literature engage with concrete socio-political realities and the privileging of the aesthetics of realism over the romantic, sentimental or exotic. For the most part, however, the version of indigeneity to which most commentators appealed was the far more mystical requirement that literature convey a particular South African 'atmosphere' or 'spirit'. Edgar Bernstein's discussion of this problem begins with the argument that South African literature should 'savour of the spirit of the land' (*S.A Opinion* 14 November

1936:11). In support of this rather vague assertion, he draws on the example of 'Bantu music' and 'Bushmen painting' to make the argument that culture 'arises whenever a people … are so affected by the impact of their environment … that they seek to express it in artistic form' (*Trek* March 1950:24). While the definition of 'environment' used here includes brief references to its human and socio-economic dimensions, it is to the impact of the natural environment that Bernstein most consistently returns. Like many others in this debate, the surprising and rather banal resolution of this quest for indigeneity is the requirement that literature involve detailed descriptions of the South African landscape, which is variously (and repeatedly) figured in terms of drought, 'decay', 'blistering heat', 'vastness', 'emptiness', 'dullness' and 'power' (Poyurs, *S.A. Opinion* October 1944: 27; Bernstein, *Trek* March 1950: 24-26; Sinclair, *Trek* May 1949:27).

Such a context—in which 'nature exerts so imposing a form' (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11)—demands stylistic experimentation and originality:

> The artist has a new land to interpret. A strange land, a land that has slumbered indolently for centuries, dark and unknown …. It is a land where the bigness is overwhelming, and in the end, it will only be in terms of that bigness, and the dark brooding spirit of eternity it carries with it, that great South African art will be created (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11).

According to Bernstein, Olive Schreiner's 'tragic' realism comes closest to capturing this 'dark brooding spirit' (*Trek* May 1950:26), and key to this success are her attempts to forge new novelistic forms appropriate to a distinctive South African experience. One of the more interesting outcomes of this preoccupation with landscape, therefore, was a literary aesthetic capable of appreciating the development of innovative form[12].

That landscape and the physical environment should appear as such strongly charged terms in these efforts to define a national culture is

[12] Unlike many later critics, Ridley Beeton also gives serious attention to Schreiner's stylistic experimentation in *The Story of an African Farm* (*Trek* August 1948:28).

intriguing. The pleasures of recognition are an undeniable part of the fascination of culture and, for a literary institution seeking to establish itself in the shadow of another much more powerful, the reflected (realist) image is a potent confirmation of self-worth (Lecker 1990:662). In this case, however, the literary discussion is conspicuous for its exclusive focus on natural landscapes and the startling absence of the human. In the face of considerable odds, these early literary nationalists privilege the geographical and geological over the human and social worlds, and blithely ignore the proximate realities of rapid urban-industrial change. The uniqueness of South African society lies not in its peculiar relations of production and exchange (brutal labour recruitment practices, legislated racism, poverty wages in mining and agriculture) but in some mystical spirit of ecological place. Interestingly, the same (essentialist) markers of authenticity employed here—land, specificity, experience—are also invoked in on-going constructions of an inclusive national identity in the post-apartheid present, a repetition which, at the very least, serves as a reminder of the enormous complexities of the South African nationalist project itself[13].

From landscape description, of course, it is only a small step to the banality of colonial myth. According to Edgar Bernstein, South Africa is not only sparsely-populated, beautiful and overwhelming, it is also 'savage', violent and unpredictable, a place in which humans feel their true insignificance in relation to powerful 'elemental forces'. The image of Africa central to the construction of a national culture in this instance is the primitive, slumbering, inscrutable 'other' of Europe, a new world 'still as it was in the first day of creation' (*S.A. Opinion* 14 November 1936:11), a place where nature is 'no kind and soothing mother' but a 'peasant nurse rudely castigating her charges' (*Trek* March 1950:25). Bernstein's

[13] See for example, the Statement of the President of the African National Congress, Nelson Mandela at his inauguration as President of South Africa, 10 May 1994. http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/speeches/ inaugpta.html [Accessed 16 January 2008] and the Statement of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki on the occasion of the adoption by the Constitutional Assembly of The Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill, 8 May 1996. http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/orders/new2002_ mbeki.htm [Accessed 16 January 2009]

commitment to place and his avowedly realist aesthetic, defined against both popular Romance forms and modernist experimentation, is undermined by a romanticisation of Africa drawn squarely from Victorian myth. While this particular rendering of the colonial stereotype may be the most elaborate, the basic structuring oppositions between 'culture' and 'nature', 'reason' and 'irrationality', 'confinement' and 'space' (which also rehearse an equally powerful stereotype of a somnolent and irrational femininity) are evident across a wide range of texts. Like many other emerging 'nations', this founding moment in the construction of a national identity, therefore, encompasses a racist and sexist construction (Baym 1978).

These colonialist assumptions also determine the scope of the magazine's critical interests: the discussion of black South African culture is always confined to pre-modern or traditional expressive forms and, aside from the occasional reference to the work of Peter Abrahams, the growing body of contemporary black literature—which, at the time, included the likes of Es'kia Mphahlele, Thomas Mofolo, R.R.R. Dhlomo and others—was completely ignored[14]. A series of articles by Joseph Sachs on African culture entitled 'The Pulse of Africa' was even more explicit, reproducing all the familiar Manichean binaries of a racist cultural vision including the dichotomies of body and intellect; expressiveness and restraint; and intuition and rationality (*Trek* June 1950:25). In 'Primitive Negro Sculpture', Sachs goes as far as to deny African consciousness and spirituality in his emphasis on the 'intuitive', 'instinctive' and 'unthinking' nature of the 'African response' to his or her environment (*Trek* July 1950: 9; August 1950:26)[15].

These examples, as well as many others of casually (often unconsciously) expressed racism, give some sense of the racist underpinnings of a benevolent South African liberalism. There were some challenges to this dominant consensus. In his discussion of South African literature, Herman Charles Bosman artfully sends up the absurdities of colonialist stereotypes of the 'Dark Continent' and African 'savagery' in the manner of his Marico tales (*Trek* September 1948:24). In similar fashion,

[14] An article by H. Poyurs was the single exception to this rule (*S.A. Opinion* October 1944:27).

[15] These racist binaries (and mystifications) are repeated in Sachs's monograph on the paintings of Irma Stern (Sachs 1942).

Durban author and journalist Oliver Walker chooses satire over moral condemnation in his regular column 'Leaves from my Diary' which he used to attack assumptions of African inferiority and the associated stereotypes of psychological mystery and physical resilience (*Trek* October 1948:10).

Two other writers who are equally suspicious of the colonialist mentality—and who provide a very different reading of the failure of South African literature—are R. Feldman and Frederick Bodmer. While Feldman invokes a widely-used stereotype in his comment that the many themes of South African life offer 'a mighty sub-continent to explore and conquer', he takes the debate over national authenticity back to more concrete (and less spiritual) concerns:

> [t]he first and fundamental cause of our literary poverty is due to the fact that writers here hold aloof from portraying the reality around them since the social theme of master and servant, and the racial theme of white and black would not be welcomed.

This is particularly noticeable in the representation of African experience: 'We get stories of Native life, are told of the witchdoctor, of "lobolo", of beads and skins, and assegais, and the patriarchal life at the kraal' but are seldom troubled with the terrible stories of rural poverty and desperation which feature so frequently in the daily press. 'These and a thousand similar themes are shunned by South African writers because they do not wish to offend the ruling cult' (*S.A. Opinion* 22 February 1936:6). Feldman singles out the work of Irma Stern both because it avoids the temptation to depict Africans as 'grown up children', and for its commitment to depicting 'social life and social problems', working as she is within a tradition which generally 'fights shy of the painful and the tragic' (17 May 1935:10).

Feldman's realist aesthetic arises out of his conviction—shared by many on the Left during this period—that the contemporary socio-political scene called for a more politicised literary response. Echoing the debates in the British *Left Review* and the US *Partisan Review*—and anticipating a contentious debate in the Jacques Malan's *Trek*—Feldman rejects the 'art for art's sake' approaches which advocate 'a free, aimless art, bound to no subject or ideal, free from the problems of the day' and offers instead an ideal of committed political engagement: 'It is no longer feared to be called

"tendentious" since to have a "tendency" means to have an outlook, means jumping off the fence and taking a stand' (*S.A. Opinion* 22 February 1936:6).

A similar emphasis on a radical political commitment and the related preference for realist modes is to be found in UCT academic, Frederick Bodmer's discussion of South African painting. In an essay which appeared in 1936, Bodmer also takes issue with an artistic tradition in which beauty is privileged over 'social reflection'. This failure to engage with the reality of South African experience is most conspicuous in the preference for images of naked 'noble savages' in environments of rural simplicity over the representation of African modernity:

> [The South African artist] never echoes in the least the Native as we know him from the factory, the police court and the petrol pump. His exact genesis and habit are difficult to state. Maybe the artist actually catches him where he is said to exist in the raw, unharmed yet by the wiles and vices of white civilisation. Then he develops him in the purifying medium of his creative vision whence our canvas-native emerges full of that shining glamour and unaggressive dignity which so much enhance the charm of the South African drawing room (*S.A. Opinion* 11 January 1935:15).

Despite the fact that 'European and Native are bound together by the most intimate working ties, in industry, in agriculture, in the kitchen, even in the nursery', they remain completely separated in South African art (15). Bodmer's determination to acknowledge the reality of contemporary urban African experience not only challenges the romantic (and racist) distortions of a characteristic white South African aesthetic, but also repudiates a powerful political consensus which hid its repressive social aims behind the liberal rhetoric of 'indigenisation' and 'retribalisation'. As Bhekisiswe Peterson has argued, the political aims of a supposedly 'benevolent segregation' (2000:162)—premised on the myth that a 'pure' African culture had to be protected from the corruptions of modernity—also found parallel expression in the arts. The explicit encouragement of traditional African art forms was just one of the many ways in which the South African state sought to entrench cultural difference as part of its broader segregationist

goals[16]. Bodmer's and Feldman's insistence on the need to recognise the reality of African modernity, and their corresponding distrust of rural constructions are part of an important counter-tradition in South African criticism, which was also articulated in magazines such as the early *Trek*, *The Voice*, *The Torch* and *Fighting Talk*.

Further reflection in *S.A. Opinion* on the 'art and society' debate was prompted both by a turbulent international political context and by the contributions of its deliberately controversial literary editor. For Herman Charles Bosman, one of the chief pre-requisites of a 'truly South African culture' was that it should be free from all 'political ideologies'. Literature is at its best when there is no politics at all, just 'that gaudy, frightening, suffocating, incredible, catastrophic vortex that goes by the simple name of "Die Lewe"' (*S.A. Opinion* April 1944:26). Bosman's dedicated antipathy to politics, in both art and life—part of a strongly-felt Romantic approach which he was seldom shy to promote—was expressed at a time when the work of left-wing writers like Stephen Spender, Harold Laski, and Cecil Day-Lewis still enjoyed widespread currency[17]. It seems likely that it was precisely in response to the contemporary vogue for left-wing ideas that Bosman advanced an ultra-Romantic position of this kind. His articles on a range of subjects written between November 1944 and September 1948 celebrated artistic freedom and individuality, gloried in the image of the artist as uniquely gifted and god-like—a 'divinely inspired madman' (*S.A. Opinion* August 1944:24)—and (echoing Bernard Sachs) rejected the constraints which ideological conviction and an obligation to community imposed upon imaginative flight. The polarisation of life and politics that is key to this argument reflects a denuded definition of the political as well as a failure to recognise ideology or politics except as it occurs in the arguments of others.

An article entitled 'Art and Feudalism', published under the by-line Herman Malan, was one of Bosman's most contentious. An artistic manifesto of the most politically incorrect kind, deliberately calculated to

[16] In this regard, see Peterson's discussion of Bertha Slosberg's involvement in Durban-based theatre group, the 'Mtetwa Lucky Stars' (2000:170f).

[17] The *S.A. Opinion* published at least two articles by Stephen Spender on this issue in October 1946 and May 1947; see also 'Politics and the Writer' by H. Gill (May 1948:32f).

offend the liberal sensibilities of *S.A. Opinion* readers, it was essentially a plea for artistic freedom and integrity versus state-controlled art, and a defence of the virtues of an apolitical stance. Its more outrageous qualities relate to the way in which, in making this case, it provocatively celebrates the opportunities presented to the artistic sensibility by the spectacle of vast social inequalities; in short, the benefits for art in a feudal regime:

> My view is that poetry can reach its ultimate power of expression only in a state in which a monied, leisured and useless aristocracy is at the head of the nation. Art can leap forth as a tiger only in a state governed by an aristocracy, or—even better—in a slave state. For poetry to be great and inspired and a living force you have got to have a world in which there are magnificent and terrible contrasts …. Anything less than this is no material for poetry …. You don't need much more than a standard four intelligence to say that it is not fair that some people should be rich and others poor, and just for no reason …. This is all obvious stuff …. But it is only an artist with the stature of Christ who can dismiss the whole question with the magnificent finality of 'the poor you always have with you' (November 1944:24f).

Bosman's insistence that this was not a satirical piece compelled editor Bernard Sachs to insert an explanatory note. He had decided to publish it, he said, 'because it [was] well and amusingly written' but made it plain that he rejected its 'blatant ultra-Romantic, ivory tower conception of art' (*S.A. Opinion* November 1944:24). Confronted with the spectacle of this seemingly callous indifference to human suffering, most respondents were quick to distance themselves from the kind of ultra-Romantic escapism and extreme individualism which they took Bosman's position to represent[18].

[18] It is difficult to differentiate between the 'authentic' Bosman and his many satirical masks. Left-wing activist Fanny Klenerman's reports that at a protest organised by the South African Garment Worker's Union, he saw Bosman ('our great writer, our South African hero') walking amongst the demonstrators and poking them with a plank which had a nail in it (Klenerman Papers, William Cullen Library, Autobiogr. Material A2031/a).

Even the ever-cautious Professor Greig, called upon against his better judgement to respond to Bosman's argument, was forced to concede the value of a more politicised stance, even going so far as to make the weak counter-argument that it was the artist's duty 'to revolt' (*S.A. Opinion* March 1945:22). For someone with such an extreme aversion to the politics of literature, this acknowledgment was quite exceptional[19].

Others responded to the controversy by taking issue with Bosman's Romantic view of the artist. Rejecting the familiar Romantic tropes of the artist as 'lone eagle', or 'man of prophecy', the anonymous author of 'Social Background and Literature', for example, argued that, like all others, 'the artist is subject … to the frailties, prejudices, and ambitions' which are the lot of ordinary human beings (*S.A. Opinion* August 1945:24). Writing about changing currents in both local and international poetry, Charles Gulston also approves of the contemporary shift away from the image of the artist as 'creature apart' or lofty truth-teller:

> [The poet's] inspiration … comes not from a sojourn in the Aegean Isles, but from the pavement outside the poet's doorstep …. The poet in South Africa to-day is going not so much to the mountain top or the flowering field for his inspiration, as to the mine shaft and the city slum … (November 1946:24).

Instead of exchanging 'his birthright for a mess of pottage', Gulston continues, the artist has finally come to the realisation that 'there is a poetry of the street as well as the cathedral'. For Gulston, this shift is evident

[19] Just how far Greig was prepared to go to deny the political significance of literary-cultural texts is demonstrated in a review of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* in which he responds to the contemporary interest in political significance: 'I shuddered at the thought of Charlie Chaplin in the clutches of an 'ism''. Happily he remains 'no more contaminated by isms than a child of ten'. The film, he suggests, is not modern at all: it is 'as old and therefore as new, as the story of Harlequin and Colombine, the fooling of Shakespeare's clown, and the pretty fable of Cindarella. In essence, it is clean outside time …. I would have called it "Houp-la!" or "Nuts and Boltings" or "Oil and Chianti"' (*S.A. Opinion* 24 July 1936:15).

among a new crop of South African poets who eschew the eternal truth and the Romantic pose for poetry which is 'part of themselves, and wholly of their age', and which 'if it expresses no immortal truth' at least expresses 'a temporary one, which is creditable' (24). With these debates, we also return to the realist aesthetic advocated by the likes of Feldman and Bodmer.

Despite these voices—and despite the horrified reactions to Bosman's apolitical stance—the bulk of the criticism in *S.A. Opinion,* tended in the opposite direction, namely an outright hostility to literature with a political purpose, including both left-wing and proto-feminist critique. The tendency to wish away, misread or condemn political content was especially evident in a pioneering series of articles on South African literature which appeared from the late 1940s onwards. In the first series on South African literature published in 1947, Edward Davis, of the University of South Africa, evinces an almost schoolboy delight in the irreverence and political irresponsibility of a figure like Bosman, whose literary aesthetic is very close to his own. Unlike Bernstein's appreciation of the tragic mode in South African writing, Davis criticises Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* for its tendency to 'wallow' in tragedy, its bleak dissection of human suffering and its weak characterisation of men: Waldo, for example, is lightly dismissed as 'a primrose by the river's brim, if not quite a pansy'. He is equally unimpressed by Schreiner's treatment of women's issues, declaring that he finds it 'impossible to admire a prose which sometimes bristles with a feminine moustache'. Schreiner's portrait of Africa is particularly difficult to accept, mainly because its sombre preoccupations are so far removed from his own more Bosman-like appreciation for the comically absurd. For Davis, Schreiner depicts an Africa in which 'the clouds return not after the rain, and in which the grasshopper is a burden. Africa is not like that. It is not a land of weeping and gnashing of teeth. The voice of the veld is thunder, silence or a snore', a 'guffaw', rather than 'groan' (*S.A. Opinion* January 1947:22). Sarah Gertrude Millin is similarly chastised for her insistence on wearing the wearisome 'hair-shirt' of social consciousness and her tendency to 'linger wretchedly over many thoroughly unpleasant things' (*S.A. Opinion* February 1947:27). Similarly, in an article which compares Steinbeck's *Tobacco Road* with Bosman's *Mafeking Road,* Davis registers a strong antipathy for the social realism of the Steinbeck tradition, preferring Bosman's less earnest style which 'doesn't point out

anything', least of all a moral truth (*S.A. Opinion* January 1948:32).

The same aversion to the 'social problem' novel is also to be found in J.P.L. Snyman's study of South African literature (for which he had just been awarded a D.Litt from Unisa). Also writing about *The Story of an African Farm*, he suggests that 'one is inclined to over-estimate the value of this book because it happens to be the most famous novel in South African English fiction' (*Trek* September 1950:16). As a novelist,

> Olive Schreiner's temper, and her biased, even angry, attitude have a harmful effect on her work. *The Story of an African Farm* is a statement of her opinions on religion, and a challenge flung to a bigoted society by a young woman who hated cant but did not have sufficient experience in writing to practise literary restraint and thus obtain objectivity (16).

In an echo of Virginia Woolf's response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, he concludes, 'Olive Schreiner's writing expresses 'angry' convictions—and most critics are agreed that no true artist should allow personal convictions unduly to colour his work. The true artist stands above such contentious issues' (18). This response is clearly motivated by more than a general hostility towards politics in art. A woman with a bad 'temper' and 'angry' convictions has overstepped the boundaries of acceptable femininity.

An article entitled 'New Writers and the Colour Problem' by 'Masque'[20], which examines the work of Alan Paton, Wulf Sachs, Doris Lessing and Oliver Walker, repeats many of the same aesthetic and political demands. Beginning with a review of Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, 'Masque' echoes a dominant view that good literature should convey 'objective' truth: 'Masque' appreciates the novel's 'objective' stance on racial questions and the fact that it 'paints no obvious moral'. Instead, its position 'derives from a broad moral attitude to life rather than from any particular political or ideological point of view' (*Trek* June 1950:3). This gives it 'universal' appeal. In contrast to Paton's sentimental optimism, Wulf

[20] The article appears with the following note: 'Masque was the non-de-plume of a contributor who was a lecturer in Literature at a Scottish University before he settled in South Africa' (*S.A. Opinion* June 1950:2).

Sachs's novel, *Black Anger*, is too despairing: its 'obvious prejudices', its undisguised sympathy for its black hero, and its 'countless illustrations' of white obstinacy, stupidity and cruelty give the impression of 'a lack of balance'. Similarly, both Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* and Oliver Walker's *Kaffirs are Lively* are too heavy-handed, too earnest, and too strongly partisan in their approach to the 'colour question'. They lack 'poise' and 'objectivity' and 'Masque' wonders at their 'strange compulsion to take sides' (5). For 'Masque', this is to muddle the 'aesthetic' and the 'moral'. As a result these writers 'have failed to attain that universality which would have brought their work into the enduring prestige of world appreciation' (46).

Joseph Sachs's examination of the work of Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing places the early Nadine Gordimer as the more 'universal' and less political of the two writers. For Sachs, while Gordimer gently points to South Africa's conflicts, Doris Lessing is 'like the Classical Fury in her merciless pursuit of stupidity, prejudice and social injustice'. More political than her contemporaries, she 'formulate[s] her problems socially, before treating them artistically'. A naturally 'tendentious' writer fully absorbed by the realities of her context, 'she is at her best … when she forgets her moral mandate and writes out of the sheer exuberance of her talent' (15). Once again, Bosman's work provides the more attractive example: in contrast to this earnest propagandising, Bosman,

> travels light …. He does not carry the ideological luggage of the young writer today, and seems to get along very well without it. On the rough road he has taken, it would only be an encumbrance. Freud and Marx would be out of place in the Marico Bushveld (*Trek* November 1951:16).

Reacting against this liberal consensus were Johannesburg trade unionist and radical theatre director Guy Routh, novelist Oliver Walker, and leftist literary critic and novelist R.K. (Jack) Cope. Routh's critique of Edward Davis's five-part series on South African literature centres on its failure to offer an 'integrated view'. By ignoring the social and material contexts 'on which [South African literature] is based', Davis overlooks one of the most important aspects of the South African experience, namely the

problem of its 'human relations' (Letter to the Editor, May 1947:3). Routh's suggestion that a literary critic should 'attempt to assay the mineral' rather than merely 'describe the quartzite' invokes a familiar Marxist critical method, and his emphasis on 'human relations' leads to an awareness of racial division and tension which is rare amongst mainstream critics like Davis. Sensitive to the way in which Africans are represented in fiction by white South African writers—regarded as either 'lovable children' or 'mysterious savages' (3)—Routh also gives credit to a more socially-conscious South African tradition. Particularly concerned that Davis omits both William Plomer's *Turbott Woolf* and Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket*, he also suggests, in anticipation of a much more contemporary debate, that an adequate account of South African literature would need to give attention to non-literary genres like travel writing and popular magazines.

Where Oliver Walker goes against the grain in his satire on white South African racism, and offers a thoughtful critique of the patronising sentimentality of Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*, R.K. Cope, the only remaining contributor from the original *Trek* team, also made a case for art which was socially responsive[21]. In a rare gesture towards existing political realities in South Africa, Cope suggests that South African writers should offer honest and forthright comment on the world in which they live: and '[if] I am accused of advocating a literature with moral and social implications', he says, 'I must answer that is precisely what I'm doing!' (March 1950:10). His case for a political art is qualified by two important assumptions. In his suggestion that 'a moral and social aim does not make literature', Cope offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between literature and ideology than is generally credited to Marxist or left-inclined literary critics. The second qualification (surely a reference to Engels's comments on the work of Honoré de Balzac) that 'the conscious aims of an author have sometimes been in contradiction to his creative achievement' (10) also makes it clear that Cope's sense of what it means to produce a socially-conscious art is far removed from any simplistic notion of art as 'message' or 'propaganda'.

[21] During this period, Cope wrote only two pieces for *Trek*, concentrating instead on his 'Art and the People Column' which appeared in the Communist newspaper, the *Guardian*.

S.A. Opinion registered the contradictions of its unstable socio-economic context in its heterogeneous politics and its many unresolved debates. The growing conservatism of the magazine, the demise of the original *Trek* and the story of Bernard Sachs's gradual shift from a leftist political stance to the more 'expansive' territory of the free artistic imagination are emblematic of a significant shift to the right in South African politics in the post-war period which is also echoed in other parts of the world. Mirroring these shifts, in turn, are the cultural debates in the magazine itself. If *S.A. Opinion* records the gradual disappearance of left-wing perspectives in mainstream cultural discussion, and the ascendance of a liberal consensus, it also marks a moment in South African literary history where the areas of 'political' and the 'aesthetic' become increasingly separated and polarised. This is illustrated not only in the general tenor of the magazine's cultural debates, but also in the editorial decision to exclude political content altogether. A moment of South African 'canon-formation', *S.A. Opinion* is an important antecedent to the canon-making processes of university journals such as *Theoria* and *English in Africa* (Barker & de Kok 2007). Of equal importance for the genealogy of South African criticism, however, are the core values which this criticism encoded, namely a profound hostility to all forms of political art, the conflation of a liberal position with 'neutrality' and 'objectivity', the tacit acceptance of racial hierarchies, the valorisation of colonial masculinities and the corresponding degradation of the feminine. More problematic perhaps than this is the assumption of moderate rationality which informs it.

With the benefit of hindsight it is easy to be alert to the contradictions which structure this discourse—the immersion of these critics in particular historical contexts; their blindness to the enabling conditions of their own intellectual production; and the wider context of economic, social and political violence hovering just beyond the closed office door or the comfortable suburban home. For Theodor Adorno (2002), these intellectual and political complicities are not so much an act of bad faith as the necessary effects of being in the world. Rather than experienced as an uncomfortable impingement from without, the values of the existing social order have migrated into the 'immanent' structures of consciousness itself (198). In these conditions, the choice of a critical perspective outside the sway of existing society is therefore illusory: cultural criticism is necessarily

complicit in the wider social world. Much more difficult than pointing to the blind spots of the past is to understand, and to be aware of, the complicities of cultural criticism in the present, to recognise the powerful pervasive influence of dominant social norms and to critique the enabling conditions of present-day intellectual production. Ironically, of all the writers in *S.A. Opinion*, it is Herman Charles Bosman, with his perverse celebration of art under Feudalism and his refusal to conform to the critical posture of the reasoned moderate, who comes closest to demonstrating this point.

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Re-constructing Grey Street in Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding*

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Introduction

In this paper I begin an exploration of the fictional constructions of Grey Street in Imraan Coovadia's novel, *The Wedding*, in order to attempt a deeper understanding of the connection between writers, place and identity in the South African Indian context. I am particularly interested in the experience of South African Indian urban space and how it is represented in literature. The Grey Street complex is a very interesting site for a study of this kind as it has, since the colonial era, been an intensely contested space. It is also a good indicator of South African Indian life since eighty percent of Indians are urban and over forty percent reside in Durban (Meer 1969:1). Many theories of urban space have already been established and much has been written in South Africa about the history and geography of the Grey Street complex. However, little has been said about the *literary* representations of Grey Street and a study of this kind can hopefully contribute to the debate on the cultural representation of urban space in South Africa and stimulate further studies of Indian literary production centered on writers, place and identity in the country.

This paper is adapted from my MA thesis, which analysed the fictional constructions of Grey Street by both Imraan Coovadia in *The Wedding* (2001) and Aziz Hassim in *The Lotus People* (2002), in order to explore the different ways in which South African Indian writers have constructed the Grey Street complex in their fiction[1]. Although beyond the

[1] See my dissertation, *Fictional Constructions of Grey Street by Selected South African Indian Writers* (2007), supervised by Professor Lindy Stiebel.

scope of this paper, it must be acknowledged that other South African Indian writers have also represented Grey Street in their works, including Kesevaloo Goonam in *Coolie Doctor* (1991), Phyllis Naidoo in *Footprints in Grey Street* (2002), Mariam Akabor in *Flat 9* (2006) and Ravi Govender in *Down Memory Lane* (2006), and in a broader study they should be considered in relation to *The Wedding* in order to establish a more comprehensive view of the South African Indian experience of the Grey Street complex.

Historical Context

Since the colonial era, literary works representing the city of Durban have largely sidelined the experience of the Grey Street complex. This is evident, for example, in the work of Yvonne Miller entitled, *Dear Old Durban* (1985), in which she—a white South African—details the historical experiences of Durban's inhabitants in the different parts of the city. While her descriptions of the white-occupied areas of the city are thoroughly documented, when Miller goes on to describe Grey Street she admits,

> I have said nothing about the very interesting Indian shops in Grey Street and the fascinating Indian Market because I knew nothing about them (1985:23).

It is this ignorance regarding the Indian areas of the city which has resulted largely in the Indian perspective being discarded in white, apartheid literature and the Grey Street complex being represented as a marginal and insignificant, though at times exotic, space (see, for example, Trapido 2003:82). As Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed highlight, the Indian perspective of South African history is lacking in the face of the overwhelming voice of colonial and apartheid ruling classes (2007:12). Today in the postcolonial/post-apartheid era there is a growing interest in the way in which postcolonial writers are using the textual space of fiction to redefine colonial spatial history. This paper explores the ways in which the South African Indian writer, Imraan Coovadia, through his novel, *The Wedding,* challenges the dominant, white spatial perspective of the city, re-

centering the borderlands and thus providing an alternative way of reading and writing the Grey Street complex.

The Grey Street complex, through which Grey Street runs, is a distinctly bounded space in Durban's city center and has, since the colonial era, been an intensely contested space. From as early as 1860, Indian migrants were brought to South Africa from India as indentured labourers to work on white-owned sugarcane farms in the colony. While this group of Indians mostly stayed in compounds in and around sugarcane farming areas, it was a second 'wave' of Indian immigrants, known as passenger Indians, who first settled in the Grey Street complex. From 1871 passenger Indians began coming to Natal freely in order to start up business ventures as they recognised early on that there was a market for the specialised needs of the indentured Indians in the colony (see Vahed 1995). Although the Grey Street complex was originally occupied by white settlers, it was marshy and not conducive to the use of wagons. As a result, Indians were left to make use of it while whites secured the more pleasant area of the Berea for their exclusive use (Badsha 2001:14).

It must be remembered, however, that although the whites initially gave way to Indian settlement in the Grey Street complex and in the colony generally, they believed that after the Indians had served their time as indentured labourers, they would all go back to India. For reasons beyond the scope of this paper to analyse in any depth, colonialists' expectations were thwarted when Indian immigrants decided to stay on in the colony after their terms of indenture had expired. Feeling increasingly threatened by the soaring number and economic success of the Indian population in Durban, the colonial government began to implement a number of strategies to control and quash what it deemed the 'Asiatic Menace'. From this point onwards the exclusion of Indians in Durban rose drastically, for the government

> increasingly came to view town planning, public health, trade arrangements and other public issues in terms of racial and ethnic distinctions (Vahed 1995:42).

Numerous acts, including the Dealers Licenses Act (1897), were passed to restrict Indian trade and residence to the Grey Street complex alone, an area

in the white colonial city that became what Michel Foucault (1986) would call a 'heterotopia of exclusion', a site in which individuals whose behaviour or appearance is considered 'abnormal' or 'inferior' to the norm are placed. Furthermore, even though by 1911, 44 percent of the Indian population in the country was South African born, Indians were refused their right to South African citizenship right up until 1961 (Dhupelia-Mesthrie 2000:13). It is clear, therefore, that Indians in the Grey Street complex were, throughout the colonial and apartheid years, marginalised from the city's socio-spatial landscape, a circumstance that has in post-apartheid South Africa been redressed in the fictional works of South African Indian writers such as Coovadia.

Imraan Coovadia's *The Wedding*

Because the kind of space I am looking at in this paper is a specifically urban city space, I draw specifically on Foucault's (1977; 1980) theorisation of the Panopticon which has influenced the construction and experience of the modern city with its grid-iron street patterns and high-rise buildings that create optimum urban surveillance and control. This idea of rational, top-down urban planning is important when analysing the spatial policy and urban design of the apartheid city, a policy that relied on the principles of the Panopticon to ensure control and order over the 'black spots' of the city (see, for example, Judin & Vladislavic 1998). The Grey Street complex, the Indian zone in the city of Durban, was an area kept under tight surveillance by the apartheid government. It was a zone that was constantly policed to ensure that Indians remained in their designated area and did not 'spill' onto the whites-only streets.

As a counterpoint to Foucault's notion of the panoptic ordering of urban space, urban theories by Michel de Certeau in 'Walking in the city' (1984) and Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project* (2002) are used in this paper to explore an alternative way of engaging with city space. As the title of his essay connotes, de Certeau is concerned with the seemingly mundane, everyday practice of walking through the city. He argues that, through the action of walking, pedestrians have the power to individuate and make ambiguous the legible order given to cities by planners and thus escape the 'imaginary totalizations' imposed from above (de Certeau 1993:153). In

other words, for de Certeau, it is the pedestrians of the city down below who are the real makers and shapers of cities. It will be shown in an analysis of *The Wedding* to follow that, through an intimate knowledge of walking through the city, the Indian inhabitants of Grey Street are able to re-route and even re-root themselves in spaces that evade apartheid's surveillance infrastructure.

Like de Certeau, Benjamin believed that the city should be approached subjectively, on foot, by the individual. In *The Arcades Project* he focuses on the marginalia of the city, considering the gambler, the *flaneur* and the prostitute as being central to a fuller understanding of life in the modern city. This will be applicable to the characters in *The Wedding* who are considered by the white colonial government to be the flotsam and jetsam of society. However, Benjamin's *flaneur* figure, whom he considers the embodiment of the modern urban dweller, will have limited application in this paper. For the *flaneur*, the city is seen more than lived in and his gaze is that of the alienated man who never feels completely at home in the metropolis. However, because of the peculiar racial zoning within the South African apartheid city, the experience of the Grey Street complex would have differed greatly from that of Benjamin's *flaneur*. By restricting the Indian community of Grey Street to a specific bounded space in the city, what emerged was an homogenous, tight-knit Indian neighbourhood. Within this lived-in space of social cohesion, therefore, very few individuals could remain anonymous like the *flaneur* or experience urban life from a distance.

The Wedding has been called a 'novelised memoir' (Govinden 2004:158), as it takes the form of an autobiography narrated by a grandson about his grandparents, Ismet Nassin and Khateja Haveri. The novel begins by recounting the circumstances surrounding the wedding of the grandparents. Ismet, a clerk from Bombay, sees Khateja for the first time from a train window and falls in love with her immediately. After a deal is made with her father, Ismet is given permission to marry Khateja. Khateja on the other hand, being an aggressively independent woman, is insulted by being sold into marriage and promises to make Ismet's life a misery. The rest of the narrative focuses on the couple's turbulent marriage which ultimately leads Ismet to decide that he and his wife should move to South Africa where they can start afresh. Like many other passenger Indians coming to South Africa at the time, Ismet believes that better opportunities await them

in the new land. Once they arrive at the port of Durban, they manage to find an abode in the Grey Street complex. In Grey Street the couple is faced with unexpected challenges that force them to adapt to the new environment. *The Wedding* thus foregrounds the experience of the old Indian diasporas[2] in South Africa and the Grey Street complex in particular, raising questions about the meaning of home, Indian diasporic identity and collective remembering.

The autobiographical element in *The Wedding* has been said to be at the heart of postcolonial/post-apartheid writing in South Africa (Govinden 2008:14). Conventional historical accounts of Indians in South Africa have traditionally reduced the Indian people coming to South Africa to numbers. However, in *The Wedding*, Coovadia breaks away from recounting the conventional master narrative of South African history by deliberately foregrounding the couple's personal life story and at the same time relegating large historical and political events to the margins of the narrative. As the narrator points out, despite the fact that '[a]round these star-spangled anti-lovers, South Africa started to burn' politically, they continued to exist 'in a self-contained bubble, sealed off from their neighbours, from India, and from historical time' (Coovadia 2001:221). This is evident in Khateja who, despite enjoying reading the newspaper on a daily basis, does not pay any attention to the political issues raised in them. As the narrator says, Khateja

> had too visceral a grasp on humanity to comprehend politics. What was in front of one's eyes and stepping on one's toes and sticking its fingers in one's nose, was real injustice (223).

Even for Ismet '[politics] never really intruded on his consciousness, which was otherwise occupied' (162). By decentering hegemonic history and enlarging the individual story in his work, Coovadia is successful in the

[2] The term diasporas is borrowed from Vijay Mishra in his essay 'The diasporic imaginary' (1996) and is used in this context as a noun to denote diasporic people rather than broader demographic shifts. The term old Indian diasporas refers specifically to those who travelled to the colonies during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, either as indentured labourers or as passenger Indians.

postcolonial act of turning numbers back into people. In other words, Coovadia uses the autobiographical mode to re-write the previously marginalised back into the history from which they were once erased. Therefore, by recasting the historical events in the story in human scale, Coovadia undermines the Foucauldian panoptic view of spatial history, taking on instead a de Certeau-like perspective that focuses on the subjective experience of everyday life.

South Africa as Space and Place in *The Wedding*

At first, when Ismet introduces to Khateja the idea of moving to South Africa, neither of them has a precise sense of the place. For both of them it is a far away and indeterminate place for as Khateja exclaims,

> South Africa, South Africa! What is this south South Africa? … What is this South Africa thing you've gone and got into it? Where is it being anyway, just out of interest? (121).

Ismet's reply to this question also reveals an unclear understanding of the country's location: 'Below the Sahara desert. You know' (121). In adopting the definition of place presented by Erica Carter et al, that place is a 'space to which meaning has been ascribed' (1993:xii), because the couple does not have a true sense of South Africa's reality as a specific place, it remains for them an abstract space to which they can attach imaginary meanings. For Ismet therefore, South Africa seems to provide him with a promise of a better future and a way of making his wife love him. As he imagines, 'That aboriginal forged Africa would throw them ever more tightly into each other's arms' (Coovadia 2001:120). Ismet is convinced that, unlike India, '[w]herever one climbed off at a platform in history-free Africa, one wouldn't expect to stumble immediately upon a village' (119). This idea of a 'history-free' Africa appeals to Ismet precisely because it would present itself to him as a fresh parchment on which he could inscribe a new life for himself and his wife.

When the couple finally reaches Durban however, their expectations are thwarted when they see that 'there are railways heavy with locomotive

and track, there are tall buildings, even a minaret [… and] there is a city tabled out on the hills' (137). As the narrator exclaims, on arrival,

> Khateja looked with greedy, particular eyes …. Red stone smokestacks, a rubber factory, a street of warehouses, a cement mixer on the pavement. Beachfront hotels. Bottle palms in lines, black iron benches (143).

However, at first there is too much for the couple to take in and the city is yet to become familiar to them. Because places can be rendered knowable through mapping (see, for example, Sienaert & Stiebel 1996), for the couple in the novel, in order to make sense of their whereabouts, Ismet takes out a 'pencil-sketch map' of Durban and tries to recall all the landmarks and highlights of the city about which he has heard (Coovadia 2001:143). What is interesting to note is that the map leads them straight to the Grey Street complex where they find an abode 'in a block of flats on Queen Street, not far from the central business district, the Grey Street mosque, the market' (144). Ismet is given the map before his voyage by an Indian friend of his who had worked in Durban for a time, and who thus knew where Indian people could go to find a sense of 'home' in the foreign city. This Indian-occupied part of the city is represented in the novel as a place that, unlike the rest of the unfamiliar city, is familiar and welcoming. This place resembles that of India:

> There was a ground-floor tearoom, the stairways were cement blocks painted red, flaking red halls with a knee-high gray band, washing line strung up on chicken wire, black-eyed children with spades and buckets and dripping noses, the smell of cooking vegetables and evaporated butter, dimpled copper pots left out to dry by the screen doors, large circular women with red dots on their forehead (44).

Although not made explicit in the text, the spatial arrangement of these individuals in an exclusively Indian area of the city supports Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) idea of the 'habitus', that is the process which guides people of a similar social status to situate themselves together spatially. Primarily due to the racist colonial forces operating in South Africa at the

time of the couple's arrival, the habitus was based largely on racial and cultural differences which explains how Ismet and Khateja find themselves being directed to the Indian-occupied Grey Street complex.

It is within this habitus that the unknown, indeterminate space of Durban quickly becomes a tangible and familiar place. Ismet walks the streets of the Grey Street complex on a daily basis, orientating himself and taking in the sights and sounds of the place just like Benjamin's *flaneur* figure. As the narrator describes,

> [h]e wandered over to Queen Street, on the Field Street corner where there were newspaper printing presses, a bottle store with crates of Castle Lager in the window, an off-track tote …. Then he stood on the street corner, lit a cigarette, and drank from the bottle (Coovadia 2001:161).

However, unlike the *flaneur* who remains anonymous in the city and who never comes to see the city as his home, the opposite is true for Ismet. Ismet finds new routes and roots in the city. For example, on Friday mornings he would

> [take] his *namaaz* mat under his arm and set off for the Grey Street mosque …. He went straight past the jewelry stores with necklaces and Elgin and Madix watches on display in red velvet boxes, the *halaal* butchers selling cold meats and sausages (176).

Through his routine movements in the Grey Street complex, Ismet is able to turn the abstract space of the city into a lived-in and meaningful place to the extent that soon enough 'he was starting to feel perfectly at home' (176). This feeling of homeliness, which the *flaneur* never experiences in the modern city, is further encouraged by the fact that the Grey Street complex is transformed by Indians into a tight-knit neighbourhood. It is important to note that because Ismet and Khateja are immediately welcomed as the community's 'new neighbours' (145), the sense of alienation in the city that the *flaneur* would feel is instantly extinguished.

It is in the detailed descriptions of Ismet's daily journeys through the streets, and his almost banal encounters with shopkeepers and vendors, that

Coovadia is adopting a de Certeau-like stance in his representation of Grey Street. The racist urban planning of the city is dismissed in the novel and what is given precedence is the pedestrian, the everyday user of the streets, who is ultimately the one who, according to de Certeau, gives shape and meaning to the city. Although Grey Street was designated as a space to house Indians and keep them bound to one area in the city, Ismet experiences the city as fluid. He moulds the city to suit his needs and this is seen particularly when he moves around the city to sell his broomsticks. Not only does he sell his goods in the Grey Street complex but he finds ways of infiltrating the white shops in Smith and West Streets as well. It is thus evident in the novel that the walkers of the Grey Street complex are able to undermine the panoptic socio-spatial ordering imposed on the colonial city.

Diasporic Culture in Grey Street

In *The Wedding*, Coovadia constructs Grey Street as a characteristically diasporic place. His focus in the novel is almost exclusively on the old Indian diasporas in the Grey Street complex. Like most passenger Indians leaving India at the time, Ismet and Khateja see themselves as temporary sojourners in the new land, for as the narrator highlights, 'Ismet never exactly planned on leaving India forever and all eternity. He still thought of himself and his wife as tourists on an extended pilgrimage' (189). When they initially settle in the Grey Street complex, Ismet ensures that the lines of communication between him and his mother in India are kept open so that he does not lose touch with the goings-on in the homeland. His plan in the new country is to do what he went there to do, that is to make money, and that until then he and his wife 'should keep to themselves, pacifically, and then they would return *home*' (189, emphasis added). This statement reveals that at first, because India is still considered their 'home', Grey Street is thought of merely as a space of temporary residence for the old Indian diasporas, a kind of 'not-home'. Thinking of Grey Street in this way would mean that no unnecessary complications or ties with South Africa would be formed.

However, as in most cases, this myth of return to India begins to fade for the couple as, over the years, '[t]here were fewer letters back and forth to Bombay', an act that was essential for 'joining together countries ten thousand miles apart' (265). Their material possessions brought from India

to remind them of home also start degrading with age, a symbol of the ties with their homeland slowly breaking. For example,

> The silk goods, those that accompanied them on that long ago ship sealed in a green trunk, were getting to be worn and thin, … The tea chest popped its copper bindings. The curtain from her father's house had long since been taken out of the window and folded away in a cupboard, a poor slip of a thing (266).

As the grandson admits, such a loss meant that '[his] grandparents got mentally denationalised' (265) for as he elaborates, 'if something's been muscled out of the future, it's only a matter of time before it loses its grip on the past' (265). The couple eventually stops thinking of a return to India as they no longer feel that they belong there. Instead they accept South Africa in general, and the Grey Street complex in particular, as their new home.

It must be remembered that two opposing forces were at work in the new land. While the old Indian diasporas were feeling increasingly alienated from returning to India, they were also trying to maintain continuities with the homeland through cultural and religious acts and this is illustrated clearly in Coovadia's novel. On the couple's arrival in Durban it becomes clear that since,

> Durban housed the largest number of Indians in a single place outside India, it was, excluding the subcontinent, the most rhetorical city in the world (143).

This statement functions to undermine the popular colonial belief that nations are bound to separate locales for as is revealed in the novel, 'India is a portable country, to some extent, which moves as people do, accommodating itself freely to new environments' (157). In this new landscape Ismet and Khateja establish continuity with the homeland in numerous ways. Firstly, tokens and relics of their lives lived in India are transported and 'transplanted' in the new land to give them a sense of security and homeliness:

> India, multifold, many-fingered, articulated, cloth-covered India issued from their luggage: a Koran in a soft cream binding to put on the bookshelf that Pravina brought from down, a red-and-white-checked settee cover, the walking stick that once belonged to Ismet's father (148).

Religion is also translated into the new country:

> Once things were a little clear Ismet took his *namaaz* mat from the bottom of his trunk and rolled it out proudly for them all to see …. Now he could pray in a proper and respectful manner in this new land (148).

Furthermore, in the novel Indian cuisine is seen as an important means of keeping Indian immigrants far from home connected to their culture. Ismet, for example, thinks he can re-live India in South Africa if Khateja can be encouraged to cook him traditional Indian meals. 'Ismet saw suppers, Sunday dinners, snacks on the weekend-time, curries, *biryanis*, *bhajias*, *pathas*, and *pooris* as the first essential step' to making Durban more homely (157f). When Ismet finds, on the corner of Grey and Bond Streets, a man selling *goolab jamus*, a delicious Indian sweet, he is delighted and believes 'it was a miracle that you could live here as you would in India' (189). In other words, in *The Wedding*, Coovadia uncovers the different ways in which the old Indian diasporas transformed Grey Street into a mini-India, an act which gave them a sense of being home away from home.

The mini-India constructed in *The Wedding* is shown not only as an active undertaking by Indian diasporas wanting to preserve their Indian identity but is also shown to be the outcome of an internalisation of the racist government's nationalist ideology that homogenised Indian immigrants in South Africa. During a job interview with his white employer, Ismet is shocked at how he is immediately 'lumped directly into the Indian masses' (151) when the white man says to him, 'I like Indians. As far as I'm concerned they're the best damned people in the whole damned country' (151). This statement exposes the colonial notion that Indians make up an homogenous 'national' group. Coovadia aims to highlight this point through his narrator who humorously declares,

> and thanks to its piebald, multi-striped composition, the municipality of Durban inculcated in the mind of the expatriate Mohandas Ghandi, who was currently residing there, the outrageous conviction that each disparate subcontinental belonged to the same nationality—and so, in a sense, Durban created the nation-state of India (143).

As a result, in the course of the novel, the characters begin to internalise this view, continuing to see themselves as an extension of India, rather than of the new land they have settled in. As Govinden reiterates, 'nationalising' different races in colonial South Africa led to the development of the 'ethno-nationalist thinking that begins to determine and undergird the construction of "diaspora"' (Govinden 2004:165). Through the self-orientalising which Indian immigrants colluded in, Grey Street therefore became thought of more as being part of the Indian sub-continent than a South African one (see Govinden 2004:164).

In *The Wedding* Coovadia also constructs Grey Street as a characteristically cultural 'contact zone', a term originally coined by Mary Louise Pratt (1992). It must be remembered that because Durban had a population that was, according to the narrator in the novel, 'one-third black, one-third white, and one-third Indian', cultures were bound to clash, mix, and thus undergo change in this space (Coovadia 2001:142). Ismet's disgust at his white employer for having 'no conception of the subtleties in the world' (151), is further exacerbated when he is given what he considers ridiculous advice from his landlord, Vikram:

> So please Ismet, one word of advice that I can give for you. In this country you must not come with stories if you are this Bombay-Indian or that one Tamil, one what-what Gujarati-Indian …. No, my friend, what is essential is we must stand together united as one (150).

This statement reveals that Vikram, along with many other Indian diasporas who had been in the new land for some time, had learned to put aside his caste difference and adopt the nationalist myth of a common ancestry imposed by colonial ideology. However, rather than being passively

absorbed, the Indian immigrants in *The Wedding* use this 'unifying fiction' to their advantage. In the face of isolation and marginalisation imposed by South Africa's colonial government, a growing solidarity among Indian diasporas would ensure their survival. Vikram understands this, telling Ismet that

> if we stick together as Indians, then the sky is the limit …. We must be together as Indians. The blacks and whites do not have the time of day for us (188).

As already discussed, during this period the Grey Street complex was, to use Foucault's term, a heterotopia of exclusion. However, within this space Indians were no longer excluded on the basis of their skin colour but in fact experienced a sense of belonging and unity; Grey Street thus became what could be deemed a heterotopia of inclusion for Indian diasporas and is constructed as such in *The Wedding*. In his novel, Coovadia shows how the old Indian diasporas of Grey Street became inward-looking, representing them as being what Mishra has termed diasporas of exclusivism (1996:422). In opposition to the colonial policies which constantly aimed to destroy 'Indianness', the characters in the novel focus on creating a rich, cultural Indian community. At Ismet's second wedding for example, he announces to the congregation that he has chosen a traditional Indian band to play that day in order to keep Indian tradition in South Africa alive:

> it is the little I can contribute to keep our Indian culture alive for all of us. Our Indian culture, that is what really counts at the end of the day (Coovadia 2001:273).

Even though Ismet is aware that the only India that really exists is one of 'a million squabbling fiefdoms and hostile tribes' (189), he too learns to forget his caste difference, embracing a broader, constructed, sense of 'Indianness' as a political means of asserting Indian identity in the land of his adoption. Grey Street therefore can be seen in the novel as a dynamic place in which cultural identities are constantly made and re-made to suit new circumstances.

However, the way in which the old Indian diasporas experienced the city was varied and Coovadia attempts to capture this in his novel. Ismet, as already mentioned, quickly adapts to the new environment, taking on his new Indian diasporic identity with relative ease. This can be seen mainly in his business ventures through which he builds close relationships with his diverse Indian clientele in the Grey Street complex and uses the Indian area to his full advantage. On his days off work for example,

> Ismet was to be found on Bond Street sharing a tube of mint humbugs with school children … handing around a sampler of guavas to shopkeepers in Salisbury Arcade …. Then he would produce his broomsticks and wheedle a good price out of them (202).

He does not feel constrained in this designated Indian zone but rather grows into a brilliant businessman there, better than he could ever be in India. Khateja on the other hand, although looked after by the other residents in Grey Street, feels isolated and stifled in this 'allotted' space. At the beginning of the novel she is portrayed as a feisty and lively woman who would never give up on her dreams and ambitions. However, in South Africa, things begin to change. In the couple's flat in Queen Street, 'the stovepipe roof and the plaster walls made her feel like nothing so much as a chicken in a coop' (183). Even in the streets Khateja can feel the restrictions placed on her freedom of movement in the city because of the colour of her skin:

> The turbulent situation in Durban mostly affected her by ruining her free-ranging dispensation. She deeply relied on freedom of movement—a motorised expression of her capacious inner liberty (223).

Although beyond the scope of this paper, this representation of Khateja's experience in the Grey Street complex calls for a gendered interpretation and could be examined further in a lengthier study of *The Wedding*. By the end of the story Khateja is merely a shadow of her former self and as her grandson acknowledges,

> the mask that's worn into my grandmother's face has a symbolic

> function: by rendering her more or less anonymous, more or less interchangeable, it indicates that her story is no longer really her own (267).

This statement expresses the fact that Khateja's experience resembles that of many old Indian diasporas, who, although having found a tight-knit Indian community in places like Grey Street, felt a perpetual sense of alienation in the racist colonial city. Through his novel, therefore, Coovadia successfully portrays the complexity of the Indian experience in the Grey Street complex as it is constructed both as a homely *place* for some and as a claustrophobic *space* for others.

Collective Memory in *The Wedding*

In *Collective Remembering*, David Middleton and Derek Edwards argue that collective remembering is essential to the identity and integrity of social groups (1990:10). Coovadia captures this notion in *The Wedding*, constructing Grey Street as a place in which collective memories of the old Indian diasporas are made and passed down the generations in order to keep Indian identity in South Africa alive. As shown in the novel, the old Indian diasporas are concerned that if they start 'forgetting [India] in this and that detail, what would happen at the end of time?' (Coovadia 2001:157). For Khateja in particular, remembering India was a priority and she felt strongly that 'memories and a culture couldn't be left to themselves; instead each person had the responsibility of being a practitioner' (215). She is the practitioner who passes on the collective memory of the old Indian diasporas' voyage from India to South Africa to her grandson. It is only once his grandmother shares her memories of the past with him, that the grandson finally finds his 'bearings' and a sense of belonging, not only in Durban, but also in the world.

Like the grandson in *The Wedding*, Coovadia, who was born in Durban in 1970, is part of the younger Indian generation in South Africa whose ancestors came from India. As James Fentress and Chris Wickham explain in *Social Memory*, writing has the power to freeze collective memory in textual forms which in turn plays a powerful role in the postcolonial project of not only remembering, but also re-membering, the colonial past

(1992:9). It must be acknowledged that the colonial government in South Africa not only marginalised the Indian diasporic communities in the country but also marginalised their histories. However, through his fiction, Coovadia records and re-centers the collective memories of the old Indian diasporas, establishing counter-memories that '[resist] the dominant coding of images and representations and [recover] differences that official memory has erased' (Boyer 1994:28). In other words, the Grey Street complex that Coovadia constructs in *The Wedding* is a place in which the collective memories of South African Indians are finally given precedence, an act essential in undermining the master narrative of South Africa's colonial and apartheid past. In this way, through *The Wedding*, Coovadia is taking part in a 'reterritorialisation' of the self, providing the younger generation of South African Indians with a sense of belonging in South Africa's past and present social landscape.

Grey Street and Beyond

It is evident from an analysis of Coovadia's *The Wedding* that the author has attempted to capture the Indian experience of life in the Grey Street complex from the 'inside' during the colonial era. In doing so, he has been successful in his postcolonial project of re-mapping the colonial city of Durban and re-centering the once marginalised Grey Street complex. However, it must be remembered that the Grey Street complex (re) constructed in Coovadia's novel captures a particular time that is now gone. The Grey Street complex today is an area that is still used and lived in, and thus is a place that is constantly being re-made. This is evident in the recent re-naming of Grey Street to Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street. As part of South Africa's post-apartheid/postcolonial project, the old, colonial street names are being replaced thus symbolising a new way of ordering the city space. As Tomlinson et al acknowledge, this process is emblematic 'of a breakdown of those modernist institutions by which the state had maintained its dominance' (2003:x). In its place has emerged an 'open', fluid city space through which people of all races and classes can pass. However, it is within this new liberated space that other challenges arise. What results is a 'new' place that is difficult to define and place boundary lines around and, therefore, for its Indian inhabitants, it becomes a place with which it is

difficult to bond and identify. As Omar Badsha points out,

> these changes challenge the certainty and privilege enjoyed by Indians and Coloureds which underpinned the racialised apartheid state (2001:22).

The post-apartheid city has witnessed an influx of Chinese traders and black migrants from other African countries, some of whom have moved aggressively into street trading and illegal activities such as prostitution and drug dealing. As a result, the more elite Indian residents of the former Grey Street complex are moving out and establishing new homes in the suburbs.

The question that remains to be asked is how will these changes in the post-apartheid city affect the fictional constructions of Grey Street/Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street to come? It seems it is the younger generation of South African Indian writers coming from Durban who are trying to represent the current experiences of living in the city in their fictional works. Mariam Akabor, an upcoming South African Indian writer, describes her first novella, *Flat 9*, as an attempt on her part to describe the very humane and community-oriented dimension of the Grey Street complex that has lived on into the present. However, as she explains, 'I feel I have done my part, based on my experiences in Grey Street' (Mamet 2007b, email correspondence) and therefore her next novel will move away from the Grey Street complex. Coovadia too has described his forthcoming novel saying that it is set entirely in Durban—but not Grey Street—and deals with issues around HIV/AIDS and psychological denial (Mamet 2007a, email correspondence). These writers' move away from writing about an older Grey Street and Coovadia's current project aimed at portraying a Durban suffering under the weight of HIV/AIDS depicts the extent to which the remnants of the past are rapidly being dis-/re-placed by new realities.

The way in which pedestrians experience street life in the present is also very different to those that appear in novels such as *The Wedding*. Today's walker in the city is more like the *flaneur*, characterised by anonymity and alienation. The tight-knit Indian diasporic community of Grey Street is fast being replaced by a new African cosmopolitanism. As a result a redefinition of the meaning of urban space is required, for as Tomlinson et al point out, 'the old [city] exists in nostalgia; the new [city]

exists in *absentia*' (2003:xiii). The Grey Street complex is thus not a stagnant place but one in constant flux. It is a 'soft city' (see Raban 1974) whose practitioners are forever changing its shape and meaning, a text forever being re-inscribed and re-interpreted. For the upcoming generation, therefore, newer post-post-apartheid memories are being embedded in the landscape to the extent that future fictional constructions of Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street may no longer even resemble those of the older Grey Street complex.

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Globalisation and Modern South African Black Political Thought: John Langalibalele Dube and Anton Muziwakhe Lembede

Thabo Tsehloane

The advent of globalisation in South Africa has been a focal point around which modern black political thought has revolved. The founding moment of this capitalist integration in context of South Africa has been the discovery of minerals first in Kimberley and later in the Witwatersrand towards the end of nineteenth century. The impact of the novel experiences of industrialization and urbanisation, ushered into the social and political milieu of the black South Africans has been phenomenal. They engendered a global consciousness and an awareness by the indigenous people of their subordinate and marginal role within the global system. It is this deeply felt sense of marginality which different black political thinkers have grappled with since the beginning of twentieth century. The main contours of this political response have moved from wholesale acceptance of universalist promise of global capitalism without questioning its ethnocentrism towards nativist affirmation of African particularity and disavowal of Eurocentric capitalist universalism. What this essay would want to argue is that each of these two positions had its own merits and demerits. Dialectical thinking, which recognises the need to embrace universalism without foregoing the need to critique the ethnocentrism of the Eurocentrist universalism, has been missing in the polemical and partisan rehearsel of the two strands of political thought.

The initial key moment in the black political response to the hege-

monic colonial globalization was characterized by the unequivocal and uncritical embrace of the assimilationist and universal ideology of British liberalism. This ideology promised for the aspirant native converts an acceptance and entry into the universal brotherhood premised on British liberal values. The unquestioning acceptance of the benign influence of British colonial mission and Christian civilization were the entry points from which a colonial subject could attain an equal status with the colonial master. They therefore accepted their tutelage and guidance under British trusteeship as a necessary prerequisite towards attainment of promised equality as 'civilized' citizens of the world. Not only in their public persona but in their private lives they strived to emulate the British values and manners. John Langalibalele Dube founding president of South African National Native Congress (SANNC predecessor of the ANC) symbolized this trend of black liberalism as well as his peers like Sol Plaatjie, John Tengo Jabavu and Pixley ka Seme. Born in Natal in 1871, Dube was a son of a Reverend of the American Missionary Board and later went to study in USA (United States of America) where he fell under the spell of Booker T Washington's ideas of black upliftment through industrial skills and vocational education. He came to believe that black people will attain real freedom through assimilation of Western values, and norms. In Dube's acceptance speech as the president of SANNC presented in his absentia to his fellow native delegates he said:

> Upward! Into the higher places of civilization and Christianity—not backward into the slump of darkness nor downward into the abyss of the antiquated tribal system. Our salvation is …. In preparing ourselves for an honoured place amongst the nations (quoted by Marks 1986:53).

This extract from Dube's speech shows the premium placed on Christianity and civilization as vehicles to claim equality within the global multinational landscape. Dube had further promised his constituency that his leadership will be guided by a 'hopeful reliance in the sense of common justice and love of freedom so innate in the British character' (quoted by Hill in Marks & Trapido 1987:228). These words reflect a single minded devotion of Dube to the British imperial values which he construed or misconstrued as

embodying a universal and cosmopolitan ideal he and his peers have been yearning for. They also reflect a flexible conception of African identity within which other identities can be assumed and embraced, that is, a possibility to imagine that they could shift their identities with ease from being Africans to being British. We could hastily judge this as misguided and naïve optimism, from the vantage point of later events which proved that their hopes were baseless, but their clairvoyance and farsightedness which grasped the basis of identity as choice not nature cannot be easily ignored. Their conception of an African identity was not unencumbered by notions of ethnic purism.

The zeal and devotion of black intellectuals to the universal ideal was no more evident than when they crossed swords with the imperial establishment for not living up to its promises of Christian brotherhood and civilisational ethos. In a classic case of a convert becoming more Catholic than the Pope, they reflected a fervent and unparalleled earnestness in their embrace of cosmopolitanism. According to G.M. Carter: 'They sought … to win rights for Africans … along the lines promised—but forever left unfulfilled—by the proponents of trusteeship and liberalism' (Carter 1978:12). The enchantment and captivation of African intellectuals with British values and ethos ran deep within the African petty bourgeois consciousness and it even continued beyond Dube's generation. Several decades later, Albert Luthuli, who also was to be the president of the ANC in the 1950s, in his memories of his student days at Adams College says: 'There seemed a point … in striving after the Western world. It seemed to be a striving after wholeness and fulfilment' (Luthuli 1962:42). The faith and patience in the eventual fulfilment of the promises of liberal universalism withstood the imperial establishment's continued refusal to realise these ideals in practice. For these native converts assimilation was not only a practice of complicity and collaboration with the colonial order but it was the only way through which they could assert their right to be recognized as equals. They had no other theoretical and ideological means to affirm their status as world citizens and escape the exoticist identity the colonial regime wanted to imprison them in.

The liberal promise of assimilation posed a threat to the foundation and basis of the caste colonial society. The British imperial establishment reneged on its assimilationist promises to protect the integrity of the colonial

hierarchy based on unchanging racial essences. This threat was recognized by even the most liberal of white politicians like General Smuts. He rejected assimilation as a solution to the then vexing 'native question' in this country and in one of his lectures delivered at Oxford he had remarked that: 'Assimilation, while seeming to advance equality, would destroy his (natives) African system which was his highest good' (quoted in Marks & Trapido 1987:8). For colonial authorities to allow assimilation to proceed to its ultimate conclusion was to acquiesce to the demolition of a colonial order. Through assimilation a native was guaranteed ultimate equality with the colonial master on the basis of Christian civilisational brotherhood. Hence the strategy to romanticize African difference as something to be preserved and protected at all costs *ala* General Smuts. According to Seamus Deane writing in reference to the context of Ireland says: 'The definition of otherness, the degree to which others can be persuasively shown to be discordant with the putative norm, provides a rationale for conquest' (Deane 1990:12).

Colonialism especially British, had always dreaded the implementation of assimilation to its logical and ultimate conclusion; that is equality of colonial subject and colonial master, therefore elimination of a colonial relationship. Assimilation would have deprived and disarmed the hegemonic power's ideological weapon and rationale for conquest. Therein lied the revolutionary and radical dimension of assimilation which nationalist historiography would denigrate and trivialize as collaboration. John Dube's unambiguous castigation of African pre-colonial traditions and unequivocal plea to his constituency to embrace Western values evident in his speech extracted quoted earlier should be understood in this context. John Dube's legendary patience and faith in British liberal values was evident even when in his later political career he looked towards pre-colonial traditional institutions for salvation. His vacillation and double allegiance to colonially inspired universalism and Zulu ethnic nationalism was to be well documented in the meticulous scholarship of Shula Marks (1986). The essence of Dube's ambiguity can be understood as a stubborn refusal to forego universalist liberal values even when he has been politically converted to Zulu ethnic nationalism.

The second key moment in black petty bourgeoisie reaction to global integration came in the 1940s. The disillusionment with the false promises of

assimilationist ideals of British liberalism was a key determinant in the shift of black political thought. The practical limitations of the premature utopianism of assimilationist thinkers were becoming evident in the context of new social and political environment after the Second World War. Firstly assimilationist ideals precluded the politics of mass involvement and action as the struggle for change was entrusted on the eloquence of few individuals to persuade the colonial establishment to be true to its ideals of equality and universalism. Secondly, the accelerated urbanisation and industrialisation which occurred after the war brought into the fold a mass of impatient and restive constituency which was impatient for a radical change. Thirdly, the war experience of the native auxilleries who came back home increased the push for a better deal for the natives from the imperial establishment. They had been subjected to a war propaganda in which the war was described as a war for freedom and democracy against fascist doctrines of racial supremacy championed by Germany's Adolf Hitler. Disillusioned with the ethnocentrism of British colonial mission cloaked under a universal ideal, a section of black petty bourgeoisie began to reject the assimilationist ideals of their predecessors and contemporaries. What was then embraced was the collective 'difference' and 'otherness' of the native subjects from the colonial master. African difference was used to reject colonially-driven integration and globalization. Assimilationist predecessors had fought vociferously though sometimes ambiguously against this imposed 'otherness' as it has been observed in case of Langalibalele Dube. If there is to be a single individual who can be credited with initiating a *coupure epistemologique* (epistemological break) in black political thinking it must be Anton Muziwakhe Lembede the founder president of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) who propounded for the first time in South Africa a systematic theory of black nationalism militantly opposed to any assimilationist project. He was born in 1914 in Georgedale, Natal, son of sharecroppers who became a school teacher, lawyer and political philosopher. Though he passed away in 1947 at tender age of 33 he was to leave an enduring legacy in black political thought.

However it must be acknowledge that a similar kind of thinking had prevailed as an undercurrent and marginal political tendency in certain black communities (mainly Western Cape and Transkei) after First World War in form of Garveyite ideas. James Thaele in Western Cape and the self-styled

black American 'Wellington' in the Transkei were key propagandists of the Garveyite ideas in their respective communities. These ideas took a millenarian and religious character (especially with the Wellington movement in the Transkei) based on the conviction that black Americans will come to liberate black South Africans from white rule and the slogan 'Am-Amelika ayeza' (Americans are coming) became the rallying cry of Garveyite adherents. These developments indicate an untheorised and populist disillusionment with imperially driven universalist values which enabled and created a fertile ground for Lembede's later theoretical excursions. Indeed R.A. Hill and G.A. Pirio say:

> The Youth League's attempt in the late 1940s at formulating a philosophy of 'Africanism' would not have been possible without the South African Garvey movement that preceded it (Marks & Trapido 1987:242).

What Lembede did was to develop a coherent and systematic political philosophy of 'Africanism' which enabled the previously subaltern and undercurrent political sentiments to gain a foothold in the mainstream black political thinking. According to GM Carter

> Lembede's 'Africanism' offered prescriptions for change based on a new analysis of the South African situation …. As a first attempt to formulate a creed of orthodox nationalism for black South Africa, it initiated a tradition on which later nationalists were to build … (Carter 1978:54).

Like all nationalisms it sought to recreate a unified black subject with an Edenic past from which there was a fall which accounts for the present misery which can be alleviated by the struggle to reclaim that lost Edenic moment. Lembede's main contention and basis of his nationalist philosophy was that the assimilationalist ideal which had been pursued by his political predecessors was a European ethnocentrism disguised as universalism. Outlining his new creed of nationalism aggressively championing African uniqueness and oneness Lembede had said:

> Africans are one. Out of the heterogeneous tribes, there must emerge a homogeneous nation. The basis of national unity is the nationalistic feeling of the Africans, the feeling of being Africans irrespective of tribal connection, social status, educational attainment, or economic class (quoted in Karis & Carter 1977:vol2).

This articulation of black self-determination provided a sense of agency and solid sense of community amidst a sense of fragmentation, instability and disorganization occasioned by colonial capitalist development. It was in essence an attempt to impose order and coherence to black experience by elimination and suppression of differences, ambiguities and ambivalences emanating from contradictory policies of British globalization which promised an open universal fraternity but condemned Africans to perpetual otherness. The nationalists had to forge this coherence by proposing a pre-existent and unique Africanness which is different and oppositional to the dominant imperial values and ethos.

However the dissident character of black nationalism meant it could only develop and grow by negation and rejection without transcending what it opposes. Manicheanism characterised its conception of African identity which exist only in a conflictual relationship to the dominant imperial culture and other things non-African. These are the beginnings of a conception of African of worldview, philosophy and political outlook which must be programmatically bound to challenge and oppose their European counterparts and other non-African influences. As strategic essentialism this Manichaeism is understandable, but what Lembede did was to define and conceive this African difference in metaphysical terms. Oppositional terms which a subaltern nationalism has to deploy to achieve its purpose of liberation must ultimately be abolished not retained as timeless essences. As Terry Eagleton has correctly observed:

> Ironically, then, politics of difference or specificity is in the first place in the cause of sameness and universal identity—the right of a group victimized in its particularity to be on equal terms with others as far as their self-determination is concerned (Eagleton et al. 1990:30).

If African difference was affirmed as a politically pragmatic strategy calculated to achieve a particular political goal as Eagleton advises a much more potent weapon for anti-imperialist struggle might have been bequeathed by Lembede to future generations. What Eagleton highlights for our context here is that the particularistic weapons deployed to challenge hegemonic ethnocentrism *a la* Lembede and assimilationist aspiration for universal identity *a la* Dube should be part of one and the same struggle which in black political thought have been conceived and experienced as two contradictory ideological currents. Lembedist nationalism in challenging the bogus universalism of British colonialism it suggested no ideal and true universalism in its place but a fixed and unchanging African essence. And this legacy was to be inherited and repeated by several generations of black nationalists in South Africa from Robert Sobhukwe in the 1950s to Steve Biko in the 1970s.

The anti-assimilationist African nationalism opened the floodgates for mass participation to the previously elitist and hitherto intellectualist pre-occupation of black politics. The rhetoric of nationalism provided a sense of fulfilment and wholeness which could be claimed by all classes and sectors while earlier generation had sought it in the British universalist ideal which could only accommodate the anglicized black elite. A person who was to symbolize this dramatic turn from elitist politics of assimilation towards mass politics of heady nationalism was a young man freshly demobilised from the native regiment of the South African army by the name of Potlako Leballo. He was inspired by this kind of nationalist ideology and came to be its most ardent and loyal disciple. Leballo born in Free State in 1924, son of an Anglican priest was to symbolize the impact and influence the nationalist ideas had on the masses beyond their sophisticated and suave intellectual origins. He had joined the British war effort during Second World War after absconding from school in Lovedale and was involved in a mutiny over the colour bar regulations in the army. After the war this embittered and malcontent ex-soldier came to settle in Johannesburg where as a teacher he fell under the spell of A.M. Lembede's and A.P. Mda's novel nationalist ideas. According to G.M. Carter:

> The Youth League had attracted Leballo on his return from the war, for it mirrored his own disillusionment and frustration and did not

> mince words in identifying whites as the enemies of African freedom. Politics as such attracted him … his real appetite was for combat per se, and politics offered him a boundless field of battle (Carter 1978:139).

In character, temperament, psychology and political outlook he was the exact opposite of the assimilationist-inclined and highbrow black intellectuals both of his era and of the preceding generations.

The nationalist ideology portrayed the liberation struggle in black and white terms which appealed to his militaristic, anti-intellectual and activist inclined character. As a natural rebel and non-conformist evidenced by his expulsion from Lovedale and involvement in army mutiny he found in nationalist teachings of Lembede a political ideology which confirmed and validated his predisposition for heroic action and brazen defiance of authority. Carter describes Leballo's approach to politics as follows:

> What Leballo lacked in intellect or originality of thought he more than made up in stamina, physical courage and single minded devotion to the political line handed down from Lembede and Mda …. If Mda's place was in the back room or the platform before 'highbrow' audiences, Leballo's calling was to the streetcorners and the hustings where intellectual principles became transformed into the slogans and emotionalized appeals of a would-be mass movement (Carter 1978: 139).

What this political profile reveals is a dramatic change and approach in black politics which was enabled by adoption of orthodox black nationalism. A character like Leballo would have had no place in the assimilationist politics of John Dube, Sol Plaatjie and Dr. Xuma. Certainly that kind of politics would not have attracted a political persona of Potlako Laballo's temperament either. Exhibiting no gentlemanly manners and diplomacy of many black intellectuals of his era he approached politics with fervour and fanaticism of a religious zealot. His political career started as a chairman of Orlando East branch of ANC and concluded as the Acting President of the PAC dogged by controversy from beginning to the end. He was an uncompromising radical who spoke straight from the heart unimpressed by

niceties of rational argument so much beloved by his peers. Perhaps one may hazard to say his emergence and attainment of political prominence represents the beginnings of an embryonic anti-intellectualism and valourisation of an activist culture in black political experience.

The 'nationalist' rejection of assimilationist ideal had negative and positive aspects. There was no theoretical advance from the dilemma their assimilationist predecessors were locked in. They retained the same formula and merely inverted it. Everything assimilationist politicians valourised they reacted by demonizing it. Everything that was previously demonized was valourised. Importance of acquiring education was highly valued by the politicians of assimilationist era and was considered on its own be part of the struggle. But the Africanist conception and view of education became instrumentalist and utilitarian. According to Robert Sobukhwe in a famous speech he made as a student leader at Fort Hare University he exhorted his fellow graduates that education should mean 'a service for Africa'. Education thus valued only in so far as it propelled the struggle for freedom forward. This instrumentalist view of education was to be taken further by young activists of the 1970s and 1980s in their slogan 'Liberation first, education after'. Education was to be seen as a hindrance which can be dispensed anytime so that due attention can be paid to the overriding national political commitments. Politics were thus conceived narrowly as activism as opposed to intellectual work which assimilationist politicians recognized as part of their struggle to uplift black people.

The nationalists over-valourised the strength and capacity of the masses to initiate and sustain a revolutionary transformation of society with pure ideology. They therefore undermined the importance of strong political organization and structures to guide and direct spontaneous actions of the masses. The patient building and creation of structures which characterized the approach of the assimilationist politicians was considered gradualist and moderate hence its cavalier disregard by radical nationalists. The assimilationist politicians have always doubted the readiness and capability of the masses to initiate and sustain a transformative programme of society hence their reliance on international diplomacy to garner support for the African cause. Another positive feature of black assimilationist aspiration was the recognition and awareness that black political experience operated within a global context over-determined by the will of powerful global

players. The assimilationist predecessors were enabled by their pragmatism to recognize that they operated within a global environment and that as colonial subjects in a dependent state they do not yet have a full and unencumbered sovereignty over their political destiny. They may be faulted for overestimating this power of international diplomacy but they recognized that international global environment has a bearing on their aspirations and they directed their political energies accordingly. The nationalists on the other hand confused their aspirations for self-determination with reality. Because they failed to understand the rules of the global game which earlier generation of black intellectuals clearly understood, they overestimated the capacity of the masses people to determine their destiny within a global environment where national political choices are limited by the whims of imperial powers. This might have been motivated also by nationalist romanticisation and lionization of the 'people' which led them to harbour political misconceptions about the spontaneous and unguided revolutionary potential of the masses which only needed to be sparked by brave and dedicated leaders. Another misconception which came with nationalist school of thought was to give politics a metaphysical essence predicated on unbridgeable gap between whiteness and blackness. The contingent character of politics as a conflict of interests was grounded and burdened with spiritualism and metaphysical essences. Hence flexibility and change of strategy in light of new developments was frowned upon by the radical nationalists. They acquired a reputation of being intransigent and uncompromising. Their steadfast adherence and commitment to programme and strategy irrespective of its untenability has become legendary.

Disregarding the revolutionary side of assimilation thereby losing sight of its potential to shake and subvert the foundations of colonial order, radical nationalists failed to advance the black political thought despite the boldness of their insights, and pioneering ideas. Unreflective denigration of the elitist and self-preserving character of liberal leadership of the ANC led the nationalists to display a cavalier attitude to their own safety with impetuous bravado and heroic adventurism. Because it emerged out of disillusionment it failed to provide an alternative universalism to the one advocated by proponents of liberalism and remained within the cocoon of rabid particularism devoid of any imagination of a different world from the present and a vision of an utopian future beyond the limitations of the status

quo. The thraldom with the past and present obscured a vision of an alternative future and different world.

In the unqualified valourisation of African difference colonial project was unwittingly perpetuated which sought to confine the native to a static and fixed identity mythically impervious to global and modern influences. John Dube, Sol Plaatjie and others understood how disempowering was the strategy of British colonial policy of 'indirect rule' which glorified and romanticized African difference as a virtue. Lembede and Mda and their ardent disciple Potlako Leballo abandoned this aspect of the struggle and chose to perceive African otherness as an unambiguous and unproblematic weapon of anti-imperialist struggle. But to their credit they conceived of African particularity not along tribal lines dictated by colonial policy but as monolithic African identity based on common historical fate of colonial subjugation. They however, overlooked the fact that any project which opposes a hegemonic globalization without an alternative form of global solidarity is doomed. Hegemonic capitalist globalization can only be challenged effectively and meaningfully by an oppositional ideology which is equal and proportionate in breath and global reach to the very system it seeks to displace.

The double dichotomy reflects the two sides of the *modus operandi* of colonialism and imperialism. On one hand colonialism sought to assimilate the colonial subject to the ways of the colonial master as way to control and contain aspirations of equality which can never be realised in practice. The black separatism or withdrawal from the universalist ideal reflected a need to break free from the thraldom with false universalist ideal of colonial mission and build an alternative and realizable community. On the other hand colonial mission sought to keep the colonial subject in permanent otherness which can never be remedied or alleviated by either education, religious conversion or acculturation. The black aspiration for assimilation reflected a need to negate this aspect of colonialism which sought to use the difference as a prison and as a restriction and potent weapon of control. According to Richard Werbner the relationship between colonialism and traditionalism in Africa is one of complicity rather than conflict contrary to what is normally assumed. Werbner says:

> With the colonial period came a conscious determination on the part of colonial authorities and missionaries to combat what they saw as

> untraditional chaos by tidying up the complexity. The main thrust of their efforts was towards new rigidities, the creation of stabilized, well defined tribes, the reifying of custom in inflexible codes, the tightening of control over subjects less able to negotiate their own identities (Werbner 1996:23).

Genuine and veritable cosmopolitanism cannot afford to ignore the fact that universalism has always been central to any imperialist agenda seeking to make the whole universe after its image from ancient Roman times to the current era of American hegemony. Founding moments of cosmopolitan idea have always been motivated by a particular ethnocentrism which upholds itself as a universal standard against which all other different identities are not only denigrated but must be subordinated to it. But this universalism is always an illusion which others can only emulate and imitate but can never completely attain. Hence the difference must be valourised and romanticized to keep intact the cultural hierarchy and imperial relationship. Universalism and difference are two contradictory but constituent aspects of any ethnocentric imperialism disguised as a universalism.

The way out of this dilemma that imperialist globalization has put majority of the Third World people in is to rightly reject ethnocentric universalism it entails *ala* Lembede, Mda, Sobukhwe and Biko. They had an insight to avoid premature utopianism and recognize that the hegemonic universal brotherhood was a relationship not of equality but a ruse for imperialist domination. But unlike them we need not forego our rightful claim to global citizenship as their assimilationist predecessors have correctly charted the way *ala* Dube, Plaatjie, and Xuma. Indeed as Terry Eagleton has aptly observed:

> Emancipatory politics exist to bring about the material conditions that will spell their own demise and so always have some peculiar self-destruct device built into them …. There will be no temple in the New Jerusalem, so the New Testament informs us since ecclesiastical apparatuses belong to a history in conflict, not to the realm of freedom beyond that history's extreme horizon (Eagleton et al. 1990:26).

The two strands of black political thought reflect the contradictory tendencies inherent in any utopian project. Firstly, how to deal realistically

with the challenges impeding the realisation of utopian ideal, how to be grounded in the present reality in order to deal with it effectively. Secondly, how to transcend the current reality and keep one's focus on that utopian ideal without getting trapped in the present realities. Nationalism reflects the first option and assimilationst thought reflects the second option. What the paper wants to contend is that these options are two necessary moments and dimensions of any worthy utopian project. They both involve risks which could throw the struggle for change astray. As Terry Eagleton has observed: 'Any emancipatory politics must begin with the specific, then, but must in the same gesture leave it behind' (Eagleton et al. 1990:30). The dialectical thinking construes what appears to be antithetical strategies to be necessary moments of a singular process. Coming to grips with how things are is the necessary first step towards achieving a state of how things might be. The risk involved is that in concentrating on one aspect we may neglect the other necessary and mandatory aspect of the same process. According to Fredric Jameson (2007) 'The fundamental dynamic of any Utopian politics (or of any political Utopianism) will therefore always lie in the dialectic of Identity and Difference …' (Jameson 2007:xii). The utopian project must be grounded in realities of the present to be feasible and realisable, yet it must transcend the current reality by retaining its conception of an alternative and different order.

Recent trends in South African public debate have reflected a desire for the abandonment of racial categories as a passé in a post-apartheid dispensation. Jonathan Jansen for example contends that a post-apartheid government should not use these categories as the basis of its public policy. Jansen says:

> South Africa needs leaders who are not imprisoned by racial hurt or racial inferiority; men and women who can define their interests, and that of the country, not in terms of race and ethnicity but in terms of ambitions such as hope and change (Jansen 2009:6).

What Jansen reflects is that the very categories which had been useful in the past have become a liability and hindrance in the present. He reflects impatience with the continued thraldom with the idea of fixed racial categories. However, Jansen's argument lacks a dialectical aspect which is

advocated by this essay. The utopian project needs not only to assert its radical difference with the present like Jansen is doing but it needs to be also grounded in the present for it to be feasible and realisable.

In conclusion, there is a need to challenge at present ethnocentrism of the dominant idea of globalization in vogue but also there is a need to imagine a new global space which is genuinely egalitarian, non-hegemonic and truly universal. In that way it's possible to transcend the colonially imposed limitations by affirming the oneness of humanity without pandering to any form of hegemonic ethnocentrism. A world in which genuine cosmopolitanism unsullied by any 'will to power' and 'desire to dominate' is both possible and feasible.

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Indigenous African Cultures and Relevance to Socio-economic Progress and Development: A Critical Review

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> We could assimilate mathematics or the French language, but we could never strip off our black skins nor root out our black souls (Senghor 1963, quoted in English in Kalumba 1996: 50).

Introduction

This paper provides a critical review of a sample of scholarly literature on the role and the relevance (or lack thereof) of indigenous African cultures and value systems to progress and development. An interest to study and seek to understand the nature of the African cultures and/or value systems and their relationship and relevance to the economy grew in the period following the end of colonialism, a period in which intellectual energies were geared towards finding workable models and strategies for reconstruction and development of the formerly colonised African countries as well as for the ending of the legacy of colonial subjugation and exploitation. As Kwame Gyeke pointed out, the post-colonial era not only signified an end to

> … the period of dictation, forcible imposition of a variety of alien values and institutions, … (but also) a period of autonomous self-expressions on the part of the formerly colonized people, as well as

> of self-assertion, sober reflection on values and goals, and the gradual weaning away from the self-flagellating aspects of colonial mentality acquired through decades of coloniality (Gyeke 1997: 25).

However, for Gyeke, this period does not only signify the total rejection of the entire colonial heritage by the formerly colonised, but also the voluntary selection of those aspects of the heritage considered worthwhile and conducive to development. As will be noticed from the review below, there are conflicting perspectives and accounts of African value systems and/or cultures and their relevance to economy and development. Notwithstanding this, however, I argue on the basis of the evidence yielded by the review that the indigenous African cultures and values are not intrinsically irrelevant and inhibitive to socio-economic progress and development.

A Review of Debates

Within the debates on indigenous African cultures, there is a perspective that, unlike Western cultures and values systems, African cultures are inhibitive to and incompatible with scientific, technological, economic, and philosophical development and progress (Gyeke 1997; Horton 1982 and 1997). Such incompatibility is attributed to the 'intensely religious and spiritual nature of African traditional life', which he argues, has discouraged an expansion of existing practical knowledge of crafts and technologies such as those used for food preservation and herbal therapeutics through scientific enquiry and analysis, which eventually stunted the growth of sciences (Gyeke 1997: p.27). Gyeke, for instance, argues that while African cultures appreciated the notion of causality, which is crucial in scientific inquiry and explanation of natural phenomena, their religiosity led to explaining causality in terms of spirits and mystical powers. This, he argues, resulted in empirical causal accounts being abandoned and neglected in favour of religious-inspired accounts[1]. The latter accounts, Gyeke argues, tend to see spirits or mystical powers as causal factors.

[1] Gyeke (1997: 28) refers to empirical causal explanations as 'empirical causation' as they ask what—and how—questions, and religious-inspired accounts as 'agentive causation' which ask who—and why—questions.

Another stumbling block to the development of science and technology within the African cultures identified by Gyeke has been identified as the way in which knowledge of the external world was acquired. He argues that unlike in science, knowledge acquisition was not based on experimentation but was personalised through a strong element of secrecy. This resulted in such knowledge not being made available for further objective, public scrutiny and analysis in order to verify its conclusions. This veil of secrecy, Gyeke argues, results in the possessed knowledge simply vanishing on the death of its bearers due to its secretive nature, as is evidenced by the knowledge of the potencies of herbs and other medicinal plants possessed by indigenous African healers. Not only does Gyeke raise concerns with the secretive and personal nature of such knowledge but also the fact that it is not made available for scrutiny and verification by those outside of it. The result is stagnation and non-further development of knowledge (Gyeke 1997: 29).

Gyeke's criticism of this lack of drive to pursue sustained scientific enquiry into knowledge of the natural world and the lack of desire to pursue knowledge for its own sake does not however lead to his dismissal of the existence and presence of technological and scientific capacity within African societies and their cultures. Gyeke's view that African traditional cultures are inhibitive to scientific growth, development and progress is shared by Robin Horton. Horton (1997), drawing distinctions between traditional African cultures and Western scientific cultures, refers to the former as 'closed' cultures and the latter as 'open' cultures. By 'closed' cultures or thought systems, he is referring to those cultures in which there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the existing, established theories or beliefs. In contrast, the 'open' cultures are those that have a highly developed awareness of such alternatives (Horton 1997: 327). For him, an obstacle to progress within the African traditional cultures lies in their reluctance to question the established beliefs (Horton 1997: 333). This point was also echoed in Wiredu's comparative analysis of African (traditional/folk) thought and Western (traditional/folk) thought systems. Wiredu (1980) argues that any culture and/or thought system which is both non-scientific and non-literate (be it Western or African), is seriously handicapped. This, he argues, is so since scientific methods can only occur where there is a recording of precise measurements, calculations, and

observational data i.e. where there is what he calls the scientific spirit and/or the spirit of rational inquiry (Wiredu 1980:41).

He argues, based on his examination of the conception of a person by the Akan people of Ghana, which he found to be more interesting and imaginative than the Western philosopher's thesis, that while (such) folk thought may be comprehensive and interesting, the lack of discursive content in it remains a major drawback. Hence, unlike the modern Western philosopher, who argues for his/her thesis, clarifies meanings, and responds to objections, the believer in folk thought usually responds like this: 'this is what our ancestors said'. Such response, Wiredu argues, only serves to block opportunities for further development. It is however ironical and self-contradictory for Wiredu to make this kind of comparison between the Akans (traditional/folk people) and the modern Western philosophers, as he repeatedly condemns and dismisses tendencies by Western anthropologists to make similar kinds of comparisons. Note below his critique:

> … instead of seeing the basic non-scientific characteristics of African traditional thought as typifying traditional thought in general, Western anthropologists and others besides have mistakenly tended to take them as defining a peculiarly African way of thinking, with unfortunate effects … one such effects is that the really interesting cross-cultural comparisons of modes of thought have rarely been made. If one starts with the recognition that each nation has some background of traditional thought—and remember by *traditional* thought that here I mean pre-scientific thought of the type that tends to construct explanations of natural phenomena in terms of the activities of gods and spirits—then the interesting and anthropologically illuminating comparison will be to see in what different ways the belief in spirits is employed by various peoples in the attempt to achieve a coherent view of the world. In such specific differences will consist the real peculiarities of African traditional thought in contradiction to, say, Western traditional thought …. In the absence of any such realisation, what has generally happened is that not only the genuine distinguishing features of African traditional thought but also its basic non-scientific tendencies have been taken as a basis for contrasting Africans and Western peoples.

> One consequence is that many Westerners have gone about with an exaggerated notion of the differences in nature between Africans and the people of the West ….
>
> … my point is that they (i.e. *backward beliefs*) are not African in any intrinsic, inseparable sense; and the least that African philosophers and foreign well-wishers can do in this connection is to refrain … from serving up the usual cogeries of unargued conceptions about gods, ghosts and witches in the name of African philosophy. Such a description is highly unfortunate. If at all deserving of the name 'philosophy', these ideas should be regarded not as a part of African philosophy simply, but rather as a part of *traditional* African philosophy (Wiredu 1980: 39,45f).

Notwithstanding this, Wiredu acknowledges that Africa lags behind the West in terms of the degree to which the scientific spirit and the rational spirit of inquiry has been developed. He argues that for Africa to develop this spirit in all spheres of thought and belief, Africans should rid themselves of those backward aspects of customs, retaining only progressive ones with relevance to development. He however notes that despite this lag in the spirit of rational inquiry in Africa when compared with the West, there is within the traditional African thinking, a presence of the principle of rational evidence (see Wiredu 1980: 41,43, 45).

Wiredu, like Gyeke (1997), proposes that for scientific and technological potential within African knowledge systems to be unlocked, it is necessary that Africans develop an understanding of scientific principles through the knowledge of physics, metallurgy, biology and chemistry. He sees this as being necessary for establishing a strong scientific base which would encourage the asking of what—and how—questions, and hence the use of empirical causation as opposed to agentive causation in explaining technological and natural processes. He argues that although African cultures display the presence of indigenous technological capacities within them, those capacities could not be fully developed and expanded due to the lack of understanding and application of scientific principles. To illustrate this point, he cites a few cases which include that of the Ghanaian motor mechanic and a female food technologist. The Ghanaian mechanic, who was working on the engine adjusting the contact breaker point in the car

distributor, was found to be doing so using only his sense of sight and refusing to use technical aids such as the feeler gauge. His refusal to use technical aids which was not peculiar to him but could also be found amongst other mechanists is rooted in the broader societal culture. This attitude towards technical aids, argues Gyeke, not only deprives mechanists the benefits of achieving precision measurement for proper maintenance of the machines but also impedes opportunities of further growth and improvement of technology. Similarly, the female food technologist in Ghana was found to be practicing technology with some limited insight of scientific principles. The woman in question was processing 'fante kenkey' which Gyeke describes as a fermented cereal dumpling made from maize dough. He argues that while this woman displayed a high level of competency and knowledge in handling the processing efficiently in terms of time and the material used to achieve desired outcomes, a knowledge clearly rooted in basic and applied scientific principles; she however could not explain and articulate those principles (Gyeke 1997: 35f).

Gyeke thus argues that this and what seems to be the thinking amongst African technology practitioners that the what—and how—questions do not matter in the application and practice of technology, whereby technology is meant to only resolve practical problems of survival, necessitate an urgent need for change in such an attitude towards knowledge. In his view, such a change in attitude would make the possessed knowledge of technology exoteric and accessible to the public for scrutiny, thus releasing knowledge from mysticism. For Gyeke, the significance of such scrutiny lies in the fact that it could result in the existing knowledge being rejected or amended or confirmed.

According to Gyeke the new intellectual attitude, together with the understanding of scientific principles and the resultant strong scientific base is necessary if African countries are to fully exploit and adapt transferred technologies from the developed world to their own local conditions as well as to meet their needs. Hence, this would enhance the *appropriation* of technology characterized by 'the active, adroit, and purposeful initiative and participation of the recipients in the pursuit and acquisition of a technology of foreign production' (Gyeke 1997: 41). This would, in his view, not only prevent Africans from becoming permanently dependent on technology transfer but also enable them to ensure that the choice and application of

technology transfer is guided by local principles and needs. His argument is based on the acknowledgement that technology is developed within specific cultural frameworks to meet certain needs. Hence, as a cultural product, technology transfer amounts to cultural borrowing, and therefore requires an active, adroit approach by the recipient in order to avoid a negative impact on local values and ways of life for maximum benefit (Gyeke 1997: 38-42). Thus, although he argues for the separation of cultural values and religious beliefs from scientific, technological world; Gyeke however believes that both can still co-exist to ensure that technology is socio-economically beneficial while not undermining highly-regarded cultural values.

While the above perspective on indigenous African cultures and value systems highlights some vital points and issues that need careful consideration when exploring their socio-economic role in the contemporary era of globalisation, it however leads to counter arguments which challenge and in some cases dismiss the views articulated in it. Counter arguments have also exposed some serious conceptual limits and dangers in the perspective's assertion that, unlike the Western knowledge systems, African traditional cultures and knowledge systems are pervasively mystical, nostalgic and lack dynamism as well as scientific and conceptual content, which in turn impede progress. Such critique was led by amongst others Jean-Marie Makang (1997) who challenged the view held by Placide Tempels, a Belgian missionary in the former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), of the indigenous African people and their traditional cultures. Makang was particularly critical of Tempels' 'philosophy of *Ntu*'/ 'ontology of participation'/ 'Bantu ontology', whereby Tempels advanced the view that the real authentic Bantu tradition is that which has not departed from its source but had kept its original purity and innocence. His perception of Bantu mentality as captured in the expression: 'the source is pure, but waters are polluted' (a quote from Eboussi in Makang 1997: 326). Informed by this perception, Tempels goes on to draw distinctions between the 'bush people' or 'authentic Bantu' and the 'Europeanized Bantu' or 'modern Bantu'. In that distinction, Tempels considers the latter as those Africans who have been corrupted by European materialism and have lost their authenticity and the sense of the old, ageless, wisdom of the ancestors as well as everything stable in Bantu tradition. In contrast, the former are

the real authentic Bantu as they are not spoiled by European modernity and are vital in preserving the authentic Bantu culture (see Makang 1997: 327).

Makang is critical of Tempels' failure to recognize the evolutionary, dynamic nature of African traditions. He argues that this discourse is unhistorical as it constantly regrets the disappearance of the past by reducing African traditions to a fixed past and to the nostalgia of an original state, thus stripping the African people of their historicity (Makang 1997:236f). He thus sees Tempels' praise of the 'bush people' or 'authentic Bantu' as amounting to nothing but the 'praise of the past over the present, of archaism … and against progress, of the good soul over and against technical and material improvement'. Hence, Tempels' nostalgic tradition of 'what ceased to be is not a living reality, but a dead tradition' (Makang 1997:327). Rather, and in contrast to Tempels' and those upholding this ethnological discourse of African people and their traditions, Makang argues that what Tempels' saw as a degeneration of a 'true, authentic' African tradition, whereby irrelevant elements to the modern world were abandoned, was in fact a signal of the dynamic nature of those Africans and their ability to adapt their traditions to the changes in time and space or changing historical contexts. Such an ability to adapt to new situations is, for Makang, critical to the survival of traditions and their enrichment through learning from other traditions as well as assimilation of some relevant elements thereof. He see is as a signifier of flexibility of the African people and their traditions (Makang 1997: 328).

A further criticism was directed at a tendency to draw dichotomies such as 'open/closed' and 'modern/traditional', whereby the West is seen as having open, modern societies and Africa as having closed, traditional societies. Peter Amato (1997) is one of those leading this criticism. In his article entitled 'African philosophy and modernity', he dismisses such dichotomies within the Western intellectual thought as simply rhetorical and having a tendency to undermine African philosophy while allowing Western culture to subsume others in a 'homogenous, self-serving narrative' (Amato 1997: 75). The main pitfall of this discourse, he argues, lies in its failure to acknowledge the role and contribution that different intellectual cultures play in producing overlapping conceptualizations of social reality and human nature. Hence, he sees a need for a shift from putative universal horizon to differentiated horizons of different cultures and writers which

allows for a mutually free discourse (Amato 1997: 75). Arguing for a multi-cultural or inter-cultural intellectual approach, Amato (1997) further dismisses the view that religious-inspired ideas and accounts of social reality are necessarily regressive. He thus sees this view as likely to perpetuate the stereotypes about other intellectual discourses, while simultaneously upholding the Western intellectual discourse's claims of understanding the direction that human history should take. Hence the tendency to measure the success of societies categorized as traditional or pre-modern on the basis of their ability to follow a similar path of development as the West i.e. scientific progress, technological administration, and capitalism as the advanced stage of human development, what he terms 'European self-described modernity' (see Amato 1997: 74). On the contrary, he argues that philosophical reason is not independent of the mythic or religious life of the people.

Amato's argument is reinforced by Barry Hallen's (1996) findings from an interview with the Nigerian Yoruba herbal doctor, whom he simply calls Chief Z. In his critique of Horton's claims, Hallen employs Karl Popper's thesis of the criteria which could be used to determine and assess whether or not the thought system is reflective and critical. According to Popper, whom, Hallen argues believes that traditional thoughts are essentially non-critical, the appropriate criterion would be to identify the following three aspects or stages within the thought system:

- People's ability to identify tradition simply as a tradition,
- Their awareness of the functional significance of the tradition to their day-to-day living and activities, and
- Awareness of at least one significant alternative to the tradition, and on some critical basis then can choose to reaffirm or not reject it (see Hallen 1996: 219).

Hallen found that Chief Z's responses to the interview on indigenous herbal practice satisfied all of these three stages, thus that there is criticality and reflectivity within traditional Yoruba thought. In his response, Chief Z told Hallen that although he and other herbalists know very well that patients are actually cured and healed by the potency of the medical herbs they prescribe to them based on their specialist knowledge, they are however

careful not to attribute the effectiveness of the herbs to their potencies and their own insight about the herb, but to some divine powers known as *orisa*. Hallen found out during his research that the Yoruba people believe strongly in the *orisa* as their protector and guardian as well as a source of power and wisdom, and thus have to show allegiance to this divine force. Hence in their *orisa* worship, the Yoruba believe that one's skill and successes should not be attributable to that individual but to divine agency i.e. *orisa* (Hallen 1996: 221). Failure to attribute the patients' recovery and healing to *orisa*, Chief Z argued, could have detrimental consequences for the herbalist such as the development of jealousy and envy amongst the members of the community as well as anger at the herbalist's perceived pride. Thus, making reference to *orisa* helps to deflect and discourage of all these.

Another advantage highlighted by Chief Z in response to Hallen's interview questions was that mentioning *orisa* in prescriptions helps to conceal common sense elements always associated with remedies and thus encourages patients to take the herbalist's advice and prescriptions seriously, with good outcomes in terms of recovery from ailments. These responses, Hallen argues, not only reveal Chief Z's recognition and appreciation of the functional significance of traditional beliefs to the herbal practice and to the community, but also satisfy all of Popper's three criteria. Contrary to Horton's claim that in traditional societies (which he characterizes as having no developed awareness of alternative world views) people are non-critical and non-reflective, Hallen argues that it is possible even in the contexts of a single world-view to have significant critical and reflective powers.

This view is shared by other later contributors to the debate on indigenous African cultures and value systems, whose analyses not only present a further a challenge to the view that traditional African thought and cultural systems are incompatible with science and progress, but also introduced a different dimension to the debate. Note here the contribution by Sogolo (1998) in his examination of the nature and function of explanatory models and the notion of causality in traditional African thought systems in which he employed a qualified use of Horton's (1970) concepts of 'primary' and 'secondary' theories or levels of thought. For Horton, the 'primary theory' level of thought is characterized by the

common sense explanations of day-to-day events by lay people and the 'secondary theory' level of thought by theoretical explanations involving hidden mechanisms unsusceptible to observational language (quoted in Sogolo 1998: 178).

Subscribing to the view that a single event and phenomenon in society can invoke different but complementary and non-mutually exclusive explanations, Sogolo dismisses the tendencies by Horton and other theorists to classify African thought systems as constituting a primary theoretical level of thought and Western ones as constituting a secondary thought level. Rather, he argues, the explanatory models provided by both African and Western thought systems have common features in their approach. For instance, while there are tendencies to refer to conceptions of illnesses that appeal to supernatural forces as animistic, those with such tendencies fail to realize that conceptions like these are common in the history of every society. This, he argues, can be seen in the case of Scotland's early medical practice whereby 'healing lay in propitiating the powers (supernatural) against which the patient might have offended' (Sogolo 1998: 182 quoting from Clough 1981: 183). Such accounts, he argues, are improved when scientific principles are uncovered to provide scientifically-based accounts.

Sogolo thus argues, like Wiredu, that the accounts provided in traditional African thought fall into both primary and secondary categories just as is the case with the Western thought explanatory models. Hence accounts in these categories of thought levels, rather than being in conflict as Horton suggests, are complementary and non-mutually exclusive. He argues that this non-mutual exclusivity and complementary nature is often missed despite the fact that the connections between the accounts are often difficult to deny. He illustrates the complementary nature of the accounts (i.e. primary and secondary) provided in both traditional African thought explanatory models and Western thought explanatory models by citing an example of causes of illnesses and methods or approaches used to heal them. He argues that in traditional African thought, causes of illnesses fall into both the primary and secondary categories. To illustrate this, he makes specific reference to the relationship between stress and the human body's natural resistance to illnesses. He argues that while the traditional African thought and the Western thought have different conceptions of

stress[2], they however both acknowledge and agree that stress reduces the body's ability to resist illnesses. Hence in both thought systems, when seeking to heal such illnesses, priority will be given to the adoption of an integrated approach whereby both medication (e.g. herbs or drugs) and stress relieving techniques are used in order to facilitate healing and recovery from illness. Sogolo further illustrates the parallels in integrated approaches in both traditional African medical practice and Western medical practice in his argument that:

> The well known *placebo* in orthodox medicine, in which confidence and positive belief—on the part either of the physician or the patient—produce a favourable effect, is well-nigh indistinguishable from the dual-approach of the African healer. Belief, here, must be distinguished from the mere unquestioning faith of the religious type. It has a psychological overtone which leads to physically effective results. Both in African and modern medicine, the patients' belief that the physician is competent, and that the drug works, helps to restore his/her body to a state of harmony with the applied drug. Psychological states, attitudes, and beliefs have been known to play significant roles in traditional African medicine; they now provide acceptable explanations for some of the ailments that have in the past been attributed mainly to supernatural forces (Sogolo 1998: 183f).

Sogolo's view that traditional African medical conceptions of illnesses are different from those in the Western but common in approach, and that the primary and secondary accounts are complementary and non-mutually exclusive, is shared by Sertima (1999). This can be noted when he argues that while African medical practice is characterized by knowledge of plant

[2] Sogolo (1998:183) argues that in traditional African thought, stress is attributed to factors such as strained relationship either with one's spiritual agents or with other persons within one's community. In contrast, in Western thought, he argues, a business executive for example, could suffer from stress due to the imminent collapse of business, a heavy load of a day's work, or anxiety over possible contingencies.

science, anaesthetics, antiseptics, vaccination, and advanced surgical techniques; it however also has an element of ritual and magic. Sertima's view is based on the observation by Finch, a medical doctor at the Morehouse School of Medicine, that:

> Traditional medical practice is intimately acquainted with the psychic, social and cultural nuances of the patients' and that '… the traditional African doctor is often an expert psychotherapist, achieving results with his patients that conventional Western psychotherapy cannot' and that 'the use of suggestion and hypnosis and the placebo, in addition to internal and external treatment … is becoming more and more appreciated in Western medicine (Sertima 1999: 326).

The view that African traditional cultures are not conducive to development and progress is also challengeable in the light of the research outcomes which point to the evidence of scientific and technological progress in pre-colonial Africa. One such example is presented by Sertima (1999) in his outline of a wide range of technologies developed in different parts of pre-colonial Africa. Those scientific technologies included amongst others the carbon steel-making industrial sites on the Western shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania and the neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda; the astronomical observatory in Kenya; a complex knowledge of astronomy amongst the Dogon people in West Africa—the Republic of Mali; the use of mathematical knowledge in the Congo (former Zaire) and amongst the Yoruba farmers and traders in the city of Benin in Nigeria; massive architectural stone structures such as the Great Zimbabwe and Egyptian pyramids; boat making technology in West and Central Africa and the use of nautical science in the Sahara desert; agricultural crop and cattle-rearing science; knowledge of medicines and herbs; and the systems of communication and writing (for details refer to Sertima 1999).

Not only does the evidence of these technologies present a challenge to the views held by Horton and others about indigenous African cultures, it also counters those accounts advanced to explain the historical failure and inability to further develop, expand and sustain these technologies. Those counter accounts effectively challenge Horton and

others' blaming of the 'regressive deeply religious, secretive and unscientific' nature of indigenous African cultures and thought systems for having inhibited the further expansion of the founded technologies. Central to those counter accounts is the argument that Africa's capacity to develop and progress was disrupted and interrupted by European colonial expansion which resulted in the subjugation and domination of indigenous traditional practices, economies and institutions of the colonized world. As Magubane (1999) remarks the destructive impact of European colonialism on the colonized world, has contributed significantly to the European Renaissance:

> It was during the era of the high Renaissance that the pattern of the entire history of Europe's devastation and exploitation of the world was set through the Crusades and the so-called voyages of discovery in search of Eastern spices (Magubane 1999: 17).
> …
> To remember all this is to ponder the nature of Western civilisation ushered in by the Renaissance and celebrated by the Enlightenment philosophers. Unless we remember this, we shall understand very little of the contemporary world. How can we forget that European capitalists appropriated everything in Africa they could lay their greedy hands on—the continent's able-bodied labour, which they systematically drained away for their own purposes for the better part of 500 years, and, in the imperial period, Africa's natural and human resources which they still control? Who can forget the looted cultural resources of Africa, like the treasures of Egypt and Ife bronze sculptures, now scattered in their museums and priceless collections? Even worse, they stole our history and our humanity by propagating their racist ideas. The destruction of the humanity of the African, the European belief in white supremacy, was more degrading than anything else. Nothing is more injurious to human relationships than for one group of people to have absolute power over others, as the white world had over Africa and its people (Magubane 1999: 30).

To further emphasize the point, Magubane goes on to quote Churchill's statement on how Britain benefited from colonizing the West Indies:

> Our possession of the West Indies … gave us the strength, the support, but especially the capital, wealth, at a time when no other European nation possessed such a reserve, which enabled us to come through the great struggle of the Napoleonic Wars, the keen competition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and enabled us … to lay the foundations of that commercial and financial leadership which enabled us to make our great position in the world (Magubane 1999: 30, quoted from Peter Fryer 1993: 11).

Another dimension to this debate on indigenous African cultures, which further supports Sogolo's analysis, arises from the creolist perspective advanced by, amongst others, Ulf Hannerz (1970). In terms of this perspective, the growing contact between people with different cultural experiences owing to movements around the globe under globalisation, has an impact that changes the previously self-contained national cultures. This contact, he argues, results in cultures ceasing to be stable and coherent systems and instead becoming cultural 'work' in progress (see Hannerz 1997:14). Hence, it would be misleading to treat culture/s within complex differentiated societies as simply homogenous and coherent. This process of change undergone by nationally-confined cultures has been described by Hannerz and others as 'creolization' and that it results in creole cultures i.e. those cultures that draw from two or more widely different historical sources (Hannerz 1997: 14).

This view that cultures are complex and diverse is shared by Appiah (1997) in his critique of Afrocentrism, a cultural movement led by African-Americans. Appiah's main criticism is directed at the claims by Afrocentrists that Africa has a single unitary culture with a common origin in ancient Egypt. He finds the major weak point of this view as lying not only in its overlooking of the rest of Africa and African history, but also in its failure to avoid similar pitfalls as that of the European prejudice against cultures without writing (Appiah 1997: 730). An example he cites is that of the nineteenth-century European curriculum which claimed that Western civilization's roots are traceable to the ancient Greece. This, he argues, failed to acknowledge the Egyptian influence on the Greeks, the Jewish contribution to Western culture and the Arabic intellectual influence of Plato's links with the Renaissance. Thus, for Appiah, Afrocentrism is

nothing but simply 'Eurocentrism turned upside-down' (see Appiah 1997: 730).

While Hannerz acknowledges that the third world cultures are to some degree influenced by first world cultures, he however dismisses the view that first world cultures necessarily pose a threat to third world cultures. He argues that rather than openness to foreign cultural influences being seen as necessarily leading to the impoverishment of local and national culture, it should be seen optimistically. That is, that it could provide people in other cultures with access to technological and symbolic resources which could enable them to deal with their own ideas and to manage their own culture in new ways (Hannerz 1997: 16). Furthermore, Hannerz sees the contact between the third world and first world cultures as being mutually beneficial to both worlds. In his own words, he says:

> Along the entire creolizing spectrum, from First World metropolis to Third World village, through education and popular culture, by way of missionaries, consultants, critical intellectuals and small-town story tellers, a conversation between cultures goes on. One of the advantages of the creolist view … is its suggestion that the different cultural streams can create a particular intensity in cultural process (Hannerz 1997: 16).

Hence, diversity is a source of cultural vitality and that rather than complexity and fluidity being seen as a threat to be avoided, they should be seen as an intellectual challenge (Hannerz 1997: 17).

Hannerz's viewpoint on creolism, cultural diversity and conversation between cultures would clearly be shared by Makgoba et al. (1999) who, in the introductory chapter of their edited text entitled *African Renaissance*, argue:

> African culture is but one major contributor to the tapestry of world culture. While the process of creolisation has affected and impacted on all cultures, the histories, the consciousness of the bearers of a culture, the differing world views and the role of the intelligentsia and institutions in filtering the external or the influence of the other so-called cultures has been vital in maintaining distinctiveness

> between the differing major cultures. We still today recognise European, Oriental, American and African cultures. So, *in the midst of complexity there is simplicity, in the midst of order there is chaos, just as there is distinctiveness in the midst of creolisation or blurring in cultures.* When European powers carved Africa up into small territories, tribes and nations and imposed their languages and cultures, they forgot that the roots and essence of African culture would largely remain in the consciousness of the people despite speaking different colonial languages. French-speaking, English-speaking, Spanish-speaking or Portuguese-speaking Africans are still able to relate, share the same world view and interpretation as Africans despite all these real, but artificial, colonial impositions. The roots, history and consciousness of our culture are the same (Makgoba et al. 1999: xi).

These views on cultural diversity and creolism in the context of growing contacts under globalisation also support Senghor's urgent appeal to Africans to re-cultivate African values so that they could make a positive, unique and rich contribution to what he calls *Civilization of the Universal*. Hence Senghor's (1963) concept of *Negritude* by which he means 'the awareness, defence and development of African cultural values' and defines it as '… the whole complex of civilized values—cultural, economic, social and political—which characterize the black peoples …' (Senghor 1996: 46). In his defence of the idea of negritude against strong criticism that negritude is a myth, he argues that while indeed it is a myth, it is a true myth and the 'awareness by a particular social group or people of its own situation in the world, and the expression of it by means of the concrete image …' (Senghor 1996: 49). Pointing to the real urgency for the need to cultivate negritude, he argues:

> With us, or in spite of us, the Civilization of the Universal is growing up before our eyes, thanks to scientific discovery, technical progress, the increase in international exchanges … It will be monstrous unless it is seasoned with the salt of *negritude* … *[N]egritude* is the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world …. You must agree that the *Civilization of the*

> *Universal* will be brought about by the fusion of 'differing civilizations' …. But all these peoples and races must first re-discover the profundity of life; they must not only know it but …be reborn with it …. Today our Negritude no longer expresses itself as an opposition to European values, but as a *complement* to them. Henceforth, its militants will be concerned … *not to be assimilated, but to assimilate*. They will use European values to arouse the slumbering values of Negritude, which they will bring as their contribution to the Civilization of the Universal …. (Senghor 1996: 50).

Concluding Remarks

While the period prior to political independence in Africa, i.e. during colonialism, intellectual and political interest in indigenous African cultures and thought systems was informed by the liberation struggle priorities aimed at toppling the oppressive, exploitative Western colonial powers as well as at asserting an African identity, the post-colonial era saw a shift in that interest towards understanding and identifying the developmental role of those indigenous cultures and thought systems, in particular in the context of increasing globalisation and diversity. This point is better captured by English (1996) in his outline of the periodisation of Senghor's idea of negritude, the idea that partly represents intellectual interest shown in indigenous African thought and cultural value systems. According to English, Senghor's conception of negritude (the idea that was first introduced by Aimé Césaire in 1939), as was analysed by Spleth (1985), went through three main historical phases. Note here his remarks:

> During the thirties and early forties, Senghor and other black intellectuals in Paris were feeling that their African ways of understanding were not fully compatible with their French ways of understanding …. Negritude became each individuals's search for a personal identity that would sort out these incompatibilities. During the second period, from the end of Senghor's service in the French army of World War II to Senegal's independence in 1960, Senghor advocated more other-directed causes: independence and cultural

> pride. He described negritude as an 'anti-racial racialism', aimed at European racism and colonialism. Since independence, the third period, Senghor has used negritude with calm self-affirmation as a constructive instrument of national and cultural growth. Now, negritude is not only 'the awareness, defence, and development of African cultural values,' but also it 'welcomes the contemporary values of Europe' (English 1996: 57f).

It was, however, noted from the above review that this shift in interest in indigenous African cultures and thought systems did not proceed without debate. The resultant debate is characterised by two main contrasting perspectives, which use mainly comparative analysis whereby African cultures and thought systems are compared and contrasted with those in the West, in an effort to examine and determine the role and the relevance of African cultures and thought to societal development and progress.

On the basis of my review of those two main perspectives, I wish to argue that the perspective led by, amongst others, Gyeke, Horton and Temples, which holds the view that indigenous African cultural values and thought systems are regressive and incompatible with development, is difficult to sustain in the light of the counter analysis provided by, amongst others, Amato, Sogolo, Wiredu, Hannerz and Hallen. Claims, for instance, that deep religiosity and reliance on spiritual powers by Africans are inhibitive to the development of the spirit of rational inquiry and scientific approach are strongly countered by the empirical evidence which shows that, in fact, reference to spiritual forces/ powers (e.g. ancestors) does not have such inhibitive effects. Rather, and as Hallen has shown with the study of the Yoruba herbal practitioners, the continual reference to the significance of spiritual and divine powers, is appreciated for its functional significance to the further growth and development of herbal practice and the community.

Another major weakness within this perspective lies in its tendency to present the traditional as peculiarly and intrinsically African and the modern as intrinsically Western. Wiredu, dismissing this tendency as misleading and incorrect, argues that when drawing useful distinctions between the traditional and the modern thought systems, cultural values and beliefs, it is imperative to note that in all societies there are both traditional

and modern practices. This, together with Sogolo's argument that traditional and modern values and practices are not mutually exclusive and incompatible, and Hallen's argument that even within the context of a single world view, it is possible to have significant levels of critical and reflective capacity, presents a serious challenge to Horton's dichotomous thesis i.e. traditional/modern and primary/secondary. Also challenged here is Gyeke's suggestion that, for scientific and technological progress to be achieved, both science and technology should be separated from culture.

This suggestion is also difficult to defend in view of creolist theory, whose implication is that such separation, especially in the era of increasing contacts between different cultures owing to globalisation processes, would inhibit the mutual benefits and cultural vitality that could emerge from Hannerz's conversation between cultures. This is particularly so as Gyeke himself, and contradictorily so, admits that technology is a cultural product and therefore that the benefits of technology transfer would best be enhanced where the recipients actively participate in the innovative integration of technologies to realise their specific needs. If indeed technology is a product of culture (which is the view I agree with[o], Amato is then correct to argue that religious-inspired ideas and accounts are not necessarily regressive as philosophical reason is not independent of the mythic, religious life of the people. This, together with Magubane's argument that the history of colonial disruption of indigenous African traditions and the evidence of scientific and technological developments and discoveries in pre-colonial Africa (see Sertima), further discredit the view that religiosity and mysticism in African cultures constitute major obstacles to socio-economic and technological progress and development. Both Gyeke and Wiredu, nonetheless, make a valid point that the West has made significant advances in the development of a strong scientific base and principles for rational inquiry, and that for Africa to achieve similar levels of scientific development, she has to rid herself of some of the inhibitive customs and practices.

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Academic Postcolonial Resistances and South Africa

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> As an autonomous system rather than an ideological instrument, the University should no longer be thought of as a tool that the left will be able to use for other purposes than those of the capitalist state (Readings 1996: 41).

This essay attempts to make connections between elements of postcolonial critique post-apartheid debates within my own university. The analysis of neo-colonialism, problems of representation and academic production, should have a bearing on the often fractious attempt to transform a South African university. And, looking the other way, the colonial background of South African debates offers the chance to clarify the stakes of metropolitan exchanges. What links these diverse contexts is the tension between a view of the university as the institutional apparatus through which society ensures its uneventful reproduction, at the least cost to itself, and the vision of the university as a potential, if unlikely, lever of change. As articulated in President Kgalema Motlanthe's *State of the Nation* address, 6th February, 2009, the ANC does not have a racial agenda but is committed to making institutions reflect the demography of the nation.

I will argue that the battle over representation can take second place to obscurantist professions of commitment to the managing of relations in line with what is seen as the transformational logic of capitalism. The broader background includes the direction of South Africa's liberation as

Naomi Kline (2007:194-217) has summarized it; the story of the embrace of the business model and the pre-eminence of investor sentiment within the terms of the global financial market. Academic discourse and the institutional politics of the university are not immune to the tricks of authoritarianism, evasions and self-delusion that accompany this complex.

I would like to begin by unearthing a marginal and largely forgotten moment from the South African literary debates. Its emblematic value will, I hope, become clear.

It is now twelve years since Kelwyn Sole attempted to settle accounts with the South African reception of postcolonial theory as part of a wider debate on the political consequences of academic and aesthetic production. The main thrust of his argument was that postcolonial theory favoured a textualism which was the academic counterpart to the supposedly apolitical accommodation to the reality of an emerging neoliberal consensus. It included the self-reflexive and tendentious claim that political participation within institutions of learning can be efficiently managed within the academies' intellectual and social boundaries (see Sole 1997: 145). Whatever one makes of this divining of the political unconscious of academic production, I would suggest that it did amount to staking out a post-apartheid critical position that demanded a response.

If it is unsurprising how little interest metropolitan postcolonial theorists take in the detail of South Africa debates, one might have expected those moving along the corridors of the academic market-place to at least note in passing a significant and well-documented local exchange on the relation between literary theory and the political. One might expect, that is, to see at least a passing reference to it in David Attwell's study of South African literary history, *Rewriting Modernity*, a book that situates itself within the complex debates around South Africa's modernity and postcoloniality. The very subject matter and theoretical resources drawn on by the book call for such an engagement, as does the participation by its author in pivotal moments of this debate. A notable moment in that debate was a call for literary scholars to stick to what they are 'competent to do' (Attwell 1990: 80). Elsewhere the veil of disciplinary propriety drawn over the politically castrating effects of institutional context was to be secured by the assertion that, 'in terms of the political scene, postcolonial studies is

post-nationalist' and 'on the intellectual front it is post-marxist' (Attwell 1993: 4). Ultimately, mirroring the manufacturing of consent through omission that we are quick to condemn in political discourse, the (un)resolved debate is simply dropped in the form of a dictum rather than an argument. Doubtless this censorship responds to the need to differentiate scholarly from political obligations on the grounds that scholarly pursuits are superior because they are 'not self-interested' (Attwell 1995: 95)[1].

It is significant that this elision in Attwell's book is accompanied by a reading of the exchange between Benita Parry and Gayatri Spivak that wishes it away as part of what is caricatured as 'a rather shallow and hermetic debate between materialists and poststructuralists, thankfully one that is now receding in pertinency' (Attwell 2005: 20). I will argue that this dismissal downplays the stakes of a debate that are far from negligible. You will recall that, in 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', Parry took Stpivak and others to task for substituting an insurgent anti-colonial subject position with their own diasporic preoccupations. This fractious debate has been read variously in terms of an argument over representing the Other—that resistance is always mediated, the role of academics therein, the resistance to theory, etc.—and the nature of political agency. In other words, precisely the issues that Sole sought to draw out in the South African context, and that Attwell consigns to the silence of history. Bearing in mind that criticism is not unjust when it dissects but rather when it parries by not parrying, I will interrogate what is at stake in this debate that provokes repression.

I will argue that the Spivak/Parry debate usefully sets the South African moment within a wider purview than is usual, and gives some perspective on issues that are often blurred by their immediacy. The same applies looking the other way as the South African debates highlight marginalised aspects of the directions and dead ends thrown up by postcolonial critique. While all debates are at the same time specific to their circumstances they also share certain affinities. Ultimately these considerations will lead, by way of what I would term a primary process, to

[1] Absent too is any reference to Sole's sharpening of his critique in his 'Writing South Africa' that considers Parry's and Attwell's readings of Coetzee. See also Rustum Kozain (2002).

the parochial site of my own university. Let us first return to the traces of the originary metropolitan dispute.

I

> It is impossible (and in my view unnecessary) to choose between these [Spivak's and Parry's] positions (Loomba 1998: 235).

Gayatri Spivak's (1999: 190) unsettling *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* restates the rebuttal of Parry's diagnosis of the problems in theories of colonial discourse:

> Benita Parry has criticized Homi Bhabha, Abdul JanMohammed, and Gayatri Spivak for being so enamoured of deconstruction that they will not let the native speak. She has forgotten that we are natives too.

This is a reworked version of an essay on J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* that was published (twice) in 1990[2]. It was also cited extensively by Spivak (1990:59f) in her 1993 book *Outside in the Teaching Machine* where the criticism is made more tersely:

> Ms. Parry is, once again, an ally and she was kind enough to draw my attention to the fact that in a recent issue of *Oxford Literary Review* on colonialism, she had charged Homi Bhabha, Abdul JanMohammed, and Gayatri Spivak basically with not being able to listen to the voice of the native …. It is in response to her that the name 'postcolonial' comes into play … In a piece on J.M. Coetzee's novel *Foe*, I have approached Parry's question ….

This reference to the 1990 Coetzee essay leads to 'the liberty of quoting myself, with contextual modification' (60). The citation from the 1990 text

[2] Spivak's 'Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*' was published in *Consequences of Theory,* edited by Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson; and in *English in Africa*17, 2 (1990).

in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* includes reference to the venue where Parry proffered her own reference to the published version of her criticism:

> When Benita Parry takes us to task for not being able to listen to the natives, or to let the natives speak, she forgets that the three of us, postcolonials, are 'natives' too.
>
> ….
>
> Those of us present in that room in Birkbeck College, or indeed the writers and readers of this collection, who are from formerly colonized countries, are able to communicate with each other, to exchange, to establish sociality, because we have had access to the culture of imperialism (qtd. 1993: 60).

So *Outside in the Teaching Machine* cites the 1990 version of the essay on Coetzee to mark the intervention as taking place in Birkbeck College, University of London, where Parry drew attention to her *Oxford Literary Review* essay. But by the time of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* the textual referent becomes 'a recent article in *Oxford Literary Review*' and the exchange at Birkbeck is erased. This apparently minor variation, suggestive of the textualism of the historical event, effects a deflection by shifting the source of animus from an interpersonal exchange 'in that room at Birkbeck' to the propriety of the published critique. This muting could of course also indicate a structure of feeling not unrelated to an intensification of resentment. Of more interest, though, is an accompanying parapraxis.

We have seen that *Outside in the Teaching Machine* gives the reference to the citation that includes ''that room in Birkbeck College'' as the *Foe* essay from the 1990 collection *Consequences of Theory*. But this is incorrect. The *Foe* essay in either of its published forms contains no such information and is closer to the version that reappears in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, referring merely to the *Oxford Literary Review* essay. So the Birkbeck intervention was already screened out in the earliest recounting, and the disclosure of the 1993 *Outside in the Teaching Machine* is re-erased in the 1999 *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. In fact, textually speaking, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* originates the event supposedly

recorded in the earlier *Foe* essay. It would seem that we are dealing with a nested citational structure and retrospective causality, a primary scene and parergonal composition of interlocking frames. What is it for an event to be framed and enclosed in quotation marks, elliptically coordinated through what Freud terms *Abwehrhandlungen* (a set of parrying actions), and then shuffled off-stage?

At the most immediate level it would also seem that the stakes of this uneasy exchange are quite familiar and centre on representation. This is the sturdy prison-house of academic identity politics with Spivak arguing that the minority academic is not the subaltern, and warning against minority academics fulfilling the role of proxy in the first world academe:

> I believe the teacher, *while operating within the institution*, can foster the emergence of a committed collectivity by not making her institutional commitment invisible: outside in the teaching machine (1993: 294, note 2).

Which, of course, is Parry's point in warning against overestimating the impact of academic performance (a warning that paradoxically asserts its importance)[3]. Indeed the last pages of the revised 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* appear, indirectly, to concede Parry's criticism of the original essay[4]. A matter of style rather than of content.

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[3] See the essays by Jenny Sharpe (1989) and Anne Maxwell (1991. Reflecting on the Spivak/Parry exchange in his *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, Neil Lazarus locates the crux of the dispute in what Parry feels to be the wholesale disparaging of nationalist discourse, although he adjudges her to be overstating the charge against Spivak (1999: 120f; and see Lazarus 1994).

[4] In a recent overview of postcolonial theory, Parry refers to 'Spivak's pioneering work on *Jane Eyre*' and offers a judicious summary of her 'deconstructive position towards the logocentrism and identitarian metaphysics underpinning Western knowledge' (2002: 73). See George Hartley's reading of Spivak's 'impossible injunction' (2004: 254).

At issue, then, is not the sincerity or the political commitment of academics but rather the pedagogical and academic elisions likely to follow, and also the likely political consequences, of certain theoretical orientations. The task is to open to analysis the pressures of an institutional-disciplinary type that form the corridors of power linking mobile representatives of the post-colonies (see Dirlik 1994). Assuming the viability of representing others at all, in Kantian terms we are also here in the arena of the judgement of a spectator rather than the maxim of an actor[5]. If academics cannot help laying down the law, and if geo-political location at the imperial centre guarantees their judgements amplification (if not necessarily authority), and if they profess commitment to counter-hegemonic possibilities, then they have an obligation on their own terms to register oppositional sites of praxis beyond the metropole and its institutional discourses.

I would suggest that Spivak's own recounting of the exchange at Birkbeck not only testifies to the potentially wounding nature of academic debate - the personal investment in professional intellectual discourse, the flickering between foe and ally - but also the capacity of questions of representation and legitimacy to both animate and derail analysis. When one of the signs of the times is read as 'the collapse of the futures (specifically the socialist and nationalist futures)' (Scott 2004: 18) that animated revolutionary anti-colonial struggles, and when capitalism seems to be triumphing through its own weaknesses, there is surely a need to look beyond the implications of the social identity of the subject of enunciation and its states of injury. With this in mind I propose to quickly look at the dynamics of a reversion to academic identity politics by disputants concerned to clarify the stakes of the Spivak/Parry exchange.

II

> Post-colonial theory, fixated on the writings of Fanon, remains preoccupied with the glamour of liberation and nationalist discourses of resistance rather than with the more mundane difficulties of

[5] See Alain Badiou's 'Against 'Political Philosophy''. The essay 'What is a Thermidorean?' in the same collection is also relevant to my argument.

> power in a decolonized state which owes its very form to the terms of the transfer from colonial power, as a result of which it remains enmeshed within inherited political discourses. It will be interesting to see how émigré South African critics, hitherto fully committed to nationalist discourses of resistance, cope with this change. (Young 1998: 24).

In a 1996 review of *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Robert Young (1996: 230) comments:

> Spivak's rejoinder points to the political irony of three Black writers being attacked by an émigré South African critic during the era of apartheid. Her comment prompts the reader to ask what political agenda, what political priorities, drive such offensives.

In a rejoinder Laura Chrisman (1997: 40-41), objecting to Young's serenely dogmatic insinuations, points out that Parry's original critique targeted Spivak herself—and not Homi Bhabha and Abdul JanMohammed—with silencing the voice of the natives. She notes the shift from ethnicity to nationality in Young's characterisation of Spivak and Parry respectively, and sees in this a feature of neo-colonialist knowledge production in which South African intellectuals are considered unworthy of critical engagement: 'Young chooses to privilege the experiential rather than the political' (41)[6]. Still, she concedes in a recuperative gesture, quite possibly both Spivak and Parry have misread one another (40).

In response Young accuses Chrisman of misreading his enquiry into Parry's politics; her 'confus[ion] [of] the personal with the positional': 'But a person's origins, familial or national, are not the same as the subject position that he or she adopts in academic critical discourse' (1997: 49). Young (1997: 48) was not concerned with national origins as such, but

[6] Chrisman notes that she herself suffered a similar fate to that of Parry for criticising Spivak's work (1997: 43); see her essay, 'The imperial unconscious? Representations of imperial discourse', and its critic Paulus Pimomo (1991).

rather with positioning and political context:

> [one could ask] what position she was speaking from in statements made in response to a paper I gave at Warwick in 1986 concerned with the contemporary South African political situation, in which she was, at the very least, critical of the African National Congress. Chrisman, who has the benefit of knowing Parry personally, speaks of her 'political activism in a revolutionary socialist movement' in England. This implies Trotskyism—which would explain Parry's reservations about the ANC—but if so, why not say so? It would give Parry's readers a far better understanding of the political location of her criticism.

Of course, Parry hardly needs to say anything about her own (or Spivak's) politics since the point at issue concerns the political effect of certain kinds of academic production whatever the political intention might be[7]. Once more there is an event behind the apparently textual dispute, and Young's aggressivity begins to look like political supervision and the ritual demand for professions of loyalty. Notably the accusation of 'Trotskyism' of course has a history associated with Stalinism and, more interestingly, has been successfully used within South Africa by the ANC to silence critics from the left.

What is at issue in this mutually reinforcing, mirrored dissent is, among other things, the issue of professional self-legitimation and struggle for authority. As Young notes of Spivak's use of the imperative mode in her writing, this is the language of laying down the law, of the pedagogic

[7] Commenting on Parry and others' criticisms of the work of 'the Holy Trinity of colonial-discourse analyis [Said, Bhabha and Spivak]', Young has argued that 'they also involve a category mistake since the investigation of the discursive construction of colonialism does not seek to replace or exclude more materialist analysis' (1995: 163). Once again intentionalism takes precedence when in fact intention is not the issue so much as the effect of metropolitan intellectual production.

imperative that brooks no refusal (1996: 238)[8]. In his subsequent *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* Young cites Spivak's 'When Benita Parry takes us to task …'. (2001: 415) riposte[9] with no mention of his subsequent exchange with Chrisman; indeed with no mention of her anywhere in the book. But he does illuminate his own political position when he endorses the view that the idea of a vanguardist takeover of the state and the economy, associated with the politics of Lenin, has long since given way to the resistance to hegemony associated with Gramsci. For in the postcolonial state decolonization corresponds to the shift between what Gramsci calls political and civil societies where overt violence is replaced by economic coercion ultimately wielded by international capital to the advantage of the old colonial centres. The implication of this situation, therefore, is that national sovereignty is effectively a fiction, and the system of apparently autonomous nation-states is in fact the means through which international capital exercises imperialist control (2001: 46). We'll return to these substantive claims shortly.

Chrisman's (2003: 12) response to Young's criticism of Parry forms chapter 8 of her 2003 book *Postcolonial contraventions* entitled 'Robert Young and the ironic authority of postcolonial criticism'. While omitting consideration of Young's own rejoinder, it does reflect on the Spivak/Parry contretemps, albeit indirectly:

> I welcome the debates about location, authority and the representational politics of speaking for, as and on the behalf of others, that postcolonial studies has generated, and the intellectual and political insights that have emerged from them. Equally I am concerned by the authoritarianism that has also, on occasion,

[8] However, Spivak reads Young as a 'metropolitan postcolonialist' who has 'objected to my call for vigilance' (1999: 362, note 68)—a curious take on the accusation of authoritarianism.

[9] In 'Deconstruction and the Postcolonial,' Young cites Spivak's (*Outside in the Teaching Machine*) rebuttal of Parry as part of his argument against the assumption (here the culprit is Helen Tiffin) that the Other cannot be the author of theory (2000: 191f).

> emerged from these debates, as I discuss in my chapter here on Robert Young.

The Parry/Spivak exchange is touched upon only to uncover the affirmative inclination of the former's work (164) as far as Chrisman is concerned. Spivak receives a ritual genuflection[10], and Young's *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* is rightly taken to task for its condescending reading of the South African Trotskyite Unity Movement[11], and reductive portrait of the ANC. More interestingly, evaluating Spivak's contention that Kant's categorical imperative can be travestied in the service of the state, Chrisman also invokes the value of Gramsci's analysis of the relations between state, civil society and ideology. Turning to South Africa, the left and labour movements (in comparison with Western Europe) are seen as having the potential for active representation in government power and economic policy (2003: 154)[12]. This seems to me to mark, however inadvertently, a return to the critical issues buried beneath the uninspiring displays of self-justification. As a bridge to South Africa let us return to *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

III

[10] 'Pessimism may deter us from the urgent tasks and responsibilities that our locations create: the task of, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, "learning to learn from below"' (Chrisman 2003: 13).

[11] For Parry's view of the Unity Movement, and its failure to develop a mass movement, see her *Postcolonial Studies. A Materialist Critique* (2004: 229, note 1), and 'The New South Africa. The revolution postponed, internationalism deferred' (2005: 182). See also Allison Drew (2000) on the left tradition in South Africa; and Baruch Hirson (1993). The driving force behind the Unity Movement consisted in part of teachers.

[12] Chrisman locates 'both the promise and the insufficiency of contemporary Gramscian thought' (2003: 154) in the argument of Grant Farred (1992) which, whatever its faults, and with the benefit of hindsight, does anticipate the centralized, top-down statism adopted by the ANC for the sake of delivery.

> And a single teachers' students, flung out into the world, is surely a better real-world example than one named the New 'International', which immediately brings Marxist organization to mind (Spivak 2000: 34).

Spivak explains the problem of achieved victory in national liberation struggles when the barriers between fragile national economies and international capital are being removed, the possibility of social redistribution in the so-called developing states, uncertain at best, are disappearing even further (1999: 380). There is complicity between local developers and the global forces of capital. The interest of the migrant, however remote, is in dominant global capital Eurocentric economic migration (and eventually even political exile), and persists in the hope of justice under capitalism. Meanwhile the anti-systemic movements aspiring to global reach no longer view the developing state as the main theatre of action:

> … these globe-girdling movements have to stand behind the state, plagued as it is from the inside by the forces of internal colonization and the local bourgeoisie and plagued from the outside by these increasingly orthodox economic constraints under global economic restructuring. Therefore, there is no interest in grabbing state power as a main program in the non-Eurocentric global movement for ecological justice. Indeed, the electoral left parties often see them as insufficiently political. This instrumentality of what can only be called nationalism or even nationalist localism in the interior of a strategy-driven rather than crisis-driven globalization is certainly beyond the benevolent study of 'other cultures' in the North. Upon this ground it is easy to cultivate 'postnationalism' in the interest of global financialization by way of the 'international civil society' of private business, bypassing the individual states, where powerful non-governmental organizations (NGOs) collaborate with the

> Bretton Woods organizations with the mediation of the new UN (Spivak 1999: 381)[13].

The shift from the insurgent project of grabbing state power is compromised by the power of international finance capital, and Lenin's critique of imperialism is invoked to underline the point (310f). Indeed the question of the vanishing present can be reformulated in the terms of Gramsci's interpretation—within the context of war of position rather than war of movement—of the Leninist concept of the present moment and of politics as grasping the weakest link of a chain. Despite the proclivities of 'many Euro-U.S. thinkers of the global [who are] caught in the national' (27 note 32), the possibility of persistently redirecting accumulation into social redistribution can be within this group of gendered outsiders' reach 'if they [postcolonial subjects] join the globe-girdling Social Movements in the South through the entry point of their own countries of origin' (402).

In another echo of the earlier Coetzee essay Spivak's concern with the complacencies of post-nationalism and the reactionary utopia of evangelical neoliberalism involves the sidelining of the internal struggles within a nation in favour of the focus on imperialist domination:

> David Atwell [*sic*] of the University of Pietermaritzburg has pointed out to me the existence of the notion of a 'colonialism of a special type' in South Africa, a colonialism that did not, by and large, export surplus value. He makes the interesting suggestion that this, too, might explain Coetzee's Crusoe's noncommittal attitude toward classic metropolitan interests. I keep to my much less finetuned point of territorial presence … (1999: 190f, note 113).

This aside touches on a debate that is at once historically interesting and relevant. Launched by the South African Communist Party as part of the 1962 Programme 'The Road to South African Freedom', the colonialism of a

[13] See Jameson's (2000) claim that the nation-state today remains the only concrete terrain and framework for political struggle; and Aijaz Ahmad's (1995) criticism of Spivak.

special type (CST) thesis refers to internal colonialism and has two parts: firstly, the contradictions of capitalism explain the shift from racist attitudes to a racist ideology; and secondly, the institutions of racial domination were first created and have since been reshaped over the years in order to meet the needs of the different fractions of South African capital. It shares a lineage with the Native Republic thesis, formulated by Jimmy LaGuma and Nikolai Bukharin and adapted by the Communist Party of South Africa in 1928, that implied a two stage theory as a national (bourgeois) democratic revolution was seen as a prelude to the move to socialism[14]. In 1969 the African National Congress endorsed the CST analysis as part of a national liberation struggle aiming at national citizenship[15]. Others have seen internal colonialism as both literal, in the case of homelands, and metaphorical in the case of extremes of categorization and discrimination within a national polity (see Cooper 2005: 249). The criticism of CST was that the subject position remains racialised in the call for a national democratic revolution to overturn colonialism and replace the white ruling class with a black bourgeoisie and ruling political class. In other words CST is amenable to liberal reformists committed to the continuation of an economic system in which the formerly advantaged might retain—under the banner of postcoloniality and with the participation of a new comprador elite—privileges nurtured by property and capital inherited from the apartheid era[16].

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[14] Allison Drew (1996: 21) gives the following description of the Native Republic thesis: 'Presupposing national self-determination for a predominantly agrarian black colony conquered by white foreigners, its implicit concept of the South African nation was a racial or colour-based one, derived from a colonial model and superimposed on a post-colonial, racial capitalist society'. Trotsky also endorsed mobilising workers and peasants around the national question.

[15] See Peter Hudson (1986). During the eighties the saliency of the CST model was a source of contention between the nationalist COSATU and its rival, workerist inclined, union grouping FOSATU. See Martin Legassick and Gary Minkley (1998).

[16] See also essays by Colin Bundy (1989), Jeremy Cronin (1990), and for a literary perspective Jabulani Mkhize (1998).

Clearly the two stage theory, the rationale for the SACP's alliance with ANC, is based on knowing the difference between managing the reality of capitalism and making it an end itself[17]. CST has been linked to South African importations of postcolonial theory. Nicholas Visser took issue with the punting of a moderate postcolonial theory that foregrounds race and the experiential at the expense of other analytic categories such as class, and drew a comparison with the pitfalls of CST. These consist not only of the privileging of the experiential franchise and the racial homogenisation of identities, and the monolithic understanding of colonialism, but also a tendency to secure existing socio-economic structures. In disciplinary terms this means the amenability of postcolonial theory to 'an immensely powerful and self-regulating mechanism' (Visser 1997: 89).

My point in following this thread is that attending to the South African context not only throws light on the importation of postcolonial theory and its amenability to an untroubled institutionalization. While the CST debate fulfils Spivak's worries concerning the homogenizing dynamic of anti-colonial nationalism, it foregrounds the ability of race to over-determine that of class. It also falls short of Parry's optimistic scenario of inscribing cultural identity before it can be transcended, of working through attachments in order to emerge beyond them; of committing, at least strategically, to insurgent identities mobilised to the end of grabbing the state as part of a national and international struggle (Parry 1993: 30). However, so far the South African example has been distinguished by the emergence of what an economic historian has termed a typical African 'party state' (Bill Freund, 'South Africa: a new nation-state in a globalising era', 44). The spectacle of the social emancipation of the new bourgeoisie within the framework of political patronage characteristic of the ANC in power would appear to justify the scepticism directed at the radical potential of democratic nationalist movements[18].

[17] For more on the national democratic revolution see http://www.sacp.org.za/ which seems to suggest, given current conditions, a stagist, incremental, gradualist approach.

[18] However, it is possible to read this symptom the other way, seeing in nationalism a bulwark against globalisation (see Guy 2004). Contrast this with the arguments of those concerned with the tendencies of the ANC's

IV

> In other words, the key Leninist lesson today is that politics without the organizational *form* of the party is politics without politics … (Žižek 2002: 558).

Most striking in both Spivak's and Parry's critique of postcolonial reason is the timely warning against the complacencies of post-nationalism and the appeal for continuing resistance to comprador regimes and new oligarchies. If the palliative of liberal-democratic-capitalist-reformism is preferable to delusory revolutionary false starts and the identity politics of class, it is no less utopian. With this in mind I would suggest that the 'vanishing present' referred to in Spivak's subtitle is not so much, as David Huddart (2001: 44) claims, the author's own vanishing—absent not only to her readers, but also to herself—nor is it merely the displaced presence of her readers. There is an equally substantive and contextualisable issue at stake that is registered when, in response to Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, Spivak reads the question of the political into 'the invocation of that absent class' (200: 34). The lesson to be taken is that

> the presuppositions of the text of Marx should be internalized (learnt) by as large a group as possible—so that the practice is changed upstream from the party line—rather than be the means of metonymically collectivizing people whose other differences will inevitably bring the 'collectivity' down (ibid.).

We are confronted here with what has been termed the finitude of a certain concept of the party[19]. After all, the seizure of State power merely represents

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continentalism and the erection of a monolithic liberation history (see Mngadi and Monson 2001); and Gqola 2004). According to Michael MacDonald one of the effects of the 'collusive liberal capitalism in South Africa' is 'to reproduce and reward racialism' (2006: 152).

[19] In the words of Jacques Derrida: 'What tends perhaps to disappear in the political world that is shaping up, and perhaps in a new age of democracy, is

a reform of the system, reinforcing the interstate system which serves the ends of accumulation and the interests of those in the traditional centres of the world system[20]. However, while the path of egalitarian politics does not necessarily pass through the State, or via the agency of a party, it does apparently intersect with the classroom.

We have returned to the theme of academic responsibility—the academic's 'one obligation of not writing on something carelessly read' (Spivak 1994: 35)—within its institutional and disciplinary context, and the question of the location of criticism foregrounds the institution of the university. Since theory (like teaching) is undoubtedly a form of praxis, and in so far as the political is the public exercise of judgement, academics are involved in advancing the interests of others. The confusion of pedagogics with questions of politics circumscribes the arena of intervention in the tradition of politics as *paideia*: 'Let us teach a resistance to mere theoreticism in the classroom' (35). If teaching is ideally the non-coercive education of desire, the desire does not all flow one way. It seems to me that what links the metropolitan and the South African debates here is the question of effective activism that summons up a missing party, as mundane as it is fantastic: an (inter)national organization or coalition able to move beyond expressions of solidarity to actualise critique, often at the irreconcilable cost of putting partisanship before intellectual freedom. Parry's choice of Pablo Neruda's *A mi partido* ('To My Party') as epigram to her essay on 'The New South Africa' signals a strategic and organizational challenge obscured by both postcolonial identity disputes and, to a lesser

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the domination of this form of organization called the party, the party-State relation, which finally will have lasted, strictly speaking, only two centuries, barely longer than that, a period to which belong as well certain determined types of parliamentary and liberal democracy, constitutional monarchies, Nazi, fascist, or Soviet totalitarianisms. *Not one* of these regimes was possible without what could be called the axiomatics of the party' (1998: 146). But what next?

[20] See also the claim that the State has not been thought through in Marx, and needs to be reinvented (Spivak 2006: 115). And Immanuel Wallerstein's claim that the loss of hope in Leninism has really been the loss of hope in centrist liberalism (1995: 158).

degree, the fates of nationalism and university politics. It also evokes for me the failure of organisations, such as the Unity Movement, to move from educational enlightenment to determining State policy. Today who can doubt the need for organization and unity; for something like a party to transcend factionalism (minus the *ersatz* of the seizure of the university standing in for the seizure of State power)?

Slogans aside, caught between morality as individual critical autonomy and morality as necessarily compromised means of effective intervention, the academic as producer faces a well-documented dilemma[21]. We can still, in the words of Ania Loomba, 'as students and academics', follow the recommendation to engage in the 'empirical specificity' of 'institutional critiques' (1998: 258). As Ato Quayson romantically puts its, beyond teaching the intra-institutional hope is that as we 'constantly defamiliarize our teaching methods' 'activists and workers "in the field" (NGOs, women's agencies etc.) will find some illumination in these pages' (2000: 184, 20). The propaganda of professional rectitude promises to displace outdated factionalism or partisanship.

This interlocking of pedagogy, institutional representation and theoretical production is also to be found in what has been characterised as South Africa's 'paranoid political climate' (Jensen 2001: 119). We have seen metropolitan postcolonial debates marked by forms of misreading, the silencing or erasing of opponents, the imputation of ulterior motives, intemperance, strategic solidarity and wishful thinking. Nothing in that follows will challenge the essentials of this portrait of academic identity politics, but it will, I hope, foreground the stakes a little more emphatically.

V

> To fend off that danger [the potentially explosive identification of capitalism with white supremacy] business is joining with the ANC government in encouraging the growth of black middle classes and

[21] Recall Antonio Gramsci's observation that the problem of functionaries partly coincides with that of intellectuals (1971: 186). Gramsci, of course, does not understand the comparison in negative terms.

> enlisting racialism, as embodied by the new African bourgeoisie, to support the new political order (MacDonald 2006: 4).

At the level of the South African university, the legacy of colonialism lives on in a particularly noticeable form: the racial profile of academic staff. For example, at my own institution, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, whereas black Africans constitute 84% of the provincial population they only make up 17% of academic staff[22]. In a post-apartheid present marked by an increasing gap between rich and poor, anti-democratic forms persisting under the guise of culture and tradition, empowerment of a comprador and parasitic bourgeoisie carried by established capital, the perceived antidote to this situation is linked to the efficiency of the international, US-forged business model[23]. The imperative of rationalisation has given the impetus to a bitter and self-sustaining recriminatory identity politics in which academics face disciplinary action for publicly criticising university management. Sapere aude! But obey! An incessant crisis is exacerbated by the difficulty of retaining or attracting black staff because of uncompetitive salaries in an economy suffering an acute skills shortage.

There are a few more intertwined moments of this complex—wherein the break between the past and the present is also a moment of halting transition that I would like to highlight.

Our Black African Academic Forum has argued that retention of 'fully black African academics' will be helped by the making of 'a counter

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[22] During the time of writing this figure has now risen to 20%. Of the permanent staff who are academics '49.7% are white ie [*sic*] 50.3% of academics are Black (20% African, 28.3% Indian and 2.4% Coloureds). For the first time, the majority of academics at UKZN are Black' (Vice-Chancellor's Communiqué 2008).

[23] It is perhaps worth noting that rather than being based solely on the US paradigm, South African affirmative action policies as documented by the Employment Equity Bill (1998) are inspired by the Malaysian model. See Kanya Adam (2005) on negotiating the contradiction between rejuvenating the racial group classifications associated with apartheid and breaking with that past.

offer when one of the black African academics seeks to resign' (BAAF 2005: 15). The challenge is to change not only the 'cultural norms, values and ideologies that underpin the operations and interactions of the university' (6) but also 'the fact that processes which lead to research productivity have non-African frames of reference'; established journals 'focus on specific issue types or on issues that reflect a non-African world view' (8). 'This is particularly dangerous for a part of the world whose identity and preference structure are being defined by others external to its locus'. (17) A key proposal to solve the problem of under–prepared academics being fast-tracked to management positions—where their 'expected failure' is taken 'as proof-positive of the baseness of the policies that assume that black Africans have the intellectual capacity to compete at this level' (8)—is to 'lower the preferred appointment level' (12) rather than employ non-black African candidates.

All of this within the context of the university's 'Strategic Plan 2007-2016' guided by the goal of 'the restructuring of South African industry (with the shift towards manufacturing)' (2008: 5) via programmes designed to meet the needs of the labour market 'and make a meaningful contribution to the provision of high-level human capital' (11). Academics, educated in 'organisational citizenship' (13), are reminded that they work at 'an institution that cares for its clients' (15) and is guided by an 'ethic of customer service to all stakeholders' (ibid.). And this in turn within the context of South African universities receiving a declining proportion of their revenue from the state. According to Habib *et al.* (2008: 149), this proportion is lower than both the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development average and the contribution in most African countries.

Inevitably the complaints of those who feel themselves employed under sufferance (using the language of rights as a fig leaf over privilege) test the patience of a management unable to source replacements. Rightly suspicious of the unconscious prevalence of a creeping nostalgia for the principled university under apartheid as covert, normative ideal, the white academic appears as the litigious paranoic who refuses to recognise his own guilt or unearned privilege; clouding the issue of transformation with the self-righteous posturing in defence of academic freedom. The suspicion of co-ordinated subversion finds itself confronting an unmistakable pattern of organised negation and insistent second-guessing. Concerns regarding the

final destination of calls to Africanise (via intellectual endogamy) not only the personnel but also the Eurocentric disciplines of the university that were built on the exploitation of Africa are drowned out by the accusation of intransigent place-holding. The case for a restorative Africanism touts the benefits of repristination as the litmus test of non-racialism, and concerns regarding authoritarianism are heard as challenges to the legitimacy of authority. Meanwhile the recoding of academic freedom in terms of bureaucratic responsibility coincides with the rhythm of perpetual punitive auditing expeditions, and the seepage from the university's racial politics militates against pedagogical enlightenment[24]. Students remain the register of disgust and alienation as those advocating the sacredness of freedom of speech object to being put to the question; the expense of spirit in a waste of shame.

In this embattled diorama appeals for moderation and reason are heard as implying a lack of these on the part of interlocutors who in turn see the continuation of colonialism in the assumed superiority of the appeal, and in its very language (here, English). The sympathetic are struck dumb when confronted by the experiential franchise of the oppressed enforced by an irresistible logic that insistently demands what it implacably refuses: you must understand what you by definition cannot understand (because of your race)[25]. The formation of cliques displaces the formation of parties and each stake-holder sees its Other as impervious to shame, contradicting reality, and inaccessible to logical critique. Beyond the fray, the remnants of the academic luxury of wielding moral superiority without having to face consequences melds into impartiality that acts as a cover for opportunism.

[24] This involves interpreting the comparison of white academics and baboons. See the commentary by Thabisi Hoeane, http://www.weekend post.co.za/main/2005/04/16/Opinion/ot01_160420htm. Also http://www. mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=290465&area=/insight/insight__nationa l. 'The strain of man's bred out/ Into baboon and monkey' (Shakespeare, *The Life of Timon of Athens*, 1.1: 251f)

[25] Those interested in doing so can track these manoeuvres, the belligerent reprisals, special pleading, condescension, and malice at http://www.changes@UKZN and http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccs/default.asp? 11,61,3,1671

The first stone has always already been thrown in retaliation, and the passion of attack, counter-attack and self-exoneration ensure that that misunderstandings flow seamlessly into disagreements. The stampede for the moral high fails to level the playing field.

As a fragment of the South African postcolonial *agon*, and at the cost of suggesting identities where differences are important, I would like to offer the following schematic thick description.

First, the seductive fantasy associated with white liberals: that they have guided the liberation movement towards modern, democratic, individualistic values. The alternative would have been crude Marxism or a totalising nationalism. In this conceit European culture, as the bastion of civilised values, is a core that must not be obscured by the atavistic aberration of racism. In this paternalistic phantasmagoria the future development of South Africa, in terms of civil society and economy, depends on the tutelage of those guarding the legacy of these values. The crisis in Zimbabwe forms a convenient backdrop illustrating what happens when Africans are given back their own indignity. In defending the gains of a post-totalitarian society, I (the beneficiary of totalitarianism) am free to detect in you (the representative of its victims) a return of the repressed.

The reaction-formation that answers this self-serving rationalisation holds that the demise of apartheid and the elections of 1994 represent an unequivocal victory over the forces of reaction identified as white. Subsequent resistance to racial transformation represents a rear-guard process of intellectual and bureaucratic wrecking, an intransigent that aims to discredit by delay the process of democratisation and representivity via obstructive provocations. This perspective has its own coherence and justification. Nevertheless its moralising form elicits the suspicion that as a scenario it rests on elision of the fact that the nature of the political compromise arose because of the estimation on the part of those in the liberation struggle was that the alternative to accommodation with former oppressors was the Balkanization of South Africa, a blood-bath that would leave little left to govern, and economic regression.

If the negotiated settlement was a step back from an abyss that involved unavoidable, and often unpalatable, compromise, it follows that to view the continued existence of whites in South Africa as an act of pure generosity on the part of the oppressed, demonstrative of a superior morality,

is a distortion. Whatever the remarkable acts of forgiveness experienced by individuals, the retention of the perceived clients of the former oppressors rests as much on economic self-interest and political realism as on a sense of justice and transcendence of the desire for revenge. The deflection of the charge of self-interest is achieved by returning that charge, assuring stasis. More importantly, if the ethos of the 1994 settlement has now evaporated, or if interlocutors no longer, or never did, identify with such principles, then a reassessment is called for.

On both sides, in the no-man's land between fantasy and memory, the satisfaction of betrayal fuels wounded resentment before gross ingratitude. While this circulation of crude stereotypes represents but one strata of a specific national complex, it does echo the highly personalised nature of polemical exchanges in the metropolitan postcolonial debates that take aim at the legitimacy of opponents. In addition, white academics in the post-colony concerned with social justice face the added responsibility of overseeing the ultimate replacement of themselves with black colleagues in a situation of financial constriction and frozen posts; a situation that resonates beyond the university and therefore gives academic politics a particular charge. Where the stakes are, if not higher, then more immediate, the South African example can illuminate what is often obscured in the metropolitan exchanges.

In the proverbial shadow of invocations of the anti-colonial utopia turning into postcolonial nightmare (but nightmare for whom?), one can sense the attraction of the argument that in the postcolonial era we are making the mistake of still asking anti-colonial questions. Wielding censorial anti-colonial rhetoric in the context of neo-colonialism risks distorting a context that has been described (borrowing from Gramsci) as a 'state of reciprocal siege' (SACP 2006: 19) produced by South Africa's negotiated transition to democracy. The entire system seems to be lurching forward and backward at the same time in a context where the *who* all too often determines the meaning and value of the *what*. A chain of buried interpretation encircles the likelihood of normalising the university in an abnormal society. Is a normal society equivalent to one based on deracialised capitalism, and how can the faith in the possibility of de-racialising

competitive society be turned into reality?[26]

If today it is no longer excusable to confuse the anti-colonial struggle with opposition to capitalism, then it would seem that the challenge confronting those who would do more than tend the flame of hope includes interrogating the limitations of academic production within the context of global and national political alliances and positions. Identifying attempts to silence and de-legitimate both in university politics and the wider academic marketplace often uncovers a common defence of policies and decisions passing off history as ineluctable nature. It appears that the real problem to be addressed—the ability of the current economic system to deliver on the promise of social justice, and the role of the university and its personnel in working for or against meaningful change—is too often lost under the trauma of bitter hope and blossoming anxiety.

Whether in the panorama of metropolitan debates, where the question of political alignment vies with social identity as the index of legitimacy, or in the microcosm of South African institutional politics where the issue of representivity overdetermines the field of non-communication, the question of correct analysis of the historical context recedes before the defence of integrity. At different ends of the academic marketplace the various answers to the challenge of what is to be done are often lost in the wake of defensiveness and charged misreadings that indicate the presence of trauma that is not only personal. We have seen that is involves various interpretations of the nature of society and of the role of the university, of teaching, of nationalism and the usefulness of political parties, etc. While the fragment of the South African case presented here can be read as testifying to the pitfalls of national consciousness, the festering legacy of colonialism, and resistances to the frank analysis of its nature and after-image, it also poses the problem of what is to be done. At the very least, as we say, academics ought to be in a position to offer a rigorous critical analysis of their function and, exceptionally, point to possible ways forward out of the impasse of mutual recrimination. What is your critique of the existing world?

Critical self-reflection is not simply one aspect of academic

[26] See *Africanus. Journal of Development Studies* 37, 2 (2007), for discussion of South African post-apartheid economic policy.

responsibility among others; and the deadlock in discourses within the university may in fact be mirroring a wider ideological crisis that is having definite material effects, retarding the ability of South Africa to exorcise the spectre of colonialism. What linkage might the post-apartheid wrangling over the stewardship of the means of academic knowledge production have with the struggle over other means of production, for example around the question of land? Colleagues working at metropolitan universities can seem, from outside at least, to dispute within a socio-economic and ideological system whose overall stability (for better or for worse) is considerably more secure than that of post-totalitarian democracies such as South Africa. If this can render metropolitan debates, however intense and significant, peripheral in their own immediate political sphere of influence it also suggests that the stakes for disputants in the post-colonies may well be more urgent. As Mahmood Mamdani (2008) has concluded from an analysis of the crisis in Zimbabwe, the clock is ticking for South Africa.

The most debilitating manifestation of the present academic situation calls to mind the folktale of the exhausted mother who invited a passing man to care for her children, only for him to realise how much easier it was to cook the children one by one and feed them to the unsuspecting mother. He escapes by turning into a stone that the mother throws across the river in anger at his perceived escape.

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Teaching for Cultural Relevance and Restoration in the Multi-lingual South African Setting: The Pedagogical Potential of Bi-lingual Setswana-English Stories

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Introduction

Plaatje includes in his 1916 bilingual collection, recently republished in 2004 and again in 2007, with illustrations, a story entitled *Katlholo ya Kgosi* (The King's Judgement). He states that:

> *Batswana ba na le polelo nngwe ke e. E tshwana le katlholo ya ga Solomone e e bolelwang mo Bebeleng, ntswa baruti ba pele ba re ba fitlhetse e itsege mo Batswaneng. Bebele e ise e kwalwe ka Setswana.*
>
> The following is a Batswana story. It is similar to the Bible story of the judgement of Solomon, but the pioneer missionaries say that they found it to be known among the Batswana before the Bible was ever written in the Setswana language (Jones & Plaatje 2007:15).

In this story two new mothers both claim one baby after one woman has accidently suffocated her baby in the night and steals the other woman's child. *Kgosi* (the chief or king) asks for a sword to cut the baby in half. One mother acquiesces while the other pleads with the chief to spare the child's

life and give it to the other mother. Her love for the baby is stronger than the pain of losing him to the other mother. The chief discerns that she who pleaded for the baby's life must be the real mother and settles the dispute in her favour. Whereas in the Bible story the emphasis is on the discernment and wisdom of the King, in the Batswana story the emphasis is on the mother. It is explicitly stated that:

> *Katlholo e, ke yona e e simolotseng seane sa Setswana se se reng: Mmangwana ke yo o tshwarang thipa ka bogale.*
>
> This judgement is the origin of the Setswana proverb: The mother of the child is the one who grasps the knife by the blade (Jones & Plaatje 2007:15).

The Setswana proverb and story extols the strength and courage of mother love, which will sacrifice, endure pain and brave danger for the sake of her child. Whereas Plaatje's story acknowledges the Bible and the missionaries and hence one view of the story focused on the king's wisdom, it simultaneously honours Setswana culture and proverbs, highlighting another view of the story, focused on the strength, tenacity and resilience of Batswana motherhood. There are always two ways at least of viewing a story depending on where one stands but there is also a place of convergence. Our shared human identity allows us to enter the space between cultures and languages and there learn about 'the wonderful diversity of our oneness'[1].

This space, we believe, offers the possibility of teaching and learning for cultural relevance and restoration, meaning, for example, if we wish to further highlight Setswana culture in the above story, we might explore the traditional judicial structure centred on the hereditary chief. The chief presided over *lekgotla* (the tribal court), as would undoubtedly have been the setting of this particular story. Usually there was a hierarchy of courts, the highest court being the one where the chief presided and which handled serious offences as well as appeals from lower courts presided over by headmen. The chief, the only person with the power to pass the death

[1] Pradervand states that 'One of the most precious dimensions of the human condition' is 'the wonderful diversity of our oneness' (1989: 201).

sentence, was held to be the embodiment of discernment and wisdom. The proverb *Kgosi, thipa e sega molootsi* (A chief is like a knife that would cut the sharpener) signifies that 'owing to the mere fact that the chief has a network of law-enforcers, advisors and tribal police' he has the 'ability to deal effectively with disrespectful, misbehaving and law-disregarding individuals within the tribe' (Sebate 2001:270).

The Multi-Lingual, Multi-Cultural South African Setting

This study is based upon the premise that learners in our multi-lingual and multi-cultural South African setting are not blank slates to be written upon, but bring to the classroom cultural resources that can and should be capitalized on to facilitate learning and teaching. In South Africa that cultural capital may include a vernacular, textured and complex, rich in proverbs, songs, stories and history. Ignoring that cultural capital, we may unwittingly undermine, disparage and negate certain types of intelligence. A tried and true educational principle is to build on the known and to move from the known to the unknown. Culturally-relevant texts and pedagogy validate learners' lived experiences, which in turn stimulate engagement and enhance self-confidence. Culturally restorative texts and pedagogy redress the effects of racism that has resulted in stereotypical misrepresentations of and negative affect attaching to African cultures and peoples.

The Cultural Capital of our African Learners

Our eurocentric education system assumes Western sensibilities, yet African learners bring a unique set of skills drawn from their natural, social and historical environments, such as skills of negotiation and problem-solving learned in families with many siblings (Ntuli 1999:196) or in the extended family. In settings such as the church, learning and teaching takes place through participation and performance, the antithesis of the passive classroom mode where opportunities to interact are typically highly structured and bounded (Ntuli 1999:197; Asante 1988:62f). For Africans, knowledge is not a collection of dead facts but 'has a spirit and dwells in specific places' and one learns through direct experience (Ntuli 1999:197; Asante 1988:80f), that is, through doing and through immersion in the

human situation. Moreover, knowledge is inseparable from ethics which informs its application (Asante 1990:11; Van der Walt 2006: 210), and wisdom entails the ability to integrate knowledge, ethics, direct experience, social intelligence etc.It is perhaps commonplace to say that Africans acknowledge the wealth of wisdom embodied in their proverbs and stories. Stories frequently encapsulate or explicate a proverb, as with Plaatje's 1916 collection discussed in the introduction. One of the ways in which we can be relevant to the sensibilities of our African learners is to use stories and proverbs, originating from an African culture, beginning at the primary level (Mashige 2002:60).

Culture as Ideology: A Tool of Control in the Past

Schools, in the colonial and apartheid context, became sites of control. By dismissing African cultural objects as unworthy of school study, education became complicit in 'a systematic assault on people's languages, literature, dances, names, history, skin colour, religions, indeed their every tool of self-definition' (Ngugi 1993:51). In education, as in the broader society, culture as ideology was a primary tool of oppression (Mashige 2002:52; Ntuli 1999:191). Under apartheid, there was a hierarchy of cultures in which 'whites arrogated themselves a central and pivotal role ... their monuments ... languages, philosophy and education were promoted by the state while others were left to fend for themselves' (ibid:193). 'They proscribed our initiation schools that taught the love and protection of nature' (ibid:192). African cultures were sometimes flagrantly suppressed, as with the forbidding of vernaculars in mission schools (ibid:191). Children too young to understand what was wrong with speaking their home language were routinely punished. Our African cultures were sometimes distorted in subtle ways, as with the West's elevation of reason, an implicit attack on emotion, arguably the primary faculty leading to understanding stories, certainly in the case of oral stories constructed and performed using structures of feeling (Scheub 2002). In the end 'we have been interpellated into the Western ideological machinery, hence the need for decolonising the mind' (Ntuli 1999:189). '[O]ne cannot build a truly African identity ... on the basis of borrowed and ill-understood cultural practices of the west' (Mashige 2002:59). We believe that the education we offer can make a difference

either for or against the decolonizing process, which entails cultural relevance and restoration. Specifically, as modelled here, it entails affective re-identification with our African languages, stories, proverb, histories, and cultural norms and values.

Thesis

In this study we draw on Plaatje's example. His vision gave rise to bridge-building efforts, such as the production of bi-lingual texts, including his collections of published Setswana proverbs and Folk Narratives. Furthermore, his vision prompted the collection and translation of oral *Setswana Stories* by the Sol Plaatje Educational Trust between 2003 and 2008[2]. Selected stories are analyzed here for cultural relevance and restoration.

In light of the critical need to tear down the myth of Western cultural superiority in our educational institutions and to restore the equal status of African languages, literatures, cultures and histories, we argue for the inclusion of bi-lingual stories and proverbs from an African culture in our multilingual South African primary classroom. We believe that our shared human identity affords an entry point into the in-between space between cultures and languages where learning and teaching can take place.

Theoretical Constructs: Hybridity, Negotiation and Translation

Given that Africans for generations have been negotiating a middle course between imposed Western values, norms and sensibilities and home cultural norms, values and sensibilities, hybrid cultural identity or hybridity seems like a fitting theory to inform our study.

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on these moments of processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences (Bhabha 1994:1).

[2] We have permission from Sol Plaatje Educational Trust to use the Unpublished Collected Setswana Stories.

Bhabha, who popularized hybridity uses various terms including 'cultural difference' to denote the dynamic cultural identities of previously colonised peoples, as in India and Africa. He writes:

> The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living (Bhabha 1994:7).

Bhabha's notion of hybridity, especially the renegotiation of cultural identities at the moment of articulation is appealing in that it restores rhetorical agency to formerly marginalized Batswana communities, allowing them to become subjects of their history, reformulating their distorted cultures and identities in the present.

> It is 'the in-between space' (of translation and negotiation), he writes, 'that carries the burden of the meaning of culture' (Bhabha 1994:38). The reason for this is that translation and negotiation are principles of difference; ways in which something other, something new can emerge (Viljoen & Van der Merwe 2007:9).

Bhabha's theory is further compelling in that it uses the analogy of translation and we are advocating here the use of bi-lingual stories and proverbs. Bhabha describes hybridity as 'the irresolution, or liminality of translation, the *element of resistance* in the process of transformation, 'that element in a translation which does not lend itself to translation' (1994:224).

In Plaatje's Setswana version of *The King's Judgement*, discussed in the introduction to this study, the word *Motsetse* (Plaatje 2007:15) appears once and refers to a woman in seclusion after giving birth. There is no real equivalent in the English culture, hence Plaatje translates it simply as 'Mother'. This bears out Bhabha's assertion that 'the content of a cultural

tradition is being overwhelmed, or alienated in the act of translation' and that:

> The foreign element 'destroys the original's structures of reference and sense communication as well' not simply by negating it but by negotiating the disjunction in which successive cultural temporalities are preserved in the work of history and at the same time cancelled (1994:227f).

We suggest with Bhabha that 'culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up possibilities for other "times" of cultural meaning' in our case, retroactive (Bhabha 1994:178). *Botsetse*, for example, refers to the Setswana custom whereby a woman was secluded in the house for a time after giving birth (Malefo in Rantao 1993: 56). A small stick was placed in front of the door (ibid)/ cross poles in front of the hut (Schapera 1948:234) to let people know that only the midwife and those caring for the mother and baby were allowed to enter. In times past, an ox or a goat was sacrificed if the parents or parents-in-law were full of expectations for the child (ibid). The woman in seclusion drank a clear consommé made with the water in which the meat had been cooked (Malefo in Rantao 1993:56). After two or three weeks, when the baby's umbilical cord dried up and fell off, it was buried in the yard (ibid). This is done to establish a bond between a person and the land of his birth. Phankga, the protagonist in Mminele's novel signifies the importance of this bond culturally, by saying:

> *Mošomo wa go ba hlogo ya sekolo se ke wa ka, o ntshwanetše. Ke wa ka—Tau gare ga Ditau—Ngwana wa mobu wo, gare ga bana ba mobu wo.Ge ke be ke sale maleng a mme, mme o be a fela a monoka mobu wo go ntiisa ka wona. Ge ke belegwa, lentšu la ka la mathomo le kwelwe ke mobu wo, gomme ba nhlapiša ma meetse ao a lego mo mobung wo. Ke godišitšwe ke eng ge e se dijo tsa mobu wo? Ke hlalefišitšwe ke eng ge e se kgati ya mobu wo?—Bjale sekolo se se swanetse go hlahlwa ke mang ge e se ngwana wa mobu wo? Ke mang? Ke nna* (1966:19f).
>
> The position of principal in this school ought to be mine. It is

> mine—A Lion among Lions—Child of this soil, among children of this soil. When I was still in my mother's womb, my mother used to lick this soil to strengthen me with this soil. When I was born, my first word was heard by this soil, I bathe with water from this soil. How was I brought up if not by food nurtured by this soil? Where did I get my wisdom if not by … if not by the stick plucked from this soil? So who is supposed to lead this school if not the child of this soil? Who is the child of the soil? It is me.

In Batswana and other South African cultures it is believed that at the end of one's life one must return to where the umbilical cord has been laid, to die and become an ancestor. Hence a person is truly *ngwana wa mmu*, a 'child of the soil'.

Translation, says Bhabha, is partial re-presentation. He cites Benjamin's well-known passage that likens an original and its translation to 'the broken fragments of the greater language, just as fragments are the broken parts of a vessel' (Bhabha 1994:170). And that greater language, when it comes to cultures, suggests the shared human identity we posit as permitting the pedagogical possibilities of 'the in-between space'. To intervene in the present, 'to be part of a revisionary time', according to Bhabha, 'is to reinscribe our human, historic commonality' (ibid: 7).

Out of respect for our African material and our African learners, and in keeping with the afrocentric quest for methodological approaches that contribute to decolonisation, we have presented theoretical constructs, hybridity, negotiation and translation which intuitively, emotionally and creatively underpin, guide and inform our interpretation of Setswana stories and proverbs.

Teaching for Cultural Relevance and Restoration: The Care and Education of Children in Selected Setswana Stories

In this section of the study we model teaching for cultural relevance and restoration through language, story, proverb, history, cultural norms and values. Language, culture, history, proverbs, stories are intertwined and indivisible, bearing out the traditional African philosophy of holism, the

interconnectedness of all things. Language, culture, proverbs and stories derive from one source, life itself. Life, if you will, is the schoolroom.

The oral stories collected by the Sol Plaatje Educational Trust number approximately 40. Of this collection, Batswana writer, B.M. Malefo (2008) tells us in the Introduction to the *Collected Stories* (*Ketapele va Ditlhamane tse di Kgobokantsweng*):

> *Dinaane tse ... di dira gore Batswana ba eletlhoko gore ke maungo a setso sa bone, bogolo jwa maitsholo, tsa botlhokwa, le maikaelelo a bone di tlhomamisiwa ke setso sa bone ...*
>
> *Batho ba ba tlotlang le go ithuta puo ya bone, gape baabe ba ithuta setso sa bone, gonne puo ke yone selotlele se se tshwaraganyang setso. Dinaane tse, ka jalo, ke tshone tshetlaganyo ya go fetisa ditumelo le tse di tlhwatlhwa mo setsong sa babui ba Setswana …*
>
> *Batswana, ka jalo, ba tshwanetse go ithuta gape mo dinaaneng tse gonne di rwele matso a botshelo jwa batswang dikai; tlotlo, tlhokomelo ya bana, seriti, lerato, boammaaruri, tse dingwe tse di tlhwatlhwa le thuto ka bophara*
>
> These stories make the Batswana aware that they are products of their culture, and that much of their behaviour, and many of their values and goals are culturally determined ….
>
> People who respect and learn their language are learning their culture as well, because language is a key component and carrier of culture. These stories are therefore a medium for transmitting beliefs and values present in the culture of Setswana speakers ….
>
> The Batswana can therefore learn from these stories, which … touch on all aspects of the Batswana way of life, such as respect, the care of children, dignity, love, honesty, other values, and education in the broadest sense (see footnote 2).

In terms of the care of children, we have already touched on the resilience,

tenacity and strength of the mother love and on the custom of *botsetse*, that is, the period and practice of secluding mother and child after the birth. Traditionally, seclusion was believed to be important in terms of protecting the infant from diseases and danger (Malefo in Rantao 1993:56) So-called natural dangers would have included viruses and contagious diseases to which a newborn is very susceptible, its immune system being relatively undeveloped. Other dangers would have included witchcraft, occasioned by jealousy, envy, revenge or some other intense negative feeling. Traditionally the Batswana believed in witchcraft, as articulated in the story entitled *Ngwana O Sa Leleng* (The Child who Does Not Cry.):

> *... rrangwana a re baloi, ditaba, magodu le baba botlhe ba ba re tsomang ba tla utlwa ngwana yo. Go ka nna botoka thata fa ngwana a sa lele, ka gonne fa re sa ntse re ilela ngwana ga re ka ke ra palama setlhare.*
>
> ... the father had a fear that witches, beasts of prey, thieves and all enemies pursuing them would hear the child. It would be much better, he said, if the child didn't cry because while they are still in that period of protecting the newborn, they shouldn't expose him to any kind of danger.

Tragically, in this story, things are arranged so that the baby does not cry, then he falls ill and dies in the cradle on his mother's back. Because he doesn't cry no one, not even his mother, is aware of his plight and he dies alone. The literal meaning of the proverb that the story illustrates, however, is less important than the analogous meaning it is understood to have by the Batswana. *Ngwana yo o sa leleng, o swela tharing* (The child who doesn't cry dies in the cradle) means that if you have a problem or are in some kind of trouble, speak up, talk to people, so that you can receive the help you need. Do not keep things inside, do not withdraw, do not bear your pain alone; ask for help, seek advice, accept comfort from others. It is a very practical life lesson, and fits with the communally reassuring social structures of traditional Africa and the value of inclusiveness. Too often we feel pain, shame or stigma associated with whatever we are facing. However, the problems we face are always human problems shared by others. By

opening up we find that others have faced similar situations and come through. By asking we are helped to constructive ways of handling our physical, emotional or spiritual pain. We find support in community, especially that community where one person's pain is the pain of all.

The story can teach not only about culture but about language. The word *thari* for example, translated 'cradle' refers to a sheep or calf skin traditionally tied around the mother to carry the baby on her back. Today, Batswana and African mothers who continue the practice typically use a cloth or a towel. *Thari* also has a number of related analogous uses for example, *thari e atile* means to have many children, while *go tlhoka thari* means to be barren, and *lethari* refers to a young girl of childbearing or marriageable age.

Among a Motswana child's first lessons is the importance of gratitude. Children have inculcated early in them the norm of giving thanks, which they do not with words but by clapping their cupped hands. The phrase *ke leboga ka a mabedi* meaning thank you, derives from this symbolic hand action. One of the modern stories in the collection, *Lorato* (Love Conquers All) illustrates the value of gratitude, as expressed in one's deeds. At first the two brothers in this story feel that the mother does not love them equally. As they mature they come to understand and feel the power of the impartial mother love. Leaving home, they find jobs and become independent adults, then:

> *E ne e re kgwedi e fedile ba bo ba ya gae ba isetsa mmaabona dijo le go ya go tlhola gore a o sa tshetse sentle. Basimane ba, ba ne ba le matlhagatlhaga mo e bileng ba bona tlhatloso kwa ba ne ba dira teng. Mme ka boitumelo ba ya gae ba fitlha ba direla Mmaabona moletlo o mo tona wa maleboga, ba laletsa batho ba le bantsi. Ga nna monate mme morago ga moletlo ba agela mmaabo ntlo e tona.*
>
> Every month end they would go home and take their mother food and make sure that she was doing well. These boys were so industrious that they soon got promotions at work. They went home full of joy and threw a big feast for their mother to say thank you. They invited a lot of people and it was a wonderful occasion. Shortly thereafter they built a very big house for their mother.

The story teaches one of the simplest yet most profound life lessons, namely, that it is in giving that we truly live and make the world a better place. In this story the value of mother love, the norm of giving thanks as well as the norm of showing respect for elders, comes to the fore. It is in acknowledging the role parents and other adults, teachers and mentors, have played in our achievements that the individual remains humble and grounded. As the Setswana proverb goes: *Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe* (I am a person through others), meaning that we coexist and are interdependent. 'My being and meaning in the world can only be fulfilled by the being of the other' (Matjila 1996). This group existence, a fundamental pillar of Batswana society, is a value shared by other black South African cultures.

A traditional story entitled *Letlapa le Basetsana* (The Stone and the Girls) brings out the value of treating others well and maintaining harmony in social interactions. The story goes:

> *Ga twe e rile e le basetsana ba bararo, ba ne ba ile kgonnyeng. Yo mongwe a kgopiwa ke letlapa fa ba le mo tseleng go ya kgonnyeng ke fa a roga letlapa. Fa ba sena go rwalela ba boela gae. Mme ba boa ka tsela e ba tlileng ka yona. Letlapa le ne la gogomoga, la nna legolo. Basetsana be tlhoka fa ba kgabaganyang teng.*
>
> Once upon a time there were three girls who went to fetch firewood. On their way one of them tripped on a stone and she swore at the stone. After collecting the firewood they went back home. They returned using the same road by which they had come. The stone swelled up, it became bigger and bigger until the girls had no way to pass.

The girls sing a song to plead with the stone which makes room for them to pass. However, the child who insulted the stone is still blocked. After the group of girls has returned home and told the father of the rude child about her predicament he goes to help her. Only after he threatens to leave her behind is she persuaded to admit what she has done and the stone lets them both pass. The story concludes that the girl went through a ritual cleansing. In Batswana culture, where a person is considered a spiritual being, it is believed that only a ritual, spiritual cleansing can heal a person after an

emotional experience. In this story what the girl had done was not in line with *botho* (humanity) and she needed to learn to live in harmony with others. Moreover, she needed to learn that 'honesty is the best policy'. Instilling an ethical value and appropriate behaviour in social intercourse, the ritual cleansing aimed to mould and chisel character. As one Westerner observed with regard to the remarkable social amenities of Africans:

> Those who have had the privilege of sharing life with African peoples can hardly fail to recognize the extraordinary level of social intelligence they display in their interactions (Fugelsang & Chandler, as cited in Pradervand 1989:208).

Repeatedly these Setswana stories foreground the benefits of obedience and consequences of disobedience to parents and elders. Traditionally, the behaviour of children was regulated through the larger community. A child was expected to treat any adult his parents' age with the same obedience. An elder was expected to reprimand any child doing wrong. In African cultures generally every woman your mother's age must be treated as your mother and every man your father's age as your father. Any adult your parent's age can correct and punish you. If you complain at home, you risk a second punishment. As the saying goes 'It takes a village to raise a child'. A Setswana proverb says: *Ngwana lekuka o a sokelwa,* meaning a child is a milk-sack that must be watched vigilantly. Seboni (1962:157) explicates the proverb: *Ngwana wa Setswana sa maloba o ne a tlotlile mogolo mongwe le mongwe ka ntlha ya ngwao ya Setswana* (a Motswana child of yesteryear was respectful to all elderly people because of the Setswana lore that expects every child to be submissive and obedient to seniors).

Disrespect of elders brings punishment, as when Mosidi's sister is devoured by an ogre. In this story, entitled *Mosidi le Mosadimogolo* (Mosidi and the Old Woman), Mosidi sets out to find work and her mother is anxious because her destination is a place known to be inhabited by ogres. When Mosidi reaches the place, she meets an old woman who asks her to lick her festering sores, promising to reciprocate by protecting Mosidi from the ogres. Mosidi responds with humility and compassion. The empathy and feeling she exhibits as well as obedience to an elder who could be her

grandmother's age, is rewarded, not just in terms of safety but she receives many beautiful gifts from the old woman. By contrast, when Mosidi's sister, desirous of getting the same beautiful things, arrives, she treats the old woman with contempt:

> *... mme mosadimogolo a mo raya a re a mo gore dintho gore a kgone go mo sireletsa mo go bodimo. A mo leba ka go nyatsa go gora dintho. A mo raya a re ke go gore dintho. A mo raya a re ke go gore dintho di bodile mmele jaana.*
>
> ... the old woman...asked her to lick her sores so that she would protect her from the ogres. The sister scowled at her and refused. 'Must I wash your festering sores?' she said.

Feeling empathy and compassion, embodying humility and respect, are values that are key to a meaningful life fulfilled in living for others. Respect and obedience go hand in hand. Disrespect of elders leads down the wrong paths in life, as illustrated in a story entitled *Maitseo* (Behaviour), where it is related that:

> *Modise o ne a na le ditsala tse di tshwanang le ena ka mokgwa, ba tlhole ba biditse batho ba mo motseng. Modise e ne e le seganana le fa e bile mmaagwe a mo eletsa jang o ne a beile mo go reng ga a kgathale ka jalo ga a kitla a kgaogana le ditsala tsa gagwe.*
>
> Modise had friends who were ill-mannered and badly behaved like himself; they would fight with the people in the village. Modise was disobedient, and even when his mother tried to give him advice, he made it clear that he didn't care and didn't intend parting company with his friends.

In this particular story, Modise, who refuses to listen to his mother, goes to jail after committing a robbery. The mother resolves not to assist in freeing her son from jail:

> *O ne a dira se ka go mo ruta gore ngwana yo o sa reetseng molao*

wa batsadi o reetsa wa manong.

She did so in order to teach him that a child who does not heed his parents will live by the law of the jungle.

The story about Modise, just cited above is a modern Setswana story, in which police and jail feature, not *lekgotla*, though the story interestingly betrays hybridity in that an onlooker informs the elders who in turn catch the boys in the act of robbery, thus assisting the police. In the traditional stories in the collection it is *lekgotla* (the traditional court), the chief and the elders that pass sentences and deliver punishment. Sometimes a thrashing is given, sometimes a death sentence enacted. Obedience was a value traditionally inculcated and enforced in initiation schools. Their primary purpose, to assist in the passage from the status of *bašwa* (minor) to full *botho* (humanhood) prepared young people physically for the world of work and sexually for marriage. It also instilled in these new members of society their social responsibilities and duties.

Initiates would form *mephato* (age-regimens) that functioned as a group for life. After graduation the achievement of an individual was the achievement of the group, the failure of an individual, the failure of the group. If a member of the age-set became a shining beacon, all members shared the limelight. If one member became a disgrace, all were scorned. Thus peer pressure also regulated behaviour. In times past an entire *mophato* (age-regimen) would be called to *lekgotla* (the traditional court) to be whipped, for example, for one member showing disrespect to a senior, having warded off a blow when his father or his uncle wanted to punish him. The thrashing was often done with lashes which the youth themselves plucked from the trees. *Le ojwa le sa le metsi* literally (bend the twig whilst it is still green) meant spare the rod and spoil the child. While the means of enforcement, corporeal punishment, may be outmoded, the values of obedience and accountability for one's actions, especially responsibility to one's fellows, are as important today in preparing young people for life.

Initiation schools taught love and respect for nature; young people also learned how to compose and perform praise poetry. Today we tend to think of initiation schools only in terms of the controversial practice of circumcision. This is one of the distortions of African cultures in which

missionaries were complicit—consider the assessment of initiation rites among the Batswana as indoctrinating children 'in all that is filthy ... deceitful ... unrighteous ... blasphemous and soul-destroying' (Ludorf, J. 1853, as cited in Comaroff & Comaroff 1991:315). Clearly, there was some level of reading literally rituals which were intended to be understood in their social and spiritual functioning and aesthetic symbolism. Initiation, a preparation for the rigours of the adult life, now fed with strong meat youths, hitherto nourished with milk.

In terms of the selected Setswana Stories discussed in this study, one cannot always translate certain Setswana words and phrases literally into English without offending the English sensibilities. The reader from a white English culture for example, cannot stomach the idea of Mosidi licking the old woman's festering sores—we may accommodate those sensibilities by using the word 'wash' instead of 'lick' in the English translation. In Setswana, language and imagery is understood to be metaphoric, to be trope, and hence does not offend but appeals to the Batswana sensibilities. To take another example, it is related in a different story that Bohutsana was extremely poor: *O ne a ja maswe a balekane ba gagwe*, meaning he ate his friends' dirt/ faeces. To accommodate the English sensibilities, we use the idiom: 'He always had to beg from his friends for the leftovers he ate'. The problem of cultural difference in translation can go some way toward a possible explanation for misunderstandings and misrepresentations in the past, though they must also be explained by white Western culture asserting its hegemony and its sanitised 'civilised' values. Even Plaatje, staunch advocate for the preservation of his Setswana language, culture, history, and proverbs acquiesced with English prudery rather than defend the metaphoric use of graphic language in certain imagery:

> Much of the oral native philosophy is too plain and therefore too frank for civilised ears. This is particularly true in regard to some of the proverbs relating to the relation between men and women (1916:ix).

Rationalising his omission of such proverbs he adds: 'Old people never mentioned such sayings in the presence of youth or uncircumcised adults, whom they always classed with the children'

Socially *mophato* separates youths from the life of childhood and brings them to the threshold of adulthood. It conditions them emotionally to mores of the group and moulds them into unified age-sets. It strengthens the authority of government by imparting social values, a proper respect for elders, faithfulness in observing taboos and the rules of conduct in all relationships. At the same time it introduces them to the supreme right of adults—that of communicating direct with *badimo* who plays such an integral part in their lives. In contrast, a man who has not been initiated is a perpetual boy—Mosimane and the woman—Lethisa. In the past no such one could marry, nor partake in the councils of men and women. Uninitiated men were spurned by women as incomplete beings and uninitiated women were despised by men and other women (Setiloane 1976:38).

In Batswana custom, death, mourning, and widowhood call for ritual cleansings. Among the Batswana if a married man or woman dies, there are certain rituals to be followed by the surviving spouse. Immediately after a husband passes on, the wife is not bound to stay in the bedroom. A mattress is placed on the floor and people coming to comfort the bereaved sit down next to the mattress. The widow or those who give her support, usually grandmothers who are close relatives, explain to visitors the cause of death. At this stage, the widow is said to be ceremonially unclean owing to the death of her husband and is forbidden to travel or mix socially (in Setswana she is called *sefifi*). She will wear black dress until the end of the mourning, the following spring, or for twelve months. The first time a widow ventures out of her house into public places, even if it is just to go and fetch water, she carries a *shokgwe* an onion-like, bulbous root, the scales of which she unobtrusively drops as she goes on her way, but especially at the cross-roads. The significance of this practice serves to exorcise ill-luck. She avoids cattle kraals as her condition is believed to affect livestock disastrously. During the mourning period a widow is not allowed to visit friends and if she visits family members must return before sunset (*a seke a phirimalelwa ke letsatsi kwa ntle*). The observances and taboos surrounding a widow are especially stringent, even oppressive, and many modern Batswana women are attempting to throw them off, especially since they tend to reinforce a socially inferior status for women.

Neither a widow nor a widower is permitted to have sexual intercourse with anyone until they have undergone ritual cleansing (g*o*

tlhatswa sesila). If a person transgresses this taboo, it is said they will suffer from an illness that is caused by sleeping with a person who has *makgome* (filth of the deceased). This norm relates to morality and the respect of waiting a period before taking a new partner. It enacts respect for marriage as well as the surviving family of the deceased. The widow's mourning clothes (*thapo*) are ceremonially removed by the maternal uncle of the deceased husband, normally at the beginning of spring, when the whole family undergoes a cleansing ritual. According to Setswana culture death brings *sesila*, uncleanness to those closely connected with the deceased, increasing with closeness of relationship. The spouse, parents, siblings and children wear *thapo* (a strip of plaited grass) around the neck and, sometimes to indicate the bitterness of loss, dipped in the gall of the animal slaughtered for the burial. Worn continuously, it involves many taboos in personal relationships (Setiloane 1976:68f).

During the mourning period the family shave their hair, change their clothing, cease all agricultural work and abstain from customary activities and especially if they are widows and widowers, do not walk freely among other people. This practice in Setswana is called go *ikilela*, meaning to put oneself in quarantine. There is also a Setswana proverb that says *Tswhenyana e bowa bo ntlha e a ikilela*, meaning people should always respect traditional taboos and customs in order to be safe. They should always be guided by their conscience and uphold the moral values of society. One disadvantage of adhering to all cultural norms of society is that it did not allow people to think independently and challenge some of the practices. Creative minds were scorned as outcasts. The advantage of the practice was the harmony and unity among people living together.

In another of the selected Setswana stories, entitled *Bogosi* (The Chieftainship), the lure of modernity which tends to value and elevate youth over age and maturity, is seen for the folly and short-sightedness that it involves. Life is a delicate balance between extremes, good and evil, light and dark, young and old. The youth have new ideas, new abilities and possibilities, a freshness, an energy—but the need is for balance—and specifically the realisation that hard-earned, hard-learned lessons through many years of trial and error can temper the impetuosity of youth, provide young people with a long-term view of things and productively channel their energies. In this story, after the misled youth yield to the temptation—in the

form of a traveller, representative of the outside, the modern world—to kill all of the elders and enthrone a young chief, they immediately find themselves with an insurmountable problem that only the wisdom, knowledge and experience of an old man can solve. This particular story explains the Setswana proverb *letlhaku je lešwa le agelwa mo go le legologolo*, an image drawn from the traditional way of life, of maintaining the fence. Literally, it refers to the practice of replacing old or broken stakes with fresh new thorn branches placed alongside the existing branches. Thus the foundation of the fence remains intact and the new thorn branches gain strength from it. Figuratively, the proverb is understood by Setswana speakers to mean that young people should imbibe the wisdom, knowledge and experience of the elders whilst they are still alive. Wisdom in Batswana culture, as in other traditional cultures, is epitomised by an elder. Wisdom is learned primarily in the schoolroom of life.

Conclusions

We have here made only a brief foray into the Setswana stories and proverbs, collected by Sol Plaatje Educational Trust, illustrating the kind of cultural relevance and restoration they embody and might teach. The space in between languages and cultures is pedagogically fertile, opening up new times of cultural meaning. In our analysis of the care and education of children, cultural norms and values begin with the value of the mother-love which sacrifices and takes risks for the sake of her offspring and which traditionally protects the newborn from the harsh outside world for a time and carries her child *mo tharing* (in a cradle) on her back. The education of children continues with instilling values such as saying thank-you, treating others well and living in harmony with them, and being honest. As language, stories, history and proverbs repeatedly demonstrated in our study that group existence is a fundamental pillar of Batswana society. Hence community, certainly in the past, regulated a child's behaviour and community provided a social securing structure to which people could turn for help with problems but simultaneously community demanded respect for one's fellows, accountability, compassion and embracing social, emotional and spiritual responsibilities in relation to adulthood. Listening to and living in close community with elders was primarily how and where wisdom was to be

learned. 'Values such as empathy, sharing, respect for the other, humanness, gentleness, hospitality and mutual acceptance in human interaction', which Mashige (2002:54) finds in folklore generally and we found here, are in fact, humanistic values shared across cultures, and hence, as we claim, can teach across cultures. Initiation rites and norms surrounding mourning may differ across cultures and change within a culture over time, but their aim is to develop strong, mature men and women, moral salt of the earth human beings. Together with values, cultural norms mould and chisel the granite that is character, *botho*. Achieving *botho* is the work of a lifetime.

In our interpretation of selected Setswana stories we moved between cultural norms and values (summarized in the previous paragraph), language, proverbs, and history, in acknowledgment of their inseparability and the African philosophy of interconnectedness. The theoretical construct of hybridity, drawn from the principles of negotiation and translation, has intuitively, imaginatively and emotionally informed our attempted 're-negotiation of Batswana cultural identity,' in the present, our 'restoration of rhetorical agency' and 'reformulation of obscured, dismissed and distorted histories' in this study. Language, for example, can be a restorative teaching about the concept of *ngwana wa mmu* which explicates the affinity, affection and attachment to the land and *badimo* (the ancestors) which the Batswana feel. Proverbs with their figurative language teach indirectly and sometimes by analogy, so that *letlhaku je lešwa le agelwa mo go le legologolo*, for example, encourages young people to live in close community with and imbibe the wisdom of the elders.

As regards history, undoing and redressing some of the distortions about initiation schools, we alluded to the values of obedience, respect, accountability and responsibility they inculcated. In the past, mistranslation based on misunderstanding by outsiders from the hegemonic Western culture, contributed to egregious distortions, that resulted in extreme negative affect toward African cultures. While we believe that cultural norms can be oppressive and discriminatory, and impeded critical, creative faculties, we maintain that the metaphoric use of graphic language, like the symbolic signification of stringent cultural rules, laws and taboos embodied the strong meat that initiates needed to digest in order to become fully-fledged adults and ultimately, revered ancestors.

afterword

Our findings compel us to return to Plaatje, 'our first Motswana man of letters' (Shole 2004:ii) to pay homage. Pioneer writer, translator, linguist, collector of folktales and proverbs, and arguably the grandfather of modern Setswana literature, he worked tirelessly to preserve and develop Setswana language, stories, history, proverbs, and culture. Speaking some eight languages, he was genuinely passionate about his mother-tongue and never lost sight of the debt of gratitude a child owes its mother: 'The best Sechuana speakers known to me owe their knowledge to the teachings of a grandmother, or a mother, or both, just as I myself ... am indebted to the teachings of my mother and two aunts' (Plaatje 1916:7).

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Exploring the Role of Conceptual Blending in Developing the Extension of Terminology in isiZulu Language

Thabisile M. Buthelezi

Introduction

In apartheid South Africa, language issues were usually linked to politics, prejudice and privilege. For many years, Afrikaans and English were accorded the status of official languages whilst indigenous languages were marginalised. For decades, English was the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) both in schools and in higher education institutions. However, in post-apartheid South Africa, with all the awareness about language rights, and the new Language in Education Policy (LiEP), national debates challenge the elevated status of English in education (Alexander 2002; Phaswana 1998) and call for mother-tongue teaching and language choice in schools (Webb 2002; Mnisi & Leibowitz 2000). In addition, new initiatives aim to develop and use the eleven official languages in schools. One such initiative is the introduction of a pioneering language programme that deals with language as a barrier to computer usage, which Microsoft South Africa (MSA), a global software leader, is implementing in schools. The programme, called the Language Interface Pack, which will initially be available in Afrikaans, isiZulu and Setswana, will be installed in computers for schools that are part of the programme (Mohlala 2007). However, putting together such a programme has met with challenges relating to terminology as Pansalb's manager of standardisation and terminology development, Alberts (in Mohlala 2007), points out:

> It is no easy task to develop terminology for various concepts being used. The terminology and related concepts are known in English but not in the various official South African languages. Terms have to be coined for the various concepts to act as term equivalents for the English terminology.

Essentially, the current policy framework provides for an environment where languages work together. For instance, the South African Constitution of 1998 recognises eleven official languages, which have equal status. The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of the Department of Education promotes multilingualism whereby eleven different languages are spoken in various communities—each of the specific African languages being used in the area where the majority are speakers of that particular language. For example, in KwaZulu-Natal the dominant indigenous language is isiZulu while in the Eastern Cape, it is isiXhosa. In academia, the Language Policy for Higher Education (Department of Education 2002) proposes that higher education institutions should promote multilingualism by using any of the indigenous languages as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), since this would promote access and success of students from indigenous groups.

Logically, in response to this changing environment and the current policy framework, higher education institutions have developed transformed language policies that include indigenous languages. For example, based on its multilingual and multicultural context, the North-West University has committed itself to a policy promoting multilingualism by using Setswana, English and Afrikaans (Coetzee-Van Roy 2006). The University of KwaZulu-Natal's language policy that was approved by its Senate in August 2006 promotes the use of isiZulu as LoLT and as a language of communication in addition to English, which is the primary language (Balfour 2007). This is because the majority of the population in KwaZulu-Natal province where the University of KwaZulu-Natal is situated, speak isiZulu as a first language. However, as indigenous languages such as isiZulu begin to be used in academic spheres, the major challenges to be met are that most languages have not developed enough concepts in existing scientific disciplines.

While isiZulu, like most indigenous languages, might have not so far developed enough concepts in various scientific disciplines, its flexibility in word formation and its class system allows for great possibility for conceptual development up to a level that the language is used in scientific disciplines. As yet, and as Nyembezi (2005: 52) shows, isiZulu has many concepts that it has adopted from other languages such as English and Afrikaans. Examples of these will be:

Figure 1: IsiZulu loan words from English and Afrikaans

isikole (school/skool)	Ifriji (fridge)
isitolo (store)	Ilivu (leave)
u-anti (aunt)	Ifomu (form)
iwindi (window)	Imfologo (fork)
ifasitela (venster)	Tafel (itafula)

In addition, I concur with Nkosi and Msomi (1992: 14) who claim that when isiZulu speakers came into contact with speakers of other indigenous languages, isiZulu language was developed by incorporating terms from languages such as isiSwati, isiNdebele, Sotho and isiXhosa, and isiZulu language has also developed many concepts through word-formation processes.

It is important to note that the underlying processes in conceptual development through word-formation lie in the general cognitive foundations as Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 310) say:

> The construction of meaning is like the evolution of species. It has coherent principles that operate all the time in an extremely rich mental and cultural world. Many, many, many new integrations are attempted and explored in an individual's backstage cognition and in interchange by members of a culture, and most of them never go anywhere. But, enough survive to provide all the language rituals and innovations we see around us. We need to explore what makes for success versus failure in conceptual integration.

From the above explanation, it is clear that conceptual integration is one of the underlying cognitive processes that play a role in word-formation

processes. Notably, human beings have a developed cognitive ability to invent new concepts and assemble new and dynamic patterns (Grady 2005). Although invisible to consciousness, blending choreographs vast networks of conceptual meaning yielding cognitive products that appear simple at a conscious level. In fact, much of the current scholarship on Conceptual Blending (Bache 2005; Coulson & Oakely 2005; Grady 2005; Lakoff 1980; 1987; Klopper 1999; Pereira & Cardoso 2002) within the framework developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002) confirm that blending is fundamental in all mental activities including linguistic performance. For example, Bache (2005) also argues that 'blending is arguably an important governing principle at all levels of human linguistic performance'.

This argument is in line with Fauconnier and Turner's (2002: 187) view that:

> Modern human performances, such as art, religion, science, and not least language, which all seem to have arisen as singularities in human evolution, are claimed to be the common consequence of the human mind's having reached a critical level of blending capacity.

In isiZulu, blending plays a major role in building terminology, particularly noun concepts. Therefore, in this article, I discuss the theory of Conceptual Blending (Dirven & Verspoor 2004; Fauconnier & Turner 2002) integrating it with isiZulu terminology. In my discussion, I highlight aspects of Conceptual Blending theory such as mental spaces, the two-domain model, composition, completion and elaboration. This is followed by a discussion of Conceptual Blending and formal blending and, here, I discuss the compounding and derivation processes. In my discussion, I briefly explore the derivation and compounding processes to determine the role of Conceptual Blending in developing new isiZulu terminology. This is followed by a discussion section where I argue that as indigenous languages such as isiZulu become used in academic spheres, they can be grounded in theory to further develop them into scientific languages. I further argue that Conceptual Blending is critical in developing particularly scientific concepts in indigenous languages such as isiZulu since in this process, the speaker or the understander is triggered to think at a conceptual level.

Conceptual Blending Theory

In recent years, when Fauconnier and Turner sought for a framework for explaining cognitive-linguistic phenomena such as analogy, metaphor, metonymy or counterfactual reasoning, they arrived at a theory of conceptual integration, named Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner 1998). The development of the Theory of Conceptual Blending began in 1993 and the theory has been applied in several fields including cognitive neuroscience, cognitive linguistics, psychology, poetics, mathematics, art, music, discourse analysis, and so on ((Fauconnier & Turner 1998).

Conceptual Blending is a general theory of cognition, which postulates that elements and vital relations from diverse scenarios are blended in a subconscious process, the Conceptual Blending process (Turner & Fauconnier 1995). Fauconnier (1994) also defines it as a set of operations for combining cognitive models in a network of mental spaces. In his interpretation of the Theory of Conceptual Blending, Klopper (1999) gives the following definition of Conceptual Blending:

> Conceptual blending accounts for a person's capacity to interrelate and blend concepts extracted from his vast conceptual network of knowledge. It is a momentary process of symbolisation that selectively inter-relates concepts from two separate cognitive domains, a target space and a source space to conceptualise a new perceived relationship known as a blended space. Blending should not be equated to the fusing of information. During blending the various types of information belonging to the target, source and blended spaces are interrelated, but remain conceptually distinct in each space.

From this definition, we learn that when two concepts combine to form a new concept (a blend), the blended concept emerges with a new meaning. While the new meaning of the blend interrelates with the various types of information belonging to the domains or input mental spaces of the two previous concepts that have blended, the blend remains conceptually distinct. In addition, the blended space has its own type of information, which interrelates with information drawn from the two input mental spaces. For example, Conceptual Blending has occurred in the following concepts:

umthetho (law) + isisekelo (base) = umthethosisekelo (constitution)

From this example, we can see that two concepts, umthetho (law) and isisekelo (a base) are conceptually distinct. When blended in Conceptual Blending, no fusing of information takes place between the two concepts. However, during blending, various types of information belonging to the two input sources, umthetho (law) and isisekelo (base) interrelate with the information from the resultant blend, umthethosisekelo (constitution). The outcome is that the resultant blend, umthethosisekelo (constitution) is a completely new concept despite the fact that it carries some information from the two input sources. Similarly, when the concepts, iphepha (paper) and indaba (story) combine in Conceptual Blending, the resultant blend, iphephandaba (newspaper) is a completely new concept. More examples of blends are:

Uthisha (teacher) + inhloko (head) = uthishanhloko (principal)
Ibala (spot) + izwe (land) = ibalazwe (map)
Inhloko (head) + ihhovisi (office) = inhlokohhovisi (head office)
Isifunda (district) + izwe (land) = isifundazwe (province)
Iphepha (paper) + ibhuku (book) =iphephabhuku (magazine)

Mental Spaces

In their definition of Conceptual Blending, Turner and Faucannier (1995) introduce the concept of mental space as follows:

> In blending, structure from two or more input mental spaces is projected to a separate 'blended' space, which inherits partial structure from inputs, and has emergent structure of its own.

Thus, for us to understand the theory of Conceptual Blending, we need to understand the concept of a mental space. Fauconnier and Turner (1998) describe mental spaces as:

> Partial structures that proliferate when we think and talk, allowing a fine-grained partitioning of our discourse and knowledge structures. As we talk and think, our reasoning focus flows from space to space, transporting and mapping concepts according to points of view, presuppositions, beliefs, changes of mood or tense, analogical counterfactuals, and so on, each giving birth to a different mental space.

In other words, a mental space is a small conceptual packet assembled for the purposes of thought and action, and is built up for local understanding and action (Turner & Fauconnier 1995). Turner and Fauconnier (1995) state that mental spaces normally recruit structure from more than one conceptual domains. They are constructed whenever we think and talk, and they are interconnected and can be modified as discourse unfolds. In this regard, Turner and Fauconnier (1995) use the term mental space in contrast to the term conceptual domain. For instance, to understand the concept khala (cry), we may build up the mental space that will include the sound, the emotion, the person (who cries), the tears, the mouth, the voice, and so on.

In this concept khala (cry), we can therefore say the mental space recruits partial structure from the two conceptual domains of sound and emotion. However, only a small amount of knowledge associated with the conceptual domains of sound and emotion is included. The additional structure in the khala (cry) mental space becomes available through default and pragmatic procedures. In another concept of imbazo (an axe), the mental space will recruit partial structure from the conceptual domain of equipments. The additional structure in the mental space will include the chopping, the chopper, the tree, the wood, the place, the physical movements, the shape (of an axe), and so on.

When the concepts khala (cry) and imbazo (an axe) combine in Conceptual Blending, the resultant blend is umkhalambazo (karate) that can be said to have a structure from the conceptual domain of sport, which is not the same as the conceptual domains of the two input sources, khala (cry) and imbazo (an axe). However, the blended mental space of umkhalambazo (karate) draws some partial structure such as sound and body movements from the two input mental spaces of khala (cry) and imbazo (an axe) respectively. In this way, a structure from two input mental spaces is

projected to a separate 'blended' space. This is in line with Turner and Fauconnier's (1995) view that a blended mental space is an integrated space that receives input projections from other mental spaces that are connected in the network and develops a new emergent structure (a blend) that is not available from inputs. The blended space inherits partial structure from the inputs and has emergent structure of its own (Turner and Fauconnier 1995).

Composition, Completion and Elaboration

In trying to provide an in-depth explanation of what happens in blending, Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 42) define three different operations that are involved in the blending process: composition, completion and elaboration. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 42), composition is the (partial) selection of elements, structures or frames from input spaces and their projection to the blended space to create new relations, concepts and scenarios. For instance, in the previous example, partial structures from the two input mental spaces of khala (cry) and imbazo (an axe) were projected to the blended space to create a new concept, umkhalambazo (karate). According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 42), completion brings additional material from the speaker's background knowledge into the blend to enrich the relations and scenarios of the blend and; elaboration is the actual running of the blend—the unfolding of the scenarios or development of the relations involved. The speaker's or decoder's background knowledge of the movements and sounds made during karate sport will enrich and develop him or her to understand the conceptual meaning of umkhalambazo (karate). These three mental sub-processes collaborate to create the emergent meaning of the blend.

The Two-domain Model

Fauconnier and Turner (1994), argue that Conceptual Blending can happen at a two-domain model. However, Fauconnier and Turner (1995) further argue that 'the two-domain model is actually part of a larger and more general model' of conceptual intergration, which they call the many-space model. According to Facaunnier and Turner (1995), a conceptual domain is 'a vast organisation of knowledge…which has a basic structure of entities

and relations at a high level of generality'. For example, we have our knowledge vastly organised into conceptual domains such as imfundo (education), inkolo (religion), umndeni (family), ikhaya (home), and so on. As Fauconnier and Turner (1994) argue, each of these domains of meaning has a basic structure of entities and relations at a high level of generality. For instance, the domain of imfundo comprises uthisha (teacher), incwadi (book), isikole (school), umfundi (learner), ikilasi (classroom), and so on. At the same time, these various domains in themselves comprise various other domains. For example, while ikilasi is within the domain of imfundo, in itself it also comprises other domains such as ushoki (chalk), ideski (desk), ibhodi (chalkboard), ukuhlala (sitting) and so on.

When new conceptual blends are created in a two-domain model, a structure from one conceptual domain (a source) combines with another structure from another input source (a target) to form a blend. The resultant blends constitute the products of creative thinking although Conceptual Blending is not a theory of creativity (Turner & Fauconnier 1995). To illustrate, in this process, elements from two concepts are blended into a new more complex concept. For example:

Akha (build) + umuzi (home) = isakhamuzi (citizen)
Umbulali (killer) + izwe (land) = umbulalazwe (epidemic)
Funda (learn) + ize (nothing) = umfundaze (bursary)
Uhlu (list) + khangisa (advertise) = uhlukhangisa (catalogue)
Umqumbe (swelling bud) + imbewu (seed)= umqumbembewu (capsule)

In order to understand the blended concept, one has to be familiar with the concepts that are combined to form the new blend. Our cultural knowledge, that is our knowledge of frames and domains, determine the way in which we interpret the new concepts. According to Dirven and Verspoor (2004: 55) the notion of frame or domain refers to all the elements that constitute a given concept. For example, Dirven and Verspoor (2004: 55) give an example that the kitchen frame comprises 'utilities for cooking, washing up, eating, sitting down, and so on'. The chair is part of the kitchen frame. Moreover, in itself, the chair frame comprises ways of sitting that are defined by various domains such as eating, working, and so on. Therefore,

the compound, kitchen chair is a blend of the chair frame and the working domain (since the chair is used in the kitchen).

Similarly, the word umphathisikole (principal or school manager) results from a combination of the words umphathi (manager) and isikole (school). The word isikole (school) provides a school frame, which comprises teachers, learners, learning and teaching material, learning and teaching activities, and so on. Then, umphathi, is part of the school frame. But, also in itself the word umphathi comprises other various domains such as holding together, leading, carrying, and caring, and so on. Therefore, umphathisikole (principal or school manager) is a blend of the school frame and mainly the leading domain.

To further illustrate how Conceptual Blending occurs, I use the word inswelaboya, which refers to a criminal. This word results from the words swela (be deprived of) and uboya (hair growing from the animal skin), which exist in two domains of meaning. In other words, these concepts exist in two different mental spaces. The word swela, which is a verb, has a noun form ukuswela. This word ukuswela provides a deprivation or a poverty frame, which comprises need, sadness, misery, pity, and so on. On the other hand, the word uboya provides a frame, which comprises animals, a scare, inhumanity, thoughtlessness, and so on. Therefore, by selecting information from these two domains, through the operation of composition, the blend inswelaboya emerges with a new meaning—which refers to a criminal. In fact, the conceptual meaning of the word inswelaboya is: an animal-like, pitiful 'thing', which has poverty of animal hair. To elaborate, this means that a criminal can be classified as neither human nor animal. While it has all the physical features of a human being, the behaviour indicates that it lacks the value of humanity that makes a human being to be human. But, while its behaviour is animal-like, it cannot be classified as an animal because it does not have uboya, animal hair. The use of the word ukuswela emphasises the poverty of hair—the 'animal-hair poverty state'.

This conceptual meaning fits in with Klopper's (1999) definition of conceptual blending. As I mentioned earlier, Klopper (1999) highlights that in conceptual blending no fusing of information occurs. While the blend interrelates with the two previous concepts that have combined, the blend remains conceptually distinct. Specifically, while the word inswelaboya bears some aspects of the two concepts that have combined, swela and

uboya, it is conceptually distinct. In addition, in this example, to understand fully the conceptual meaning of inswelaboya, a person should have background knowledge about how the Zulus view and relate to animals, their beliefs about animals versus the meaning they have about humanity, which is captured in the value of ubuntu. This is in line with Fauconnier and Turner's (2002: 42) description of completion that it occurs when additional information or material is brought from the speaker's background knowledge.

Moreover, O'Grady (1997) also introduces the concept of conversational implicature, which refers to another type of information that enters into the interpretation of utterances. The information has to do with the rules for conversation and our understanding of how the language is used in particular situations to convey message. As speakers of the language, we are able to draw inferences about the meaning of the concept inswelaboya, which is not the literal meaning of the word. Such information that is conveyed in this way is what O'Grady (1997) refers to as conversational implicature. He further says that 'the ease with which we recognise and interpret implications stems from our knowledge of how people in our linguistic community use language to communicate with each other'.

However, it is important to note that Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 351) recognise that not all cognitive operations result in blending, we may combine different objects that we see, imagine or think of without blending them. Bache (2005) concurs with this view and says that:

> Many operations involving categorisation and temporal or spatial sequencing serve to combine and organise experiences without conceptually integrating them.

Conceptual Blending and Formal Blending

As I have mentioned in the introduction of this article, the creation of new concepts is also a cognitive process. However, not all cognitive processes of word-formation result in blending. In language, the new concepts formed result from a creative process and they serve the purpose of enhancing not only communication, but also the development of the language. The most important processes of word-formation are compounding and derivation. In

the process of derivation, the free morphemes combine with bound morphemes to build derivations; whereas in compounding, two free morphemes combine to form a compound. Not all compounds can be claimed to be conceptual blends.

Derived from the Greek word morphe, which means 'form', the word morpheme means the smallest meaningful unit in the language (O'Grady & Guzman 1997). These morphemes allow us to build composite words and composite grammatical units (Dirven & Verspoor 2004: 50). Dirven and Verspoor (2004: 50) as well as Nyembezi (2005: 38) distinguish between free morphemes (simple words) and bound morphemes (affixes). In derivation, particularly in English, a free morpheme combines with a bound morpheme to form a derivation. For example, a free morpheme use can combine with a bound morpheme –less to form a derivation useless, see figure 2.

Figure 2: Derivations in English

(free m)	**+**	(bound m)	=	(derivation)
use	+	-less (affix)	=	useless
shop	+	-s (affix)	=	shops
child	+	-ish (affix)	=	childish

In compounding two free morphemes combine to form a compound. For example, the words hair and brush are two free morphemes. The two words can combine to form a compound hair brush, see figure 3.

Figure 3: Compounds in English

(free m)	+	(free m)	=	(compound)
hair	+	brush	=	hair brush
tooth	+	brush	=	tooth brush
water	+	pipe	=	water pipe

In isiZulu, most words are derivations formed by a combination of bound morphemes, which are called izakhi. Mainly, these are isiqalo (prefix), umsuka (word-stem) and isijobelelo (suffix). For example, the word umfundisi (teacher) is a derivation formed by um- (prefix), -fund- (word-stem) and –isi (suffix), see figure 4.

Figure 4: Derivations in isiZulu

(bound m) prefix	+	(bound m) stem		(bound m) suffix	=	(word)
um-	+	-fund-	+	-isi	=	umfundisi (teacher)
isi-	+	-hlal-	+	-o	=	isihlalo (chair)
isi-	+	-khulum-	+	-i	=	isikhulumi (speaker)

In this word formation process, the word-stem does not change. In this way, many words can be formed from the same word-stem by using different affixes (prefixes and suffixes). For example, many words can be derived from the word-stem –fund- by using different prefixes and suffixes. For the list of examples of such words see figure 5.

Figure 5: Derivations from the words-stem –fund–

(bound m) prefix	+	(bound m) word-stem	+	(bound m) suffix	=	(derivation)
aba-	+	-fund-	+	-isi	=	abafundisi (teachers)
abe-	+	-fund-	+	-isi	=	abefundisi (pastors)
ubu-	+	-fund-	+	-isi	=	ubufundisi (calling to the ministry)
um-	+	-fund-	+	-isikazi	=	umfundisikazi (female teacher/pastor)
isi-	+	-fund-	+	-iswa	=	isifundiswa (an educated person)

u-	+	-fund-	+	-o	=	ufundo (back of Zulu hut, opposite the door)
im-	+	-fund-	+	-o	=	imfundo (education)
im-	+	-fund-	+	-a	=	imfunda (meadow land)
im-	+	-fund-	+	-iso	=	imfundiso (doctrine)
isi-	+	-fund-	+	-o	=	isifundo (lesson)
isi-	+	-fund-	+	-a	=	isifunda (district)
i-	+	-fund-	+	-ululu/ululo	=	ifundululu /ifundululo (malice)
		fund-	+	-a	=	funda (read)
		fund-	+	-ani	=	fundani (plural-you all read)
		fund-	+	-isa	=	fundisa (teach)
		fund-	+	-ela	=	fundela (read for or practise songs to sing in a wedding)
		fund-	+	-ekela	=	fundekela (pester/ bother)
		fund-	+	-isisa	=	fundisisa (carefully read)

		fund-	+	-wa	=	fundwa (be read)
		fund-	+	-iwe	=	fundiwe (been read)
		fund-	+	-isiwe	=	fundisiwe (been educated)
		fund-	+	-iswa	=	fundiswa (being taught)

IsiZulu has a limited number of free morphemes (Nyembezi 2005: 38). Mostly, the free morphemes are ideophones. Examples of ideophones are: Swayi! (*to keep quiet*); Ntinini! (*to run fast*); Lungu! (*to appear*), and many others. For this reason, most isiZulu words are formed by a combination of bound morphemes. This explanation means that most words result from the derivation process where bound morphemes combine in a particular sequence to form a word. Therefore, in compounding, the words that were formed through this derivation process further combine to form compounds. For example, some of the derivations listed in figure 4 such as funda, isifunda, imfundo, isifundiswa and imfundiso, can combine with other words to form compounds, see figure 6.

Figure 6: Compounding from derivations

(derivation)	+	**(word)**	=	**(compound)**
funda (read)	+	ize (nothing)	=	umfundaze (bursary)
funda (read)	+	amakhwelo (whistle using mouth)	=	imfundamakhwela (apprentice/ beginner learner / amateur)
imfundo (education)	+	-khulu (big)	=	imfundonkulu (tertiary education)

imfundiso (doctrine)	+	ize (nothing)	=	imfundisoze (false ideology)
isifunda (district)	+	izwe (land)	=	isifundazwe (province)
isifunda (district)	+	inkantolo (court)	=	isifundankantolo (magisterial district)
isifundiswa (learned person)	+	mbumbulu (not real)	=	isifundiswambumbulu (a learned person who does not behave as such / unlearned person who pretends to be learned)

From the above compounds, which are blends, we find formally integrated linguistic structures such as umfundaze (bursary), imfundisoze (false ideology), imfundamakhwela (apprentice), and so on. In these linguistic structures, we can recognise the two original concepts that combined to form a compound. For example, in the compound isifundazwe (province), we can recognise the linguistic structures, isifunda (district) and izwe (land) that formed the compound. However, as Turner and Fauconnier (1995) argue, formal integration 'gives only a small combination of elements from the two input spaces that are to be integrated'. In other words, formal integration provides minimal indication of a starting point from which the speaker or the person formulating a concept can depart in constructing integration.

However, although the conceptual integration is worked out from the formal blend, this does not mean that the formal blend parallels the conceptual blend very closely (Turner & Fauconnier 1995). As seen in most examples that I gave in this paper, most cases of formal blending have no corresponding blend at a conceptual level. However, in very rare cases, formal blending and conceptual blending are in closer parallel. Some examples in this category are:

Andisa (increase) + umsindo (sound) + isandisamsindo (amplifier)
Akha (build) + umzimba (body) =isakhamzimba (vitamin)
Izinga (rate) + ukukhula (growth) = izingakukhula (growth rate)

Discussion

As alluded to earlier on in this article, Conceptual Blending is not the only process in which new concepts are developed. Other processes such as derivation, back derivation, clipping, conversion, and so on, are also used to form new concepts. However, Conceptual Blending is critical in developing isiZulu terminology, particularly scientific concepts, as in this process, the 'understander' or speaker is triggered to think at a conceptual level. From the examples that were presented in this article, it is clear that some of the blended concepts such as umfundaze (bursary), umthethosisekelo (constitution) umtholampilo (clinic), umabonakude (television), umakhalekhukhwini (cell phone) and isifundazwe (province), have developed as a result of the advancement in science and technology as well as the changing socio-political and educational environment.

However, as discussed in this paper, in Conceptual Blending the speaker also draws from his or her own background knowledge. For this reason, the success of conceptual blending depends largely on the language competences of the person forming the new concept. Therefore, the linguists who are first language speakers of isiZulu and / or second language speakers who have developed a level of competence in the language should commit themselves to developing new concepts in various fields or discipline areas.

A way of facilitating the process of developing new concepts in various areas would be that isiZulu language be used as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in the education sector (schools and higher education institutions). This would not only facilitate the development of new concepts in various disciplines, but would also make the new concepts available to a wider community. In South Africa, Afrikaans (which evolved out of Dutch and slave experience in Africa in the 18th century) is an example of a language that further developed through its use in government and in the education sector. Afrikaans was not recognised as an official language until 1925 when it replaced Dutch (Mesthrie, 2002). In the 1950s the Department of Bantu Education ruled that English and Afrikaans be

introduced in the first year of schooling for all children who were non-native speakers of the two languages. This regulation was passed partly because the government feared that should only English be used as an official language, Afrikaans would die as a language. This wide use of Afrikaans in the government and education sectors had sustained its existence and led to its development as a language.

Conclusion

This paper explored Conceptual Blending in developing isiZulu terminology. The Conceptual Blending theory has been discussed and integrated with existing isiZulu terminology. It therefore attempts to pave the way for the developing of indigenous languages into scientific languages.

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Guarding the Novel: *The Stone Country* and Literary Representation[1]

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> What Marx said of legal institutions applies in wide measure to literary forms. They cannot stand higher than the society which brought them forth. Indeed, since they deal with the deepest human laws, problems and contradictions of an epoch they *should* not stand higher—in the sense, say, of anticipating coming perspectives of development by romantic-Utopian projections of the future into the present. For the tendencies leading to the future are in fact more firmly and definitely contained in what really is than in the most beautiful Utopian dreams or projections (Lukács 1983).

Lukács establishes here a strong foundation for the argument that novels are social formations that echo the dominant standards of a culture, at the same time that they seek to call attention to the paradoxes of those institutions. Cultures and countries that endure great tribulation seem destined to turn to literary realism as a default setting for narrative prose; the crucible that is the prison in such cultures provides a unique glimpse into the 'real' that Lukács suggests[1]. Many critics have recognized that the prison of Alex La Guma's *The Stone Country* stands in for South Africa during Apartheid. The quote from Lukács speaks to the creation of the realist novel and the relationship between history and literature, so it would have been interesting to have seen his analysis of the prison novels of the apartheid-period in South African

[1] Due to space constraints this article has end- and not footnotes (Editor).

history. One of his core insights allows us to attribute literary 'value' to a text: 'The "value" of a literary narrative is in this sense to be grasped in terms of its capacity to open a totalizing and mapping access to society as a whole' (quoted in Frederic Jameson's Preface to *The Historical Novel* 7). This totalizing tendency is at the heart of the formal and ideological elements of an important La Guma's text: the novel recapitulates the precise hegemonic elements of the society of the time in the ways in which it defers agency, uses overtly negative characters to control, yet presents a culture that relies primarily on 'knowledgeable insiders' *to maintain* control[2]. There is a consistent attempt to remove the subject from the signification chain, which the subject resists. Further, and perhaps less obviously, this particular text ironizes the binary oppositions[3] it presents in two ways: insisting that an urge to narratize is a crucial strategy for the survival of the imprisoned subject, and forcing a focus on the most-easily ignored figure in prison narratives—the guard—as a representative of that least-easily ignored aspect of prison life—a conception of linear time that needs to 'pass'[4]. Last, the tendency of the narrative to metaphorize, and thereby control prisoners by reducing them to 'paper' creates a central paradox: written discourse (paper) will be privileged over speech (orature), yet the narrative grammar of the text creates the seeds of its own dissolution as writing itself escapes from the prison-space. The focus of the present analysis will suggest that the interstices between prisoner and guard, inside and outside, orality and written discourse, and ultimately between narrative grammar and surface phenomenon—between *langue* and *parole*—are the locations that this text investigates. This particular novel is an example of a narrative strategy that deconstructs itself by seeming to invert opposed terms, but is actually engaged in the more subversive tactic of showing that only the prisoners have the possibility of freedom—of escape. In this novel, writing is double-edged, and resists signification: writing must be excluded from the society of this South African prison, yet writing is mechanism of signification by which prisoners attain an ironic subjectivity and, thus, agency.

Several assumptions must be foregrounded. First, that there is a tendency towards binarization in the South African prison novel. J.U. Jacobs and others (see, for example, Roberts, Schalkwyk, Sinha, et al.) have done substantial work on the context and tendencies of memoirs of detention and prison novels that are sometimes predicated upon the real experiences of the

authors of those novels. Although not all critics establish binary modes as the operant reality of the prison novel, it is the dominant tendency[5]. Second, that this tendency towards the reduction of complexity *via* essentializing binaries is at the heart of a narrative strategy that attempts to impose an intersubjective vision of time on the master-clock held by the guard. Third, that the guard-figure serves a role more complex than that of mere stereotype; in other words, there needs be nuance to a binarized construction that insists upon 'good guard/bad prisoner' or the more usual 'bad guard/good prisoner' Finally, in what ways, if any, does a given prison novel interrogate base assumptions—such as language use, strategies of existence, etc.—so as to provide a bridge to a sociohistorical 'reality'outside of the prison? La Guma's novel is a striking example of a narrative that presents a simple surface, yet fractures the structural certainty of binary codes even while employing those same codes to create the novel itself; the text places conceptions of orature and writing at odds and establishes a struggle whereby the prisoners fight against their transformation into pieces of writing, easily stored by the keepers of the master-clock, the guards—themselves trapped in place, but without the keys to a 'true'existence in the novel. The guards, in a sense, *must* be merely stereotypes if they are to have (ironically) a subtler role in the structure of the novel. The novel's reduction of the guards to stereotypes is subversive because it does to them what they seek to do to all prisoners—elide difference and reduce substance. Time itself, and the temporal indeterminacies of the fictive and the real provide the bridge required to immerse the text in its contextual reality. Thus, those imprisoned must become 'writing' if they are to be controlled, in much the same way that oral narratives become fixed by their transformation into written discourse. A different way of envisioning this dynamic is that the deep structures of the narrative[6] create a labyrinth with paradox at the center. There is a physical center to the prison in *The Stone Country*, The Hole, but more important is the irony of isolation that forces the reflective prisoner, having been created as a text, into a place where all contradictions meet: '[the prison] had been built in the last century … and because it could not expand outward, it had closed in upon itself in a warren of cells, cages, corridors, and yards' (*The Stone Country* 17)[7]. The physical structure of the labyrinth/ prison, established by switches in time and perspective that constitute the narrative and the narration, recapitulates the internal

movement of initiates into the system (both within and without the prison-space) as they internalize codes. The figure of 'the guard', the most prosaic figure in the text, is the structural key to the text's dynamics.

I

Alex LaGuma was uniquely positioned to present such a problematic text. Born in 1925 in the Cape Town slum, now razed, called District Six (Pointer 2-8), he was a member the Cape coloured community. His personal identity, and the creolized nature of this community, effectively underlines the narrative refusal of what some have seen as 'manichean' tendencies in the novel[8]. Further, at least one critic sees *The Stone Country* as a 'transitional novel' that marks a 'changed focus from the depoliticized ... members of the coloured community ... to the more active and politically conscious' characters seen in his later novels, such as *In the Fog of the Season's End* or *Time of the Butcherbird* (Breidlid 2002: 219). His father was 'one of the founders of the Communist Party of South Africa' (Sinha 1990:16), and young Alex was politicized further by his training and employment as a journalist, joining the progressive newspaper 'New Age' as a young man. In '1956, he was one of the 156 people arrested for high treason; even during the Sharpeville massacre he was imprisoned' (Sinha 1990:16). In fact, La Guma was one of the first 'casualties' of the Sabotage Act, 'which permitted the minister of justice to place anyone under house arrest' (JanMohamed 1983: 226). LaGuma was confined 'to his own house for twenty-four hours a day for five years' (JanMohamed 1983: 226). It was the Sabotage Act, also, that prohibited the oral or written dissemination of La Guma's works, and explains why a novelist essentially concerned with the use of literature for social purposes was forced to publish outside of his own country, outside of the social matrix that needed to be told of texts speaking truth to power. His prison novel shows his awareness of the power of narrative to effect change, as he has the Superintendent of the prison in this novel express concern that few of the 'internal demerits' of the prison make it to the light of public scrutiny (*The Stone Country* 109). La Guma began the writing of *The Stone Country* when he was placed under house arrest in December, 1962 (Sinha 1990: 16). All of his fiction, from the short story, 'Tattoo Marks and Nails' that was to be transformed into a central scene in *The Stone Country*, to his

last novel, *Time of the Butcherbird* (1981) are concerned with remaining true to the necessity of social realism in the novel form[9]. He has been quoted as saying that his novels provide 'individual "pictures" of South African "totality"' (Abrahams in Mkhize 1998: 148). It is commonly understood that 'La Guma's use of subjects drawn from his journalism is but one indication that it might well have been his intention to "record history"' (Mkhize 1998: 148). The 'necessity of social realism' referred to above comes from the question of the 'twofold meaning implied when we use the term 'commitment': the writer's commitment to his art and to the society he is living in' (Moyana in Riemenschneider 1980: 144). La Guma is a writer who presents (journalistic surfaces) so that deeper trends and analyses can be explored:

> It seems to me that the depiction of characters whose everyday confrontation with the South African reality is reduced to that of prisoners and warders offers the writer the opportunity to probe more subtly into the interrelationship of the personal and the social because it forces him to stress the interrelationship of black South Africans on one hand and the confrontation of man with himself on the other hand (Riemenschneider 1980: 145).

La Guma was to deal with imprisonment in several of his works, most notably in *In the Fog of the Season's End* where Elias Tekwane is tortured, ultimately beaten to death because he will not talk to his racist interrogators. Issues of speech, and of refusal to speak, are at play throughout many texts involving power relationships, and La Guma's are no exception. In his own life, La Guma's position in a society that did not recognize him as a participant led him to exile. And it is in this internationalist position, writing to an audience receptive to information on South Africa, that La Guma is best known. An ironic analogy suggests itself: texts that are unable to circulate in the system that they represent—like prison novels being mainly read by those not only outside of prison, but also outside of the cultures that spawned them (Davies 1990: 7)—are speaking to audiences often unskilled in the settings they represent. Although prison writing[10] 'from abroad is a confirmation of the tolerance of this [i.e., the reader's] society' (Davies 1990:7), in 'Russia, for example, or France, or

South Africa, writing from prison is of great importance' (Davies 1990:7). The fact that the 'writings' and even the oral statements of titles of poems were banned in South Africa for much of the Apartheid period is well known, so the censorship of books by those who were imprisoned for political purposes is hardly surprising:

> And, of course, with the re-uniting of apartheid South Africa with the 'other' South Africa in exile the two streams of South African writing have also been rejoined, one consisting of texts produced within the country during the past thirty years [he is writing in 1991], the other of texts produced within the country but either banished beyond the borders or else forced underground (Jacobs 'The Discourses of Detention' 1991: 194).

La Guma represents a novelistic part of the 'stream' that has returned to South Africa, one that stands in a precarious relationship to the many tales that tell 'truth to power' in autobiographical accounts of imprisonment[11]. He is also one of a number of novelists depicting apartheid-era imprisonment in South Africa, including Nadine Gordimer and Breyten Breytenbach, but La Guma differs from Gordimer[12] by virtue of the fact of his having been imprisoned, and from Breytenbach (and many other black, coloured and Indian novelists and memoirists, including Molefe Pheto, Livie Mqotsi, D.M. Zwelonke, Indres Naidoo, and Caesarina Kona Makhoere. Schalkwyk 1994: 43, note 1, gives a list of 'best-known examples') by virtue of his disengagement from autobiography[13]. Finally, La Guma's own enforced enclosure during his house arrest, and during his period in prison—in solitary confinement, 'after the passage of the infamous thirty-day no trial act' (JanMohamed 1983: 226)—led him to a nuanced understanding of his position within a tradition of written discourse that refused to allow him to be recognized. His experience of isolation from the various communities within which an individual exists gives his texts concerning isolation and imprisonment a piquancy difficult to overstate:

> … when he was forced to abandon journalism in 1962 because a shortage of funds forced the newspaper to drastically reduce its staff, La Guma became completely isolated from his community; his

house arrest precluded any re-employment and participation in the social and political life of his country, and because he was a banned person, all his novels were published outside South Africa (JanMohamed 1983: 226)[14].

II

The issue of a 'deferral of agency' is an important starting point for an analysis of *The Stone Countr*y. By this deferral I mean that there is, initially, no apparent source for the dictates that oppress individuals either in the prison or in the South African society as a whole: there is a sense of things merely being the way they are[15]. The institutional forces that control individuals are deterministic in their relentlessness. Hence, in the novel, the prison intrudes itself, without the overt presence of any individuals: 'There came the sounds of heavy doors being unlocked, and then the distant mutterings of many voices, like the far-away bleating of sheep …' (15). The use of the passive voice here, and in subsequent sections, will give way to the figure of the guard as the focus of seeming power in the prison—inevitably using the active voice[16]. The guards in the narrative are one-dimensional, and would not merit attention save that they are circumscribed by the pettiness of their duties, while they serve as the primary movers of the plot of the novel. The guards are not all white, either, as colored (mixed race) jailers, though not as viciously presented as some of the Afrikaans guards, are in evidence throughout—perhaps an acknowledgement of the position of the subaltern in a society in which race and class are intermingled[17].

La Guma is ironic in his display of the actual level of control exercised by the warders, and that is the mapping of the apartheid culture we require. He also provides us with an important bridge to the American nexus of prison narratives because the knowing insider is the one who allows the system to operate. At the level of the prison, this means that prisoners who have been initiated into knowledge act as warders over the prison culture itself. As another writer-from-the-inside has put it, 'When you are interested in prison accounts as a genre you will soon see that prisons are pretty much the same the world over. It is rather the peculiar relationship of power-repression which seems immutable …' (Breytenbach 1984: 339). While the

guards may run the temporal and bureaucratic, knowing prisoners exercise control over almost everything else. LaGuma highlights the connections between the (apartheid) world and prison, guards and prisoners, surfaces and depths by making the prisoners into 'paper': a surreptitious code operates throughout the novel that reduces prisoners to examples of writing, which jailers then get to (de)file. Thus, the protagonist's initiation into knowledge presupposes a relationship of power-knowledge.

A basic plot summary is in order. The text consists of 35 chapters broken into two parts, of 14 and 21 chapters respectively. The novel, at least in this edition, breaks almost exactly in half at page 88, where Part One ends. The overall movement of the novel divides the universe into four parts, and it is deceptively non-linear in the ways in which it displays them. The 'stone country' is, inevitably, a metaphor for the carceral condition of the bulk of those who live in South Africa proper. The outside world is the first and most contentious of the four realms the text inhabits, as we visit it in flashback, referential explanation, and eventual escape. The connection of the jail/prison, which is the physical setting for the entire novel, and South Africa itself is unsubtle: 'This jail is a small something of what they want to make the country. Everybody separate, boy: White, African, Coloured. Regulations for everybody, and a white boss with a gun and a stick' (20). The prisoners are given food and treatment appropriate to their ranking in the apartheid system while imprisoned. Further, as we shall see, the prison identification card functions in much the same way as does the hated 'pass' on the outside: controlling access, restricting even imaginative liberty, providing a measure of arbitrary control and a 'law' apt for easy justification for punishment, and a reduction of individuality.

> George Adams moved over to join the others who had already gone through the finger-printing and the issue of ID cards. He looked at his own card. It said: ----*Gaol*. *Awaiting Trial*. Then a number and his name and the date, and *Charge*: *Illegal Organisation*. He thrust the card into the top pocket of his coat, and then found Jefferson waiting with the rest of the prisoners.
>
> Jefferson said, 'You got your card? Listen, look after it. Anywhere you go in this place you got to have that card with you.

> You lose it and these Dutchmen give you the works. He added, grinning: 'It's like a pass, hey' (24).

The Remand section, where prisoners await trial or the further disposition of the courts is the second area, and it is a vortex of career criminals, naïve political prisoners (like George), hard cases, murderers, and those who have stumbled into the criminal justice system. In short, it serves as the general population sector would in an American prison novel. The text's various treatments of the events that occur in this section of the novel provide much of the material for our analysis of the power relationships of the actual prison, and the structural realities of the text itself. Here we meet Yusef the Turk, a suave and deadly denizen of the underworld who takes the naïve George's side against the bestial Butcherboy Williams in the central plot event of Part One. Here also we are introduced to Solly, the wizened jester who functions like the Medieval Fool. We meet him as an adjunct to Butcherboy Williams, '[g]ang leader, and incidentally cell boss by virtue of his brutality and the backing of bullied and equally vicious toadies …. Only the man called Solly showed no sign of nervousness …. he danced like a marionette, a grotesque jig in front of the savage hulk' (30). Most important, perhaps, is that we meet the one-dimensional—yet structurally crucial—figure of Fatso the Guard: 'This guard was heavy and paunchy and seemed to be constructed from a series of soft, smoothly joined sacs, and he had a plump, smooth, healthy pink face, like a Santa Claus with a blonde mustache instead of a snow-white beard: in the outwardly jolly face the eyes were pale and washed-out and silvery, much like imitation pearls, and cold as quicksilver' (61). We are meant to connect the as-yet-unnamed Fatso to Butcherboy, signaling the dependence of guard upon convict and the complicities of all power relationships, as George falls afoul of Fatso by requesting a blanket:

> Behind [George], the guard looked over at Butcherboy, the brute man, who lounged against the rough, stone-constructed wall of one side of the yard, and smiled a wintry smile, saying, 'he's *mos* one of those *slim* men. He's looking for trouble.
>
> And Butcherboy shifted his great shoulders against the wall and grinned, saying, 'old boss, he *is* looking for trouble. A clever' (62f).

The third section of the novel's compass is the Isolation Block, for disciplinary cases as well as those already sentenced to a term but awaiting further charges. The novel begins here, with George and the Casbah Kid—a dehumanized and abused youth who has murdered his father—*in medias res* for offences as yet unnamed. In the limbo of the Reception area, where prisoners have not yet been categorized by having been written about and upon, we also meet a trio of prisoners whose attempted escape from the Isolation Block will constitute the primary plot activity of Part Two of the novel: Gus, Morgan, and Koppe.

> They had been brought from [another] prison to the city jail where they were to await trial.
>
> They stood quietly, with the blank faces of prisoners who already knew the ropes, apparently seeing nothing, but all the time as alert as electric meters, ready to move at a flick. One of these men had a knife-scar down the left side of his face from eyebrow to chin, and it gave him a lopsided look, as if his face had been hastily stuffed and sewn up. All had shaven heads and their mouths were still and sullen (28).

In keeping with a refusal of surface interpretation, the case with the deceptive Santa Claus-like appearance of Fatso the guard, here also/always surfaces are deceptively simple and ironically misleading. Prior to the climactic battle in the cell between Butcherboy and Yusef the Turk, we are told that Yusef 'was smiling faintly with drooping lids, but despite the ease and the smile, his eyes were as alert as sparks, and he was now sharp and tough and dangerous as a polished spear (81). Even as the text seems to reduce even the jail itself, the 'stone country', to a set of patterned partitions that reflect the external realities of the society which has spawned it, the text undermines its own reductive simplicity by insisting upon the slipperiness of surface, and perhaps the impossibility of any totalizing that is a representation. The prison in not itself uniform, even when seen from the outside, though our imaginative construction of it reduces and essentializes the physical and imaginative space: 'men were clambering onto outhouses and projections of which there were many inside the old prison' (158). Since there is no uniformity, texts necessarily present samplings that universalize.

Thus LaGuma's choice of a jail, although not strictly a prison, allows the text to interrogate this issue of the apprehension of surface phenomena. By presenting a seemingly simple narrative peppered with seemingly one-dimensional characterizations—usually ironic—we are forced back upon a re-examination of the simplest of these prison-stock characters—the guard—as the text unpacks all the various textures of what it means to be a criminal, a prisoner, a jailer, a society that imprisons as a function of defining itself *as* a society.

The fourth and innermost sanctum is The Hole, and it is not surprising that we have followed a sequence of separations: from society, from the large group in the Remand room, from the small groups in Isolation Block, to insular isolation, at the furthest remove from the 'outside.'

> The Hole was on the ground floor; the punishment cell which was a square, windowless box, painted pitch black on the inside. Air came through a narrow, barred transom above the iron door, and that was the only opening in the stygian cell (101).

The metaphor of the labyrinth, with The Hole—isolation—as Minotaur is set up by physical descriptions of the warren within which the characters move, but also by the ironic presentation of a Daedalus-figure:

> A man, a newcomer who had arrived the previous day now set his bowl aside, leaned forward and made soft, crooning bird-sounds, extending a ragged arm towards the pigeons. He was dressed in tattered jacket, patched trousers and disintegrating shoes, and he had a flabby, liquor-bloated, sagging face, like a half-filled penny balloon. The unshaven, pouchy mouth smiled, and his soft, gentle calling came strangely from it.
>
> 'Cooo-rrr. Cooo-rrr', the man called quietly to the birds.
>
> Then, as everybody watched, the pigeons rose on fluttering wings to settle on the ragged arm and shoulders, so that the man…looked like some strange mythological being, half-feathers-half-human (71).

This absurd figure has been transformed by pigeons which the text had just described as if they were guards, and he masters them by crooning and

wheedling, using the language of passivity that lulls warders: 'the pigeons, blue-grey in the sunlight, sailed from the roof and dropped to the floor of the yard, strutted with smooth-feathered importance among the fallen scraps of food, their sharp beaks pecking skilfully past their pouting breasts' (71). This master of the labyrinth appears only in this scene, disappearing after awing the assembled prisoners in the yard with his knowledge of all things pigeon. He is, although 'a newcomer', emblematic of the fact that knowing prisoners really control prisons, although jailers exert control over the surface elements, and he departs after fulfilling his role, and after foreshadowing the cosmic irony of the escape of the trio in the second half of the novel. The weakest of the trio, Koppe, is the only one able to get away. Morgan and Gus are thrown, each in chains after each is severely beaten, into the blackness of The Hole: 'A long time afterwards, Morgan came out of the darkness of insensibility into another darkness—the darkness of a sealed tomb…He kept his eyes shut for it hurt him to open them, and in any case he would be able to see nothing there in the womb-like blackness of The Hole' (161). Here, at the center of the labyrinth, Morgan laughs hysterically at the outcome of their attempt, recognizes that Koppe, the one whom they had had to force into activity—almost dragging him with them—is the only one to succeed: 'Morgan lay there and filled the darkness with his crazy and painful laugh' (161). It is deep and true laughter, but it is also the laugh of full play here at the nethermost reaches. This is as far a remove as is possible from the metropolitan realities that all the text's external references have conjured, but here laughter—edged with insanity—is possible.

But the novel begins with an initiate, George Adams, awaiting trial for being a member of a banned political organization, and The Casbah Kid, already convicted of murder and waiting to be hanged, sharing a cell and looking out. '"What you reckon the time is now?" the boy … asked. 'I don't know,' George Adams said, 'must be past three.' And then he remembered that the boy behind him would probably never see the outside world again, or have to bother about time' (12). Immediately, we are told that a subjective stream of imposed ritual will be the temporal restriction imposed on those—as in George's case—waiting to 'serve time.' The monotony of days punctuated by meals alone lies at the heart of a real prisoner's conception of prison: '"Almost bleddy supper time, and we with three meals off", the boy

said. He had a cold impersonal voice coming from below a raw and swollen lip' (12). We are reminded here, by way of the mention of the 'three meals off' punishment and the Casbah Kid's swollen lip, that we have entered the text *in medias res*, and will have the necessary linearity of prison time fractured by textual narratives designed to flesh out the subjective lives of those imprisoned. In the 'realest' of narrative senses, we will construct the subjectivity of each actant synchronically. We cycle through anticipation, expectation, partial acknowledgement of our correct guesses, and realization. As we are given a pastiche of events, we construct the subjective existence of characters; we witness the creation of subjects in language in its specific discursive field. Further, a linkage is made almost immediately between the battle for intersubjective control of the temporal environment and the function of orature and written discourse. George is a writer, and we are treated to the first of many allusions to writing as a trope of control:

> Around them the walls were grimy, battleship-grey halfway up, and a dirty yellow-white above, all the four surfaces covered with inscriptions scratched into the paint or written in black pencil; the usual prison litany of man's inhumanity to man: *Gus was here for Housebreak and Theft; Johnny Bril you are a pig; I'll never see blue skies again; The Buster Boys was here; Never trust a woman she will make you sorry* … (12)

The nonlinear nature of the inscriptions is a core structural component of the novel, as the narratives of the prisoners (and the central thrust of the novel) compete with and attempt to displace the rigidity of an imposed temporal order. Two brief comments complete the linkage: the text states that these inscriptions, and the drawings—pornographic and otherwise—are examples of '[t]wentieth century man forced back to the cave' while '[s]omewhere outside, a leaking pipe dripped with *infinite* reluctance' [e.a.] (12). The two-step temporal remove that prisoner must contend with—once from the redolence of external events (like the reference to Christmas), and twice from the linearity and lockstep of meal times and shift changes in the prison—is precisely the nexus that the text establishes. Much later in the novel, the text makes ironic the linearity of even this remove: as if a prisoner could, in fact, distance himself from the outside

world—in the sense of an optimistically romanticized vision of imprisonment[18]—by self-creation within. The situation is bleaker than that, because the world itself is a prison:

> A hard breeze was blowing *outside* [e.a.], promising to turn into a full-scale southeaster before the day was over. Through it, the sunlight made the usual barred pattern on the floor and on the drab paint where former occupants of the cell had left their epitaphs, salutations and warnings: *Pike is a squealer; God gives us life and the hangman his rope; The Buster Boys was here; Goodbye Molly, I will always remember you* (131) (e.i.o.).

In this section of the novel, reminding us of the carceral reality of the external world, the storm brewing outside symbolizes the coming storm inside as the 'trio' (Gus, Morgan, and Koppe) escapes[19]. Here also we have a reiteration of the binary codes of orature and writing, contained in the contrast of the evanescence of the 'leaking pipe [tapping] away at its irregular Morse' and the semi-permanence of the written word, the graffiti. Further, the deferral of agency, so necessary to the depersonalization and alienation of the situation, is underlined in the recurrence of the hymn-singer, who was 'in the middle of *While shepherds watched their flocks*, as the door *was relocked* [e.a.] after breakfast. Nobody shouted him into silence; apparently hymns *were allowed* [e.a.] on Sundays' (131). No guard 'relocked' and no prisoner 'allowed'; the passive voice unites prisoner and guard. The necessary escape from the limbo of this is ironic: writing imprisons (George), yet prison is a space which writes upon the prisoners, inscribing and delimiting them while offering a way to negotiate an identity. Perhaps it is this realization, an unconscious one, which powers Morgan's 'crazy' laughter when he reaches The Hole.

The first, and most obvious way that prisons 'capture' prisoners is by the creation of a number and a formal bureaucratic record, and it is, naturally, the functionary who does the job: 'There was the khaki-uniformed guard looking in at them, one hand holding the door and the other grasping a thick sheaf of admission forms' (17). The guard here acts as a liminal character, a doorway, through which all must pass as they are captured in the inscriptions to be made on the forms. The prisoners are then counted off, as

trustees—prisoners used as guards—shout 'to exercise the precarious authority bestowed upon them by their watchful master' (18). There is a perceptible chill in the air as the prisoners all enter the prison space, physically, for the first time, though they are not yet initiated in either official or unofficial ways. The completeness of the visionary environment of the prison, including the questionable, double-edged nature of the existence of the guard, is clarified:

> Guards and prisoners, everybody, were the enforced inhabitants of another country, another world. This was a world without beauty; a lunar barrenness of stone and steel and locked doors. In this world no trees grew, and the only shade was found in the shadow of its cliffs and walls, the only perfume it knew came from night-soil buckets and drains. In the summer it broiled, and it chattered in the winter, and the only music the regulations allowed was composed of the slap-slap of bare feet, the grinding of boots, counterpointed by shouted orders, the slam of doors and the tintinnabulation of heavy keys. Anything else smacked of rebellion 18).

The incoming prisoners are literally desensitized, as the text strips or warps all sensory input. Although it comes quite far along in the novel, this description of the Casbah Kid as a book of photos is a strong realization of the concretizing tendency of text that the prison seeks to impose:

> Not being able to indulge in any sort of intricate thought, he accepted an idea, good or bad, and it became fixed in his brain, tightly, like a picture pasted in a scrap-book.
>
> He was nineteen years old and all his recollections of life were a series of pictures …. They were all there, in his mind … like filthy postcards … if he liked, he could stop at some page and look at a particular picture, examine it, and afterwards pass on or shut the book (128).

The 'book of the mind' that the text presents is the narrative structure of the oral recitation, relying upon 'postcards' to structure reminiscence; the 'trap' of written discourse becomes an ironic freedom.

Even though prisoners will be reduced to paper throughout the novel, there is a freedom in having been imprisoned in this way, as the text clearly establishes the priority of written over oral discourse.

The crucial reduction of prisoner-to-paper is a dominant tendency of the text, beginning with the transformation of admissions forms (17) to the ID card. Perhaps it is not too much to suggest that the ID card is the first example of the 'id' card as narrative subjectivity replaces a coherent sense of an individuated self? First the prisoners must be categorized to inhabit on of the four universes the prison encompasses:

> 'Where are you sleeping?'
> 'In the Groot Kamer, the Big Room.'
> 'You can't man. You a admission. Got to go with the others.'
> … those who had been sentenced by the courts had been called aside and made to strip, and they stood in a bunch, stark naked, each holding his bundled clothing, waiting for their names to be called off again, and to be moved to where they would receive their convict uniform. Watching them was a young Coloured guard in a washed-out uniform…[another] 'guard came up the steps through the archway into the hall … he shouted furiously, 'You think this is a ----bar-room?' (22).

The dialogue references Remand (the 'Big Room'), which transits into Isolation Block, because one of the speakers is 'a admission.' There is a slide from the 'Coloured guard' to the other guard—each a perspective on the paradoxical nature of the guard-figure, inside yet outside, and there is a reference to the world outside of the prison in the barroom reference. The shouting guard is a menacing figure, prodding all around him—prisoners, prisoner-clerks, other guards—so that he doesn't 'waste his time' on the process (23):

> 'I'm going as fast as I can, mate', another clerk said … [the menacing guard] shouted again, for no apparent reason, 'You think this is a blerry hotel?' … The other guards, spurred on by the short one's anger, began to hurry things up. Names were shouted, and men sprang forward, bumping into each other to be in time. The man

> writing the ID cards at the table was shouting each name and flinging the card away without lifting his face, as he wrote the next card, so that the prisoners had to scramble for them (23).

It is at this point that George Adams's status as a political activist is highlighted: '"Another ---- Communist", the man at the table said. "What, are you a kaffir? This ---- jail is getting full of ---- Communists"' (24). The trio who will attempt escape—Gus, Morgan, and Koppe—are also processed: 'in the Reception Hall … the clerk checked their names from their ID cards against the papers in his hand …. He signed a receipt and gave it back to the guard who had escorted these men from another prison' (28). J.U. Jacobs has observed this same trope in prison memoir, referring to the fact that Robben Island prisoners Moses Dlamini and Indres Naidoo 'give prior status to their prison numbers as the "name" of the author on the title pages of their memoirs, recognizing that their singularity has been subsumed into the depersonalized plurality of political prisoners … their South African subjectivity forever attached to a prison identity' (1991b: 195).

We have already observed that Solly, the character of misrule, is a 'memo-sized, yellow duplicate of a man' (30). It is important to note, however, that it is the text that metaphorizes Solly, and not only the processing system of the bureaucracy. Of course Solly, a 'memo' circulates throughout the narrative, eventually using the system to make the transition from Remand to Isolation Block to aid in the coming escape attempt. And the prison's ultimate creation, Butcherboy Williams, is written on in the time-honored tradition of prison inscription. 'He was half-naked, revealing an ape-like torso covered with tattooed decorations: hands holding hands, a skull and crossbones, a Union Jack, a dripping dagger, and various other emblems consistent with his barbarism' (31). Later on, during the build up to the fight between Yusef the Turk and this enforcer of the prison's violent tendencies, we get more detail. 'He flexed his biceps and slapped his chest, grinning with his bad teeth, displaying the pictures needled into his flesh: the skull-and-cross-bones, the flags and crossed daggers, the nude women who wiggled as his muscles writhed…an eagle in full flight, its beak agape and wings spread, eyes glaring and talons hooked and poised for the kill' (83).

The particularity of the designs connects Butcherboy with predation, of course, and also with one of the colonial masters in the body of the Union

Jack. The fight that George Adams and his fellow political prisoner, Jefferson, have is with the South African government, but the nominative reference to other activists against England (as in Thomas Jefferson and Samuel Adams) is just as obvious. Butcherboy is a 'cultural creation' in the sense that he has become the place where text rules. In a discussion of form within his argument in favor of the cultural and historical nexus that gave rise to both the modern (English) penitentiary system and the seventeenth century English novel, John Bender notes that:

> Works of art attempt the unified representation of different social and cultural structures simultaneously in a single frame of reference. In literature and art the very attempt to contrive formal coherence out of disparate materials allows us to glimpse—through what have been called eloquent silences—the process of generation and regeneration that drives all cultural formation (1987:6f).

The illustrated man who is Butcherboy is, his own choices of design and reception notwithstanding, a text with structural integrity. We read him as a totality because we are acculturated to grant a *telos* to texts, to grant coherence to the incoherent, to grant meaning to the random. We grant an horizon of expectations (*a la* Wolfgang Iser) to our experience of reading, and our entrance into the reading process snares us in the trap and release of written discourse. It is in this sense that those entering the prison space approach the orderliness of the entrance experience, and it is for this reason that the reduction of prisoners to text must proceed: the bureaucratic role of the guard cannot be fulfilled simply by organizing individuals.

It is no surprise that it is writing itself which has led to the imprisonment of George Adams prior to his reduction to the status of a mobile text in the fictional prison. In a flashback, George, Jefferson, and several committed others create political pamphlets for distribution: he 'thought of the bundles of illegal leaflets on the back seat of the car. He was a little apprehensive about them, and wished that they had done with the delivery, that the bundles were out of their hands…' (47). George is arrested for passing paper, he is to be turned into paper—though he will resist the process—he will inevitably be written on by the process, and the novel itself is concerned with the creation and 'distribution' of text throughout its

entirety. After having received his ID card, George's first interaction with a guard—over the lack of supplies—goes poorly as George refuses to 'be' the ID card, which the guard asks for to reconcile the irreconcilable: a prisoner who has 'talked' back.

> To George Adams he said, '*Jong*, here you better not keep yourself *slim*, clever. There's trouble waiting for you if you keep yourself too clever'. Then, as an afterthought: 'Let's see your card'.
>
> George Adams drew the blue card from his hip pocket. Near him he was aware of silence. The silence spread … you didn't talk back to a guard, and George Adams had done so, even in a small way, and they all waited for the storm of authority which seemed to be building up (61f).

The 'authority' has already been passed from George to Fatso in the party of the ID card; text 'silences' the verbal, and reestablishes the master-slave dyad. The small thing that George had done was to call Fatso 'sir': 'The hard eyes assumed a scratchy quality and seemed to rasp over George Adams. "Sir? You should know that there is no – *sir* in this place. Here you say *Boss*, hear me?"' (61). Fatso asks for the ID 'as an afterthought' because it is the default setting for all verbal interactions, swinging control away from prisoner and back to guard. After Fatso realizes that George is a political, a "Bloody Communist", stocking up trouble everywhere' (62), the guard's face is described as 'immobile as a papier-mâché mask, and only the lips under the blonde mustache moved as he spoke. He handed the card back' (62). In a sense, the text has frozen both the transaction between George and Fatso, but also Fatso himself. The novel here, as elsewhere, gives primacy to written discourse while underscoring the dangers of concretization. George's essential mistake, which will bring on the retributive wrath of the fully-textualized Butcherboy, is to insist upon a real, rather than a textual—and thereby one-dimensional—existence. The eyes that had seemed to 'rasp over him' will gouge him: a painful privilege accorded only to those who have (not yet) been made into texts to be controlled: [George] 'felt rather than saw the fat guard's pale eyes scouring him from above' (63).

The central importance of all this detail is that the text insists upon a homoglossic, one-way, connection to the reader in its focus upon realistic detail in dialogue, catalogue, and interior monologue. The tendency to 'fix' the meaning, to create a monologic text in the Bakhtinian sense, is evident throughout. Underlying all of this realistic text's insistences upon conveying meaning is the mimetic relationship between words and the things to which they refer. But traces, in the Derridean sense, inhabit the interstices of the seemingly placid surface, creating dialogism and polyphony at moments where uniformity seems to reign. As a representative of Fatso the Guard, Butcherboy is initially a symbol of the monoglossic pretensions of writing.

Butcherboy badgers George in the Big Room where all prisoners in Remand must wait. The bestial Butcherboy is described always and only in animalistic terms. He is variously a 'jackal', 'a wolf', 'a hyena' (30), or a 'boar' (53) with 'ape-like eyes' (66), always observed from an objective perspective. Yusef the Turk takes George's side, insisting that the animal in Butcherboy recognize that George is not meant for this place they inhabit together, that George is somehow special by virtue of his idealism and the peculiarities of the political place and time. Yusef also has an 'animalistic' trait here: he understands instinctually, viscerally, that George is unable to survive in the textualized universe of the prison. In other words, the chronotope of the context is foregrounded—not just in the sense that there is a shared cultural construction of space-time, but also in the sense that George 'belongs' to another order, one concerned not with present exigencies, but with future possibilities. The text had first shown us Yusef from the privileged position of George's consciousness:

> George Adams looked at this man…This was the gentleman gangster, a member of the underworld aristocracy…a frequenter of the upstairs billiard rooms along Hanover and Caledon Streets, where plots were hatched against a background of clacking cues and drifting smoke (38).

Yusef asks, 'What you in for, mate?' as three card players in the common cell—reminiscent of Kafka's card-players in 'The Metamorphosis'—are separated out from the 'conspirators' (Yusef and George). The truth-claim that the text makes is noteworthy: both are hatchers of plots, the relative

validity of state charges against a political rather than a 'mere' criminal is waived. Each is imprisoned for the abrogation of a code of conduct. George shares his cigarettes with one of the card-players, saying 'We all in this ---together' (39). Although one is meant to guess at the scatological description the ellipsis suggests, the indeterminacy of the *lacuna* is in keeping with the overall arc of the texts negation of monologic certainty at the very moment of its seeming primacy. The necessary equation of George with Yusef continues, as we are given an index of friendship and §camaraderie in the cigarette first dispersed, then lit for George:

> The lean man [Yusef] produced a lighter and snapped the flame and held it to George Adams's cigarette. As far as he was concerned Adams was an equal, an expert from the upper echelons of crime, but generosity came hard to him as he offered the lighter with reluctance to the card-player (39).

The sense of unity that Adams attempts to instil is a conscious one. The general critical consensus of the novel is that 'Adams's compassion stems from the fact that he is aware that the prisoners are blind and unthinking victims of a vicious system that desires to reduce both the oppressed outside and inside the prison to the violence and lack of compassion of the stone and iron society the regime has built' (for example in Abrahams 1985: 96; JanMohamed 1983: 24f). The essential goal of the revolutionary group to which Adams had belonged is nowhere stated, and must be inferred as a precursor to all dialogues in the prison itself. Certainly, the possibility of organized defiance to the jailers—as a synechdoche for George's out-of-prison activities—is at odds with law of the jungle as it is practiced in the prison. 'The prisoners are preoccupied with how to survive and how to have an easy existence' (Abrahams 1985: 95). And since George refuses to cower to the hulking Butcherboy, an actant[20] is required for the violence that is to come: George's importance to the novel is not only

> As La Guma indicates … 'a telescope through which to see what is going around' (9). Adams, however, becomes more than a telescope; he assumes again the role of being a recorder of events but, since he

> is an experienced man of the political world, he also attempts to teach the lessons he has learned (Abrahams 1985: 95).

And even if George does not 'teach' Yusef the necessity of abandoning solipsism, the effect is the same. Again the connection is established by way of a shared cigarette—though perhaps casting the passing of the paper-encased tube as an example of the textualizing tendency of the novel is over determination: 'George Adams was opening his cigarette-box, and he offered one to the other man [Yusef]'. George is distressed that Yusef has taken Butcherboy's gaze on him to keep George safe: '"You stuck your nose in when he was ---- ing around with me, isn't it? If you had not, you would not be in this, *mos*"', says George to Yusef. 'Yusef the Turk said, "So I didn't *mos* like to see a john like you being pulled up by that basket. We got to look after you, Professor" …. George Adams said, "You and your every man for himself"' (80).

The structural connection—creating of George and Yusef a dyad by way of the connections referred to above—is necessary for the assumption, by Yusef, of George's battle with Butcherboy. Yusef becomes, narratologically, an example of the helper, and he is dispensed with in the text after he serves his purpose: to forestall the danger of Butcherboy Williams by fighting him, taking a terrible beating, but 'winning' because The Casbah Kid surreptitiously stabs and kills Butcherboy.

The ID card is also the passport for movement and the distribution of goods throughout the narrative: 'The escort collected their ID cards and handed them through the grille to the guard who also wore a holstered pistol. After a wait the guard started calling names, and the prisoners went forward' (64). The central tendency of the novel is to attempt to control by textualising prisoners, but the guards are 'traces' that map a continuity that prisoners cannot.

III

Of course guards are 'enforced inhabitants', too; their lack of subjectivity merely makes them unable to reflect on their positionality. As the prisoners are turned into paper, requiring sorting and storage, the guards are re-inscribed, turned from monsters into mere bureaucrats. The guard-function

becomes essentially clerical—especially as they file prisoners—and the condition of employment is thus indistinguishable. They are time-keepers, clockwork characters, measuring out the fractions of the 'story' that they will manipulate. Since the distinction between the story and the narrative is at play, it is understandable that the temporal-spatial control of the prison-space lies in the hands of the bureaucrat-guard, and that time reflects space: 'at five-thirty in the morning a guard stepped out of the Headquarters block, opposite the Awaiting-trial Section, and began to hammer the iron triangle hanging from a sort of gallows' (50). In this case, the time-marker of the triangle becomes the boundary for a narrative unit for both the story and the narrative. The dynamic function of the guard is also reconfigured as a primarily space-keeping one: they are organizers of the paper prisoners. As Butcherboy smacks Solly and sends him spinning out of a line of prisoners, '[t]he column of prisoners, disrupted, eddied and undulated, and a guard came running up…the disrupted center of the column sorted itself and straightened out again' after 'the guard caught [Solly] by the collar and pushed him into line ... and everybody became silent as the guards came up the length of the assembly, counting the men off in fours' (54). Like loose sheets of paper bounced on a desk so that they all face the same way, the guards shape the prisoners into a sortable order. The pretence of control—of a monoglossic world—is comforting, but illusory.

Paper leads them into the labyrinth as the prisoners are led from the truck to the prison: '… there was the khaki-uniformed guard looking in at them, one hand holding the door and the other grasping a thick sheaf of admission forms. Another guard, wearing a holstered pistol, stood on the other side of the door.' Here we have the dual coercions of textuality and violence. As we observed previously with the heavily-inscribed figure of Butcherboy Williams, these two are tied together and reflect the inevitability of the prison experience: written discursive processes are coercive and oppressive. These same admissions forms lead the prisoners into the Reception Area (19) and their categorization into one of the four sections of the prison universe (21). We have already observed that these forms will be transformed, in the truest sense of the word, into ID cards (23), creating a paper-identity for the guards to seize. The reduction of person-to-paper allows the guard-filing clerk to sort prisoners into cells: 'The two guards, one of them unlocking doors down the row, began allocating prisoners to

cells' (27). And the ironically panoptic vision of the Superintendent requires categorization in order for his pretense of bureaucratic control to be exercised:

> Now they were all assembled for inspection, the short ones in front and the tall men behind, everybody in files of four, holding the blue ID cards so that the Superintendent of the jail could read their names in case he had anything to say to anybody (68).

Of course the Superintendent has nothing 'to say to anybody'; he is mute, in charge of a system which works without his knowledge or awareness. Only a menacing guard who 'asked suspiciously, "Any complaints?"' while 'slapping the side of his leg with the strap of his truncheon' (68) gets to speak. And this speech act, intended to ironically forestall speech, guarantees that only the ID cards exist. In a sense, the narrative grammar of the prison structure, the *langue*, has created a matrix within which the only *parole* allowed will be the inscriptions which are the prisoners—and, ironically, the warders and the Superintendent too:

> The superintendent arrived and the section-guard unlocked the gate for him, stamped elaborately to attention…and said …'. Everything all right, Major'.
>
> The Super returned the salute with a gesture of his swagger-stick and started down the line … [he] was a very tall, thin bony man [who looked as though] he had been roughly carved out of knotty wood … he had a dry, brittle face like crumpled pink tissue-paper with holes torn in it for eyes, and a horizontal crease for a mouth (68).

He leaves, grunting his apparent satisfaction, and 'as soon as he had disappeared, a mutter of talk broke out and the prisoners relaxed' (69). This structural recognition that the representative of the writing-culture that is the prison system will silence speech (or attempt to) and impose writing on the prisoners is part of the narrative grammar of the institution. But even as the men are arrayed in 'files of four', we are to be led to files that lead to escape: the indeterminacy of the term 'file'—in fact its paradoxical quality—is a

loose thread waiting to unravel. Prisoners are lined up in files; they are literally and metaphorically sorted and (de)filed as paper products, yet files and rasps can free, will free, prisoners from the Jamesonian prison house of language.

The centrality of this issue (the Superintendent's panoptic control) is underlined elsewhere in the text, after Butcherboy's dead body is removed, his inscribed body covered by a blanket. Although he is quoted, it is an unusual kind of speech which we enter in mid-sentence:

> The Super was saying, '…they treat this prison like it was a damned bar-room.' He stared at the lines of prisoners who had now fallen silent. He was angry and also worried. The Prisons Department expected him to keep proper order and to run the prison without its internal demerits being exposed too much (109).

The indirection of the ascription ('was saying') comes close to being free indirect speech, relegating the Super and his concerns—that, indeed, narrative/paper will escape—to a back burner. Of course the text will escape: Butcherboy is text and he is out, as Koppe will later ironically escape from the place in which, ultimately, the guards themselves are in many respects more imprisoned than the prisoners:

> Locking and unlocking, George Adams thought. All these birds do is lock and unlock. It occurred to him that all guards in prison were practically prisoners themselves, that they lived most of their working life behind stone walls and bars; they were manacled to the other end of the chain (106).

It is not that the text requires sympathy in any simplistic way for the guards; rather, the structural dyad of guard/prisoner is polysemous—many layered. There is the cat and mouse game played between George and Fatso throughout—appropriately symbolized by a real cat playing with a mouse (110f): 'The prison cat came through the bars of the grille into the square and headed towards the kitchen behind the Isolation Block, and [George] watched it sleepily, thinking, Kitty ... you got me into trouble, kitty' (111). The necessary interdependence one expects from such dyads is at play. As

the sentence moves synchronically, we move with the cat, which connects to George and 'trouble.' When George is put into Isolation Block for his back-talk, he dreams of the now-dead Butcherboy, the cat's paw that Fatso had used to try to dehumanize George. In the dream, the *leitmotif* of the dripping water-pipe serves as the connector between the two strands of the narrative: George's story and that of the trio who will attempt escape:

> Through the sound of the rising wind, the hesitant drip-drip of the unseen water-pipe played a reluctant counterpoint, and George Adams dreamed that he was in the backyard of the house where he lived, and Butcherboy was saying, 'Somebody got to fix that tap.' Butcherboy had a bundle of pamphlets under his arm and he said to George Adams, 'We got to hand this out by tonight before they lock us in.' 'You can get Jefferson and Yussy to help you', George Adams told him. 'I've got to cut that Yussy's blerry throat.' Then there was Butcherboy being carried away on a stretcher, holding the bundle of pamphlets, saying, 'Who killed Cock Robin?' (113).

In a sense, George's dream both highlights and negates the naturalistic suggestiveness of the narrative's descriptions. The 'drip-drip' of the pipe suggests an incremental erosion of seemingly solid structures (like the stone country itself). But there is the sense also, noticed by several critics[21], that George Adams rejects a 'naturalistic, fatalistic explanation of human fate' (Mkhize 1998: 159). Whatever his motivations, George, 'albeit to a limited extent, conscientises these characters' (Mkhize 1998: 162). The handful of pamphlets that Butcherboy holds at the end of his dream is powerful evidence that even the bestial are remediable—even in prison.

We have also observed that the guards treat their very jobs as impositions upon them, complaining even about the most ordinary of duties. The ineptitude of the jailers, even as they pretend to control is in evidence everywhere in the novel. In fact, the reduction of the novelistic guard to idiocy is a dominant tendency in most if not all prison novels—unsurprising since guards are the representatives of the oppression of the site and the structure that imprisons. In their attempt to impose apartheid even in the supplies and food given to the different racial groups within the prison, the administration functions erratically and arbitrarily. George and Yusef are

discussing supper, bread and 'cawfee' (73), when Yusef initiates George into one of the ways that the prison works: they will get their bread 'With a dab a jam ... Use to be fat, but the Moslems and Indians had to get ghee. I reckon it was mos too much trouble for them to separate the ghees from the fats everyday, so now every bogger gets jam…' (74). George, about to have a confrontation with a guard who has just insisted that 'no skolly' is going to 'talk to me like he was a white man' (75), refuses to beg for a cup for his coffee. He asks the guard, 'Well, why don't they run this jail proper?' (75). One critic of the novel has developed the redolence of apartheid's hierarchies in *The Stone Country* (Yousaf 2001: 70-74). Others have acknowledged hierarchical separation in prison memoirs (notably Young 1996).

However, with the exception of George Adams' reflection on the events leading up to his arrest and imprisonment, guards function, structurally, as the primary source of exterior-to-prison references. There is a repetitive metaphoric quality to the guards' insistences that prison is not a 'circus' (19), a 'bar' (22, 109), a 'hotel' (23), a 'bioscope' (55), or a 'public meeting' (112). The parodic nature of the prison environment, in all of its rituals and patterns recalls Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, and the need, as some have called it, to see prison as 'world inside out'[22]. The metaphoric elimination of all that prison is not doesn't clearly establish what it is, but does call attention to the need to negotiate the space.

It is interesting that Solly, the jester-figure, is one of the only exceptions to the guards' textual control over external reference: 'Listen, when I was on the farm, we use to get up two o'clock to drive the cattle, reckon and think …. He started to fold his own blankets, saying, 'Saturday today. We all going to the big match this afternoon' (122). He also provides the impetus to an external comment by George, and is the key to connecting the otherwise unconnected (political George, prison naïf, and Gus, hard-core prisoner), thereby unifying the two sections of the novel:

> Among the group was the little man, Solly, who grinned at him, cackling, '*Hoit*, pally. So they give you a separate room, hey?'
> '*Ja*', George Adams laughed. 'Grand Hotel. What happened in here?'

> 'Law came yesterday afternoon', Solly said. He was trying to gaze past George Adams with wrinkled eyes, trying to catch the attention of Gus who was plodding mechanically around the square … he caught Gus's eye and raised his hand slightly in an obscure signal and Gus winked at him (115).

The real life of the jailers regularly intrudes upon the patterns established by the jailers themselves, providing an ironic reminder of life beyond 'this half-world, hemmed in by stone and iron' (37): '"Well, I've got to go off duty", the short guard said. "Jesus, must a man waste his time on these-----?"' (23). 'The guard said to the escort: "Jussus, man, I am not going to wait. Going off now, jong. These bastards can wash in the morning, to hell with it. I'm not working blerry overtime"' (27). As a prelude to George's conflict with Fatso over his missing kit, we are told that '"We got in late", George Adams [said]. "I reckon the warder didn't want to open up the store"' (37). A structural connection is made at the heart of the novel, as a change in work shifts underlines the essential absence of language—as speech becomes stilled in writing—and unifies the external and internal prison worlds:

> Outside, the sun had dwindled away, leaving the lavender twilight to filter over the stone and iron of the prison. The guards had taken the last count of the day, and had handed over to the night shift. The warders now on duty noticed the silence only casually, the way one noticed a street light after dark, or the sheen on the ground after a rainfall, and it did not bother them (81).

It is this ease with the rhythms of the space which they pretend to control that spirals the banality of the guards through the core of the labyrinth into their roles as plot motivators. The double helix which is the dance of guard with prisoner works in this way: prisoners tunnel inward to the isolate strength of their convictions (whether political or not). They move incrementally through the four stages of the prison to the heart of the labyrinth—The Hole—where Morgan's laughter represents the freedom that springs from a place that folds in upon itself. The prison space, as a result of the narrative grammar that propels this particular *discours*, is (inevitably) a metaphor for the isolate exploration of self—or a society's reflection of its

essential tendencies. On the other hand, the guards cycle in from a place where 'control' is manifested by surface manipulation—counts, orders, and other examples of physical authority—to a place where the paradox of writing banned becomes writing as freedom. The very instrument of control, the ability to make texts of people, releases people for the very exploration of internality which the prisoners 'true' freedom demands. Since knowledgeable prisoners, immersed in the prison culture, really run the temporal realities of all the prisoners in the textual landscape, it is fascinating to notice that the armature of the novel—the discrete narrative units of the text—is controlled by the guards. Guards are necessary and indispensable to the existence of the possibility of liberation within the prisoners' consciousnesses.

As examples of their role as primary motivators of plot, observe that the indoctrination and reduction to paper of the prisoners was necessarily led by those who waived admission forms, that the primary catapult for George's movement from Remand to Isolation Block is the confrontation with Fatso. Fatso goads Butcherboy into George's orbit (62); a nameless guard interrupts Yusef and Butcherboy after Yusef takes George's side (65). The long narrative unit leading up to the fight in the last chapter (the fourteenth) of Part I wavers between guard-induced interruptions to the slowly building scene, as in Chapter 12, where George is awakened by 'the grinding key in the lock' (74), and interventions by groups of prisoners who agitate in favour of an amorphous set of prisoners' 'rules' established by tradition. For example, after George's dangerous retort to Fatso over the inefficient administration of the prison—'Well, why don't they run this jail right?' (75)—a prisoner gives a mug to George so that the confrontation will end. Fatso asks the prisoner, '"Who the hell called you to do anything" but he did not object when George Adams took the mug' (76). Butcherboy 'wondered whether he could do the baas a favour by dealing with this clever' (76).

Here, as elsewhere in the novel, we are told that 'the half-world of the prison had its own justice' (150), and that prisoners who have been initiated into knowledge control the deep field of prison life. For example, the internal 'trial' that is referenced during the confrontation between Yusef and Butcherboy establishes the common law of the institution: guards run the clock, but the existence of prisoners is controlled by codes of discursive

conduct that require initiation, absorption, and mediation. In the 'case' displayed in the novel, a prisoner who had 'complained to a guard, an unpardonable crime' (82), is found mysteriously murdered within a packed cell, with no hint of a weapon or any evidence of violence on anyone but the victim. Of course, the variation amongst those imprisoned is a function of how deeply a given prisoner has internalized the actual codes, the narrative grammar or *langue*, of the prison landscape. While the prisoners are walking in the exercise circle, we are given the order of initiation: 'round and round the circle moved, the bare feet of the three convicts slapping the hot tarmac of the square. Behind them walked The Casbah Kid and George Adams' (113). The trio mentioned in this passage is comprised of Gus, Morgan and Koppe. The trio—two of whom will make it to the center of the physical labyrinth—is the most incorporated into prison culture, George least.

This trio will escape, singing covering the sound of their sawing of the bars. These files, hack-saw blades really, are secreted in paper (of course) and hide in the plain sight of a garbage can, as the guards are distracted by the prison cat, who 'had caught a mouse and was in the process of worrying it to death before devouring it'. We are reminded yet again of the connection between guard/prisoner and cat/mouse: 'The three guards were watching, with fascination, the punishment of the mouse, chuckling, as if they felt a natural association with the feline sadism' (124). Gus uses paper to get to the garbage can where Solly has stashed the blades:

> And Gus, seeing the attention of the guards distracted, started to saunter slowly past their backs toward the grille [where a crowd of prisoners watched the show]. He picked up a scrap of paper and a peel which somebody had dropped, and held it ostentatiously, so that anybody who happened to look his way would see nothing suspicious in his movement to the bins (124f).

At the end of the novel, three prisoners are highlighted as moving towards 'escape.' Although there is narrative movement to the outside of the prison, the ultimate escape is an escape from signification itself. The Casbah Kid, watched only by a 'Coloured warder' is about to be led to the gallows. He will be narratized as a story told to other prisoners, if he is to be

remembered at all. George moves back to remand from Isolation block, no longer to be menaced by Butcherboy. The impersonality of the prison's events and the depersonalization of the guards are complete: 'The door slammed shut and the lock grated. Leaving him alone again, with the scribbled walls, the smell of tobacco and blankets, and the chuckling sound of the wind. The next morning they moved him back to the Remand Section' (168). Although George is not yet out—indeed it does not matter because there is no escape from either the 'stone country' that is the world or from signification itself—he has maintained his status as a subject within the chain and within the labyrinth.

Conclusions

David Schalkwyk has observed that Afrikaner Herman Charles Bosman's *Cold Stone Jug*, a novel published in 1949 that is based upon his time as a convicted murderer 'remains the classic of South African prison writing' (1994:23). Bosman is, in the words of M.C. Andersen, 'a household name' among Afrikaners for his many short stories set in the Transvaal and because he was an outspoken critic of the Nationalist government's apartheid policies (Andersen 1993: 26). Bosman's had been 'sentenced to death in 1926 for shooting his stepbrother. The sentence was commuted … and he ultimately spent about four years in the Pretoria Central Prison' (Andersen note 6: 38). That experience provided the grist for his prison novel, a text that is relentless in the ways in which it foregrounds the process of writing as inextricably bound up with the condition of imprisonment. Too, in this text as in *The Stone Country*, the writer becomes co-equal with the guard by virtue of the narrative control of reality exercised by the act of writing. Critics and former prisoners have written about the paradoxical fact that literacy programs on Robben Island created the conditions for ideological awakenings among politically indifferent prisoners (e.g. Buntman 1993; Jacobs 1992; Mandela 1978, 1994; Zwelonke 1973: 60-71). At least one critic sees George Adams in *The Stone Country* as just such an ideological instructor, of at least The Turk (Yusaf 2001: 86). Many others have written widely and well about the prison memoir and its revelatory or cathartic possibilities (including Davies 1990; Jacobs 1986, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c; Riemenschneider 1980; Roberts 1985; Schalkwyk 1994; Sinha 1990; Young

1996). A few have looked, notably Barbara Harlow (1987) and Ioan Davies (1990), at a typology of prison writing. Fewer have looked carefully at the intertextuality of prison novels written by former prisoners (Davies and Jacobs come to mind), and that connection, linking Bosman to La Guma by way of Hugh Lewin is the way in which I wish to close here.

In a limited but very real sense, the writer of a prison novel becomes co-equal with the figure of the guard. The prison writer's ability to create of him/herself a guard is inextricably connected to textuality and narrative: Both the prisoner-as-writer and the prison guard exercise a surface control over events that will eventually do what they will. As in the case of writing and literacy education within Robben Island, where the institutional 'distraction' of reading/writing/study turn against the institutional structure that spawned it (Jacobs 1991b: 196), the prison novelist becomes a carceral figure—one who guards the narrative presented, though more trapped within all prior narratives than he or she might wish to admit. Both are trapped within frames—the guard within the frame of carcerality itself, the writer within the frames of all past narratives. For example, Bosman writes in *Cold Stone Jug* that a 'yearning for culture and scholarship ... infected the prison like a mediaeval plague' as prisoners wrote their memoirs while in prison, creating what he termed 'graphomania': 'And what a lot of lies they wrote, too …. But there was also a grim realism about the titles of some of these works of autobiography: like "Put in Boob by a Nark", or "Cold Stone Jug"' (1949: 160f). Bosman—the character in the novel—is working in a print shop at that chronological point in the narrative where a

> warder named Marman … who had literary leanings … had written a novel about prison life … the hero was a blue coat [a long-term convict] … it was a very moving story that this warder Marman wrote. It was full of slush and sentiment and melodrama and bad grammar (128).

The convicts surreptitiously set the type for the book in the prison print shop; however, they decide that the redistribution of the letters into their appropriate storage bins will take too much time, so 'Discipline Head-Warder Marman's novel in the form of column after column of loose type set by hand were shot through a hole in the floor' (129). The jail guard's

prison novel serves up sentences that are literally buried in the prison/narrative.

When Charles Bosman's protagonist reads *The Count of Monte Christo* while in Pretoria Central Prison (Bosman 1949: 46), and when Hugh Lewin reads Bosman thirty years after publication and fifty after his incarceration in the same prison, noting that 'very little had changed' in Pretoria Central (Lewin 1974: 109), then the 'wealth of resonances' that astute critics of the prison memoir such as Jacobs (1991b: 199) note must accompany readings of memoirs can become true also of prison novels, especially those written by authors who have faced isolation and longing in a prison setting. Their novels escape, while guards remain behind.

References

[1] See Breidlid (2002), especially pp. 34-41, on representational realism in African contexts. Breidlid surveys Foucault, Said, and ultimately Bhabha as well as South Africans such as J.M. Coetzee, David Maughan-Brown and many others on the notion of the mediated reality of truth.

[2] Abdul JanMohamed quotes Fredric Jameson's insistence that 'all literature is informed by the political unconscious … and that the primary function of literary analysis is the "unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts"' in *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (264). Inevitably, the Jamesonian aesthetic, best exemplified in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, is assumed at the outset of this study. Jameson's assumption that the relations between literature and society require narratives to interrogate the paradoxes inherent in social contradictions is especially important (e.g. pp. 82-83, 70, elsewhere).

[3] It is the dialectical tension between thesis and antithesis to which I refer here. Abdul JanMohamed's study, referred to immediately above, is an especially useful analysis of the binarizing tendency of (especially) colonial representations in the novel form. In his study, JanMohamed grounds himself in Franz Fanon's belief that 'the colonial world is a Manichean world'. In other words, novels that depict the colonial situation in Africa—and especially novels that treat of racial organization, as in the South Africa of the period—either reduce the native to the embodiment of evil, or invert the situation and demonize the settler. Little subtlety is allowed.

'The Manichean organization of colonial society has reached its apogee in the 'Republic' of South Africa … where the abusive term for African, 'kaffir', literally means infidel … [in his fourth chapter, on Nadine Gordimer, 79-150]. D.T. Moodie has traced the theological notions of apartheid back to the Calvinistic notions of predestination, original sin, and its highly polarized views of salvation and damnation. Given the theological sources of this ideology, Fanon's definition of colonial society as a manichean organization is by no means exaggerated. In fact, the colonial mentality is dominated by a manichean allegory of white and black, good and evil, salvation and damnation, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, self and other, subject and object)' (e.i.o.). To his list of binaries, we merely need to add master and slave, guard and prisoner, writing and orality. In *The Stone Country*, I feel that the dialectical tension between guard and prisoner is a surface phenomenon which the text deconstructs.

[4] Although I am here referring to Bakhtin's conception of the 'chronotope', as developed in *The Dialogic Imagination* (84), John Bender and David Wellbery, in their collection, *Chronotypes*: *The Construction of Time*, present a detailed introduction to research into narratives that focus on temporality. Inevitably, Husserl's phenomenological concepts and Paul Ricouer's *Temps et Recit*, among many others, are investigated.

[5] Nahem Yousaf, in *Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance* (2001), is exemplary in his avoidance of binarization in favour of more complicated narrative presentations. In his chapter on *The Stone Country* (71-89), he explicitly links the 'apartheid structures' and all facets of 'everyday life', including the prison experience (71).

[6] The distinction that Gerard Gennette makes between story, the chronological run of events in the real world and narrative, the shaping of those events into the form we read—regardless of temporal sequence or duration; and narration, the way in which the tenor of those events is relayed to us—is the relevant background for this use of the term. See Genette, *Figures III* (1972); see also the invaluable analysis of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, 'A Comprehensive Theory of Narrative: Genette's *Figures III* and the Structuralist Study of Fiction', in *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976), 33-62.

[7] All references to *The Stone Country* are from the Heinemann edition (1974).

[8] JanMohamed, referred to in note #3, is concerned with the dependency relationship inherent in relationships of duality. I am more concerned with the indeterminacy of the liminal space in between the opposed pairs.

[9] This point is extensively developed by J.J.T. Mkhize (1998) in his *Social Realism in Alex La Guma's Longer Fiction.*

[10] See, for example, Yousaf (2001: note 47, page 89) who points to Barbara Harlow's (1987:120) distinction between 'prison writing' and 'prison memoirs', in *Resistance Literature* (1987).

[11] Jacobs, in 'The Discourses of Detention' makes it clear that many of the most powerful of the autobiographical accounts surveyed in his essay do not provide 'the kinds of insights into the internal, organizational hierarchy necessary for survival in a penal world', nor do they probe 'the more problematic "grey" zones between gaolers and prisoners' (196).

[12] Jacobs puts it so: 'More than any other novelist working within the country Gordimer has concerned herself in her works with the theme of political imprisonment: *Burger's Daughter* is *the* fictional text dealing with imprisonment and life under surveillance in South Africa during the 60s and 70s; and in both *A Sport of Nature* and *My Son's Story* imprisonment for resistance to the apartheid regime is formative in the experience of main characters' (194). The problem lies in the fact that imprisonment is, in all three cases, functional rather than developed as a matrix apart from the needs of the formation of character. For example, in *Burger's Daughter*, the protagonist goes through a revelatory experience while in prison, but prison itself is not explored in ways which get beyond the trope of prison as potentially redemptive, and therefore romantically 'necessary'.

[13] As J.M. Coetzee (1992:378) notes in his comments on Breytenbach, *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* is relentlessly about not merely the prison, but Breytenbach himself: 'What is the difference, he asks himself, between the "true confession" he utters into a microphone in Palermo in 1983 (eventually to become this book) and the "true confession" the interrogators demanded in Pretoria in 1975? Are not both of them answers to the question "What is the truth of your mission to South Africa?" Before the interrogator, before the microphone, before the blank page, Breytenbach

finds himself in the same position, staring at himself. So he develops the mirror as the master metaphor of his book; and the most interesting passages are the dialogues he conducts with the figure in the mirror, which is variously the cruel interrogator, the "true" Breytenbach, and the dark brother-African'.

[14] JanMohamed lists the novels and publications: '*A Walk in the Night* (1962) was published in Nigeria, *And a Threefold Cord* (1964) and *The Stone Country* (1967), in Berlin, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (1973), in New York, and *Time of the Butcherbird* (1981), in London' (226). It seems noteworthy that the publications cycle in from the margins of the colonial world to the metropolis, eventually filtering back to the 're-incorporated' (post-apartheid) margins of South Africa.

[15] The literary naturalism to which I refer is particularly appropriate to *The Stone Country* if not to all other La Guma texts. However, La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* and some of his short stories are consistent with Zola's preface to his own *Therese Racquin* (1867), where clinical detachment and a dissection of the squalid lives of members of the lowest underclass combine with an overpowering sense of the juggernauts that control lives. Still, characters can express hope even in the face of overwhelming odds. However, some critics, such as Jabulani Mkhize (1998:151, 159) insist that 'La Guma dismisses any naturalistic reading of [*And a Threefold Cord*] …. [and in *The Stone Country*] George Adams rejects a naturalistic, fatalistic and idealistic explanation of human fate …'. I submit that human agency and the hope that struggle engenders are not mutually exclusive of a Naturalistic view of the world. Yousaf (2001: 80f) seconds the notion that persistence 'against all odds' is an Althusserian possibility.

[16] As a representative comment on the rhetorical usage of the passive voice, see Coetzee's (1980a; 1980b) 'The Agentless Sentence as Rhetorical Device' and 'The Rhetoric of the Passive in English' respectively. In his collection of essays, *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee (1992:149) cites Ian Watt's conception of the passive voice: 'Passives … contribute to texts "many of the verbal and syntactic qualities of abstract discourse; of expository rather than narrative prose"'. This connects with the observation, above, that La Guma is using a socially realistic conception of narrative discourse. Further, Coetzee, in summarizing Roger Fowler, analogizes the

condition of the prisoner we have located: 'By affecting the focus of a sentence, the active form can consolidate the superficial subject as "hero" where the passive would consolidate the subject as "sufferer". If the agent is systematically deleted 'the impression would be given of a central participant "to whom things happened"—as opposed to "who had things done to him"' (150). Coetzee also warns against the "naïve direction", whereby one posits a direct and "necessary relationship between the syntactic pattern and its interpretation" …. The naïve step is to argue for a neat mapping from syntactic form to meaning. A more fruitful question to ask instead is whether a given form can accommodate *any* given meaning, and, if not (as seems likely), what the *range* of meanings is that a given form accommodates in practice' (148f). The point I wish to make in calling attention to the passive form is its deferral of the active agent, the 'range' of possible sites of power, and the narrative logic of the text's display of the passive in a text where, superficially, prisoner agency is absent in the face of a depersonalized system.

[17] See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Can The Subaltern Speak?' (in Nelson 1998).

[18] The long tradition of a romantic vision of the prisoner, especially in the French literary tradition, is surveyed by, among others, deWitt (1985); Davies (1990); and Auerbach (1996).

[19] See Abrahams (1985) and Mkhize (1998) for a summary of the critical discussion of La Guma's use of weather as a leitmotif in his fiction.

[20] In the sense that A.J. Greimas (1971) uses the term. An actant is a structural element with functional existence.

[21] Mkhize (1998: 147-165) surveys the criticism of La Guma's work in *And A Threefold Cord* and *The Stone Country*, highlighting those critics, such as Abdul JanMohammed, who disagree over the degree to which George Adams, and other La Guma protagonists, are social activists.

[22] Ioan Davies (1990:10f) gives an extended treatment of the carnivalesque nature of prison, using Bakhtin extensively. He also highlights several core distinctions between a facile assumption of the trope of 'prison as parodic reality': 'Prisons anywhere do not offer a time-limited event in which the carnival parodies extra-carnival life. For prisoners the "carnival" is an episode in which the external power implodes, and the play one in which all

prisoners are compelled to become actors …. prison culture is not festive and displays no laughter …. In fact, prison culture is the exact obverse of the carnivalesque: there is little or no spontaneity in the ritual, the social hierarchy is tightened, not relaxed, and if identities are sometimes played with, they are more often negotiated. But the prison culture is in another sense a culture that is set apart from everyday culture, establishing a creative, experiential scheme in dealing with its everyday world'.

Nahem Yousaf (2001:76-80) extends Davies' usage of the prison carnivalesque in his *Alex La Guma: Politics and Resistance*, where he pithily captures Foucault's essence of the 'machinery' of imprisonment insofar as it is related to the Apartheid regime. However, more than one critic has taken exception to the ascription of 'carnivalesque' to any but the most thinly described of phenomena: 'Terry Eagleton, for example, expresses a strong skepticism toward the subversive potential of Bakhtin's carnival, pointing out that carnival is 'a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art' (Walter 148). In addition, Bakhtin's apparent treatment of the carnival as an unequivocal image of emancipation seems to ignore the important fact that carnivalesque violence was often directed not at official authority but precisely at the kinds of oppressed and marginalized groups that would presumably be liberated by carnivalesque subversion of authority' (see Booker 1996: 107).

It is in the sense of this 'darker' side of the Bakhtinian carnival, as Bernstein calls it in *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* (1994), that I use the term.

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Orality and the South African Short Story: Es'kia Mphahlele's 'Mrs Plum'

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In her study of the works of Es'kia Mphahlele, Ursula Barnett quotes a letter to her from the author in which he remarks that 'Mrs Plum' was 'the best thing I ever pulled off'. It is certainly Mphahlele's most widely discussed and anthologised story, and justifiably so: it is an acute and subtle interrogation of white liberalism in South Africa by a black narrator whose steady growth in knowledge and understanding allows her to prise apart the liberal ideology of her employer and to expose the hypocrisy and injustice that it contains.

'Mrs Plum' is narrated by Karabo, a black woman in her early twenties, and the chief focus of the narrative is what Karabo experiences in her three-year stint as a domestic worker for Mrs Plum. Mrs Plum lives in Greenside (which signifies 'wealthy Johannesburg northern suburbs') and, in the words of Karabo, 'love[s] dogs and Africans and said that everyone must follow the law even if it hurt' (Mphahlele 1967: 164). These are the story's opening lines, and already we are made aware of Mphahlele's satirical intent (note the order of 'dogs and Africans …').

Karabo hails from Phokeng near Rustenburg and has come to the big city to find work. Part one of the story provides an overview of the life of black domestic workers, their worries and delights, and their relationships with their madams. Part two takes a closer look at Mrs Plum. Mrs Plum is a classic northern suburbs liberal: she insists on calling Karabo by her African name; she also encourages her to read and generally to improve herself. But her concern for Karabo inevitably becomes a form of bullying manipulation:

she knows what is best for her servant, and will insist that she follow the prescribed course of improvement.

Karabo's relationship with Kate (Mrs Plum's daughter, who is the same age as Karabo) is a little more open and equal, until they become rivals for the affections of the same man (but this only comes a little later). A few pages into the story, the following revealing exchange occurs between the two young women:

> …. Kate tells me plenty of things about Madam. She says to me she says, My mother goes to meetings many times. I ask her I say, What for? She says to me she says, For your people. I ask her I say, My people are in Phokeng far away. They have got mouths, I say. Why does she want to say something for them? Does she know what my mother and what my father want to say? They can speak when they want to (168).

A little further on, Kate describes to Karabo how the women of the Black Sash protest outside government buildings:

> Kate also told me she said, My mother and other women who think like her put on black belts over their shoulders when they are sad and they want to show the white government they do not like the things being done by whites to blacks. My mother and the others go and stand where the people in government are going to enter or go out of a building.
>
> I ask her I say, Does the government and the white people listen and stop their sins? She says, No. But my mother is in another group of white people.
>
> I ask, Do the people of the government give the women tea and cakes? Kate says, Karabo! How stupid; oh!
>
> I say to her I say, Among my people if someone comes and stands in front of my house I tell him to come in and I give him food. You white people are wonderful. But they keep standing there and the government people do not give them anything (16f).

So, very early on, then, Karabo shows her mettle: she debunks the classic liberal folly of believing that merely protesting to an inhuman and intransigent government will produce results; and she also implicitly criticises a society that believes itself to be superior to black culture, but that does not observe even the simplest of courtesies—that does not, in other words, treat people with respect. It is her very naïveté that proves most devastating: her frank rebuttals to Kate's and Mrs Plum's attempts to educate her are both funny and highly effective. At one point Mrs Plum objects to her addressing the gardener, Dick, as 'boy':

> Now listen here, she says, You Africans must learn to speak properly about each other. And she says White people won't talk kindly about you if you look down upon each other (171);

to which Karabo promptly replies: 'Madam, I learned the words from the white people I worked for' (171).

Part three deals with Karabo's participation in the activities at the Black Crow Club, where she learns sewing and knitting—and politics . . . courtesy of the real-life Lilian Ngoyi. At this point in Karabo's gradual progress towards awareness she observes: 'I was learning. I was growing up' (175). This forms a refrain in the story, and points to the story's status as a *bildungsroman* (a work charting the growth and development of its main character).

Part four is by far the longest part of the story and presents the various crises that begin occurring. Dick has the onerous task of seeing to Mrs Plum's two dogs (Monty and Malan), and is resentful at having to treat the animals as if they were human beings. Later, when a scare breaks out in the neighbourhood about servants poisoning the dogs of their employers, he is summarily dismissed by Mrs Plum. Karabo herself has a series of disillusioning experiences. She and Kate both fall in love with a black doctor who is one of Mrs Plum's guests; this comes to nothing, but the experience leaves Karabo deeply resentful at Kate's presumption in dating and wishing to marry a man in order, she says, to 'help him' (186). Karabo's inward response is to think, 'these white women, why do not they love their own men and leave us to love ours!' (184).

Karabo becomes more and more disenchanted. Seeing Dick cleaning the dirt out of Mrs Plum's bath one day, she thinks: '*Sies!* …. Why cannot people wash the dirt of their own bodies out of the bath?' (194). And when, in that infamous moment in the story, she peeps through the keyhole and sees Mrs Plum engaged in what appears to be a bestial action with one of her dogs, her disenchantment is complete. Shortly after this, Mrs Plum refuses to give her leave to be with her family upon the death of her uncle, and Karabo decides to leave her service for good. However, a week after Karabo has come back to her parents' home, Mrs Plum herself arrives in Phokeng to attempt to persuade her to return. Karabo manages to exact a pay-rise from her and better leave arrangements, and the story ends in the following way:

> The next day she found me packed and ready to return with her. She was very much pleased and looked kinder than I had ever known her. And me, I felt sure of myself, more than I had ever done.
>
> Mrs. Plum says to me, You will not find Monty and Malan.
>
> Oh?
>
> Yes, they were stolen the day after you left. The police have not found them yet. I think they are dead myself.
>
> I thought of Dick … Could he? And she … did this woman come to ask me to return because she had lost two animals she loved?
>
> Mrs. Plum says to me she says, You know, I like your people, Karabo, the Africans.
>
> And Dick and Me? I wondered (208).

So, in one sense, the story ends where it began—certainly as far as Mrs Plum is concerned: she loves dogs and Africans—in that order, and according to her lights. However, for Karabo, the experience has given rise to immense personal growth. In three years she has grown from a state of ignorance about white people and their ways, to one in which their worst aspects have been revealed. She will return to this world, but on her own terms, and older and wiser.

'Mrs Plum' has been commented on fairly extensively—most notably by Norman Hodge and Damian Ruth. At the opening of 'Mrs Plum', Hodge comments,

> Karabo is cast as a seemingly naïve narrator, unconscious of what she is saying or thinking. Yet the reader soon realizes Mphahlele's mastery of narrative voice: he is able to show a character coming into contact with an unfamiliar environment, gradually learning about it, and at the same time, he uses Karabo's reactions as a means of illustrating some of the absurdities in South African white social protest (Hodge 1981: 34).

Here the distinction that can be drawn in this sort of story between the 'narrating I' and the 'experiencing I' is useful: the 'narrating I' is the narrative agency in the story, the 'voice' we hear relating the events of the story; the 'experiencing I' is the persona whose experiences over some three years make up the substance of the story. In 'Mrs Plum' we witness the gradual convergence of the two towards the story's end, as the initially naïve and inexperienced protagonist moves ever closer to the position occupied by the older and wiser narrator.

In his article, Ruth explores the story in relation to three others that, he argues, 'prefigure' it ('We'll Have Dinner at Eight', 'The Living and the Dead', and 'The Master of Doornvlei'). Ruth argues that Hodge 'makes too great a claim for Karabo: we do not at the end of the story have a character with 'a total awareness of self'' (Ruth 1986: 65). Nonetheless, he agrees that the story has the qualities of a *bildungsroman* and points to its emphasis on the enlarged understanding of its protagonist:

> it is specifically a story of how a black South African maid develops to a point where she sees through a white liberal madam and comes to a particular understanding of her socio-economic position in the society she enters (65).

At the end of the story, he concludes, 'Karabo opts for manipulating the oppressive structural expression of the relationship' with Mrs Plum: 'Karabo certainly has grown up and learnt; Mrs Plum obviously hasn't' (88).

I would endorse Ruth's analysis: Mphahlele is too canny to present the unsophisticated Karabo as having the insight necessary to dissect the world of white liberalism in clinical intellectual terms. Mphahlele knows that such a perspective would strain the credulity of the reader. What we

have, instead, is a situation expressed succinctly by Hodge in the first of his remarks quoted above (it is worth repeating):

> the reader soon realizes Mphahlele's mastery of narrative voice: he is able to show a character coming into contact with an unfamiliar environment, gradually learning about it, and at the same time, he uses Karabo's reactions as a means of illustrating some of the absurdities in South African white social protest (Hodge 1981: 34).

Both Hodge and Ruth have provided thorough and convincing readings of the story, and I do not want to go over the ground they so competently cover. However, there is one aspect of the story that has not received a great deal of attention, and it is this aspect that, I believe, makes the story so successful—Mphahlele's skilful use of *narrative voice*. He uses a first-person narrative point of view and filters the events of the story through the consciousness of his central character, so that we see these events through her eyes. The fact that Karabo is not a sophisticated, self-aware narrator makes her narrative all the more compelling. The purpose of the story is to probe at, and reveal, the contradictions of white liberalism in South Africa under apartheid, and Karabo does this extremely effectively. It is her very naïveté that makes her debunking of white liberalism so trenchant—and funny, to boot.

Let us look a little closer at Mphahlele's use of narrative voice. In the passages from the story I quoted earlier we can see examples of Mphahlele's adroit use of rhetorical devices that serve to *locate* the narrative voice ('I say to her I say …'; 'Kate also told me she said …'; 'I ask her I say …'). This verbal tic, which is a skilful way of reminding us that we are listening to the voice of a narrator, is supplemented by an abundance of other idiomatic expressions: 'That day I was as angry as a red-hot iron when it meets water' (164); 'I do not know what runs crooked in the heads of other people' (168); 'our food … is [s]o nice that it does not stop in the mouth or the throat to greet anyone before it passes smoothly down' (171); 'We walked in with slow footsteps that seemed to be sniffing at the floor' (187).

Karabo is a 'spy in the house of white South African liberalism,' and we are made privy to her discoveries via Mphahlele's use of narrative voice. Karabo becomes our eyes and ears, and her very forthrightness and

simplicity make her a believable witness. A third-person narrative point of view, with its customary detachment and distance, would not have served the purpose nearly as effectively. To be sure, the story itself is strong and memorable. But it is the way it is *told*—its use of idiomatically rich first-person narration—that makes it so entertaining, and, of course, *effective* as a piece of satirical fiction.

I wish to end by locating Mphahlele's masterpiece in a larger context. I have for some time been absorbed by the question of the relationship between oral and written forms in the South African short story. My fascination with the work of Herman Charles Bosman, in particular, led me far back into the early nineteenth century in pursuit of early models for his 'oral-style stories,' which is the term I believe most aptly characterises a narrative technique in which the cadences and styles of oral speech are simulated in written stories. I have traced the roots of this style of story to the 1840s, when Cape periodicals began to publish stories cast in the form of oral narratives[1]. And then there is a century-long tradition of oral-style stories that follows. From writers like Drayson, writing in the 1860s, through Scully, FitzPatrick and Glanville in the late nineteenth century, and Gibbon and Pauline Smith in the first few decades of the twentieth century, Bosman inherited a rich local tradition of oral narrative, which he blended with the influence of the American humorous tradition (Twain, Leacock, and Harte, among others)[2].

However, after Bosman this style of story goes into sharp decline and surfaces only sporadically, and in substantially altered form, mainly in the work of black writers in the modern era. The post-war South African short story by whites—led by writers like Gordimer, Lessing, Jacobson, Cope and Paton—is predominantly social-realist in nature, typically focuses on the inner consciousness of a single protagonist, and is highly compressed in

[1] Two examples are an anonymous story entitled 'My Uncle's Tale', which appeared in *The Cape of Good Hope Literary Magazine* in 1848, and a story by one H. van P1aaks *(pseud.* C.A. Fairbridge), called 'Dirk van Splinter, a Legend of the Devil's Peak', which appeared in the same magazine in the same year.

[2] For an analysis of this tradition of story in South African literature, see Pereira (1986) and MacKenzie (1993; 1995; 1999).

form. It conforms, in other words, to the requirements of the modern short story. The broad development of the (overwhelmingly white) South African short story from its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century to the stage it has reached in the present day, then, can be characterised as a steady and irreversible progression from fireside tale (or what I have called the oral-style story) to modern short story.

When one turns to the short story by black South African writers, however, this progression from fireside tale to modern short story (which brings with it the decline of stories written in an oral style) is to some extent reversed: from an initial reliance on Western modernist literary models in emergent black South African fiction in the late 1920s, many black writers sought increasingly to throw off Western influence and adopt African (largely oral) cultural modes. So while short stories by white writers evince a marked decline in oral influence in the post-war period, in the same period black South African writers were just beginning to rediscover their cultural roots. Prior to this, the tendency to mix cultural traditions was already evident in black short fiction (in R.R.R. Dhlomo, for instance), but this tendency gained impetus later, and is to be found chiefly in the writing of the 1970s and 1980s: short stories by A. C. Jordan, Bessie Head, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Mbulelo Mzamane, Mothobi Mutloatse, Joel Matlou and Njabulo Ndebele all bear the traces of such cultural 'hybridity.'

However, the convention of the frame narrative and the use of an intradiegetic storyteller figure in the South African short story occur very seldom after Bosman. Instead, what we find in the work of those writers attempting to adopt an 'oral style' in the modern era is the assumption by the author of the role and function of the oral storyteller. Instead of employing the convention of the internal narrator and frame narrative, the writer him- or herself takes on this narrative voice. 'The Writer as Storyteller?' is the title of Michael Vaughan's paper (1988) on Ndebele, and it aptly captures the nature of this phenomenon. In different ways various black writers (Head, Matshoba and Ndebele in particular) attempt to cast their stories in an oral style and they do this by assuming the mantle of the traditional oral storyteller.

In very few cases, however, is an oral style adopted as the *mode* in which their stories are narrated. Their stories, in other words, do not employ a storyteller figure and the cadences of oral speech—and thus the link with

the earlier oral-style tradition is tenuous. Interestingly, Mphahlele himself remarks on the paucity of oral-style stories in black South African writing: '"Mrs Plum" is an attempt to record African speech rhythms and African speech idiom in English. To my knowledge there aren't many ... black writers who try to do this ...' (Mphahlele 1987: 31). More frequently (and most conspicuously in the case of Ndebele), oral cultural modes and values are merely *thematised:* they form a significant part of the subject-matter of the stories without fundamentally affecting the manner in which the stories are told.

Mphahlele's 'Mrs Plum' is one of the few exceptions to this rule. In this story, as we have seen, Mphahlele uses a first-person narrator and the cadences of oral speech. This narrative device brings the reader very close to the narrator and her experiences. Indeed, it allows the reader to inhabit Karabo's very consciousness, as it were—and it is this technique that makes the story so effective.

To my knowledge, Mphahlele did not repeat this technique in later stories—and, still more surprising, few writers after him made use of the rich legacy of the oral traditions of Africa in the narrative style of their stories. We can only wonder what other stories Karabo might have told us.

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Conflicts and Invisibility in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

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> I am an invisible man …. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me …. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me (Ellison 1965:7).

This opening statement has gained the same auspicious notoriety of Herman Melville's 'Call me Ishmael'. Its timbre has resonated around the world, carrying with it the longings of a generation struggling against the 'fragmenting, life-denying, de-humanizing conditions' (Wright 2003:178) that seek to deny their existence. As Ellison's protagonist explains:

> You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful (Ellison 1965:7).

This essay will examine the web of worldliness investigated by Ralph Ellison in his seminal text *The Invisible Man*. Discussing, distorting and disseminating the concept of invisibility in 1950's America, Ellison both taunts and cajoles the reader to discover the cloak of invisibility that has covered African Americans through societal indifference, intolerance and ambition.

Since the anger and anguish of the alienated African American is not limited to the North American continent, this study readily bridges the Black Atlantic providing interesting and informative connections to the disenfranchised on our continent.

The Times reported that Ellison's text 'brought African-American experiences vividly into the literary mainstream and spurred a renaissance that continues to this day'. This comment is not unlike the response received by African writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele and Bessie Head who tore aside the veil that hid the life sores of Africanness inflicted by the distancing discourse of the white proletariat. Like Mphahlele and Head, Ellison fights his invisibility with his pen.

Ellison's protagonist recounts the transition from naïve southern youth to embittered northern liberationist, the personal journey from sightlessness to internal revelation, the pilgrimage from innocent people pleasing to mature destiny-driven determinism. His collision with a world that doesn't want to acknowledge his existence and the incumbent bruises, blackouts and blind rages drive him to inward harbours of isolation.

The cataclysmic conclusion created by the Harlem riot illustrates the boiling point reached when humanity's participants attempt to live in a world scratched raw by conflicting ideologies and forced invisibility.

Although Ellison insisted that *The Invisible Man* was not autobiographical, there exist many similarities between the author and his protagonist, self-titled 'Jack-the-Bear'. Ellison was born in 1913 as Europe was entering its devastating First World War, and America was gaining momentum as a significant economic and intellectual source of power and prominence, yet still scarred by their virulent history of slavery and its unsuccessful programme of Reconstruction. His grandparents were slaves who sloughed off the shackles of bondage for the hope of sharecropping and fed their children with the ripe promises of freedom and self-determined destinies. Likewise Ellison's parents determined that their children would escape the poverty and prejudice that ruled their lives. To illustrate their vision of a brighter future, Ellison's father named him after the influential writer Ralph Waldo Emerson to project upon his young son the possibilities of profound intellectualism and independent identity. Buoyed by the significance of this moniker, Ellison dreamed of becoming a 'Renaissance Man' enthusiastically developing his gifts in music and literature. His

fortitude earned him a music scholarship at the prestigious Booker T. Washington Tuskegee Institute of Alabama, but his financial limitations required that he hobo his way there by jumping trains.

Alabama proved to be a stifling world apart from the openness of the Oklahoman territory of his birth. Schooled and experienced in the cultural integration of Oklahoma where he lived in blended unity and understanding with Native Americans, Jews, whites and blacks, he recalls his non-segregated youth in *Shadow and Act*: 'At the time we were living in a white middle-class neighbourhood, where my mother was custodian for some apartments …' (Wright 2003:178). There he developed a firm friendship with another boy who shared his love for radios and mechanics, colour a non-issue. He recalls: 'but knowing this white boy was a very meaningful experience. It had little to do with the race questions as such, but with our mutual loneliness' (Wright 2003:179).

In the famous all-black Institute race didn't speak differences, but money screamed it. Ellison was shocked at the class consciousness that separated the financially secure from the economically desperate at the Institute. His frantic need to fit in and appear more than his pocketbook allowed is witnessed in a letter he wrote to his mother Ida complaining about his shoddy appearance: 'You know I travel with the rich gang here and this clothes problem is a pain' (Als 2007:5). This distaste for poverty is echoed in a 1964 interview:

> As a kid I remember working it out this way: there was a world in which you wore your everyday clothes on Sunday, and there was a world in which you wore your Sunday clothes every day. I wanted [that world] because it represented something better, a more exciting and civilized and human way of living …. I sometimes [glimpsed this world] through the windows of the great houses on Sunday afternoons when my mother took my brother and me for walks through the wealthy white sections of the city…and for me none of this was hopelessly beyond the reach of my Negro world, really; because if you worked and you fought for your rights, and so on, you could finally achieve it. This involved our American Negro faith in education, of course, and the idea of self-cultivation (Als 2007:5).

The polarity Ellison felt existed between black and white pocketbooks is evidenced in this section from *Invisible Man*:

> I looked for the counterman, seeing him serving a plate of pork chops and grits to a man with a pale blond moustache, and stared; then I slapped the dime on the counter and left, annoyed that the dime did not ring as a loud as a fifty-cent piece (Ellison 1965:147).

Ellison further argued in his book titled *Going for the Territory* that "the mystique of wealth is intertwined with the American mysteries of class and color" and that "the little man endures with a certain grace the social restrictions that limit his own mobility" (Ellison 1986:13-14).

The scourge of financial insecurity would change his life again (and ours) when his dream of an upwardly mobile education was cut short after his scholarship at Tuskegee was withdrawn, but not before English instructor MD Sprague inspired him to consider literature as a lyrical art form and introduced him to the anguished tragic heroes of Dostoevsky and Hardy, figures that he would craft in his own novel. His time at Tuskegee shaped the Southern college of the *Invisible Man* peopled with the Dr. Bledsoe's and Mr. Norton's of his own experiences whose falsehood and pretence inflame his main character. Their masked sightlessness filled his mind and mouth with bloody spittle similar to that which threatened to overwhelm the young invisible man after he was forced to box his schoolmates blindfolded for a pitiful offering thrown on an electrified rug. But like his protagonist Ellison travelled north with high hopes of success.

Arriving in New York's Harlem, Ellison fortuitously met influential black poet Langston Hughes whose generosity in developing young talented African American writers was renowned. This connection led to an introduction to Richard Wright who offered important writing opportunities to Ellison, like the Federal Writers Project which served as foundations for his text. Despite the Communist ideologies espoused by his new circle of friends, Ellison continued to drink in western literature, deeming Hemingway, not Wright, his literary father. Ellison raved about Hemingway's work and debunked Wright's significant influence in his literary development. He admired Hemingway '[n]ot because he was white, or more "accepted". But because he appreciated the things of this earth

which I love and which Wright was too driven or deprived or inexperienced to know …. But most important because Hemingway was a greater artist than Wright, who although a Negro like myself, and perhaps a great man, understood little if anything of these, at least to me, important things' (Als 2007:8). Ellison completely dismissed Wright when he later wrote: 'No, Wright was no spiritual father of mine, certainly in no sense I recognize …. I simply stepped around him' (Als 2007:7). He sniffed at the notion that being black meant writing black. 'Ellison never believed that blackness alone—its voice, its culture, its symbols, and its myths, was literary enough for a novel' (Als 2007:8) and criticized those 'who urge the Negro writer to keep to Negro themes and ideals' (Boyagoda 2007:93). By not adopting 'a minority tone', Ellison taps into the core of the universal Everyman and 'establish[es] a true middle-of-consciousness for everyone' (Als 2007:3).

> Where on earth did the notion come from that the world, and all its art, has to be reinvented, recreated, every time a Black individual seeks to express himself? (Allen 2007:26).

His acerbity became sharper, perhaps intimating about Wright who emigrated to Paris in 1946:

> So many of them talk and act like sulking children and all they can say about France with its great culture is that it's a place where they can walk in any restaurant and be served. It seems rather obscene to reduce life to such terms (Allen 2007:26).

Although Ellison would, for many years, surround himself with a cluster of wealthy white philanthropists and was notorious for his unwillingness to nurture young black artists, he never denied his African American heritage, peppering his text with 1950's black vernacular. In fact, he highlighted the essence of his planned masterpiece thus:

> The invisible man will move upward through Negro life coming into contact with its various forms and personality types; will operate in the Negro middle class in the left-wing movement and descend again into the disorganized atmosphere of the Harlem underworld. He will

> move upward in society through opportunism and submissiveness. Psychologically he is a traitor, to himself, to his people and to democracy and his treachery lies in his submissiveness and opportunism (Allen 2007:28).

Frantz Fanon's superb works *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin White Masks* (1952) encapsulate Ellison's images of distorted identities and disenfranchisement. Fanon explains it aptly:

> A normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world (Fanon 2004:463).

He continues:

> The Negro is unaware of it as long as his existence is limited to his own environment; but the first encounter with a white man oppresses him with the whole weight of his blackness (Fanon 2005:466).

The existential search for identity and meaning, often leading to a terrifying abyss of confusion and uncertainty, are the universal themes that Ellison tackles. Given the resultant flight or fight principle, Ellison creates a character whose barely controlled anger and aggression somewhat mirrors his own. Bitterness and contempt blaze through his pen. Norman Mailer describes Ellison as 'a hateful writer', explaining that reading his work 'is like holding a live electric wire in one's hand. But', he suggests, 'Ralph's mind, fine and icy, tuned to the pitch of a major novelist's madness, is not always adequate to mastering the forms of rage, horror, and disgust which his eyes have presented to his experience' (quoted in Allen 2007:25).

This uncontrolled frenetic anger is gruesomely described in the Prologue when a white man accidentally bumps Ellison's main character. Instead of apologizing for the innocent tap, the man curses him. The Invisible Man lashes out demanding an apology, but the insolent man continues to struggle and curse.

> *I kicked him repeatedly, in a frenzy because he still uttered insults*

> *though his lips were frothy with blood. Oh Yes, I kicked him! And in my outrage I got out my knife and prepared to slit his throat, right there beneath the lamplight in the deserted street, holding him by the collar with one hand, and opening the knife with my teeth—when it occurred to me that the man had not seen me, actually; that he, as far as he knew was in the midst of a walking nightmare! And I stopped the blade, slicing the air as I pushed him away …. He lay there, moaning on the asphalt; a man almost killed by a phantom. It unnerved me. I was both disgusted and ashamed …. Poor blind fool I thought with sincere compassion, mugged by an invisible man* (Ellison 1965:8).

Yet Ellison would argue that the mush of mankind is all lost in a void desperate for meaning and understanding:

> Thus one of the greatest jokes in the world is the spectacle of the whites busy escaping blackness and becoming blacker every day, and the blacks striving towards whiteness, becoming dull and grey. None of us seems to know who he is or where he's going (Ellison 1965:465).

Ellison beats the drum for everyone, recording our chafing at injustice and our fury at undeserved rejection. The cloak of invisibility is thrown over his main character by white and black hands which equally pummel his fragile self. From the classmates who pound him in the makeshift boxing ring, to the drunken whites who orchestrate the mêlée, to Mr. Norton who seeks his peccadillo cravings, to Dr. Bledsoe who hands him the fatal exit letters, from the crazed foreman at Liberty Paints, to the glass-eyed Jack of the Brotherhood, from the crazed Ras who screams for his lynching, to the white thugs who force him down the manhole. Each carve out their pound of flesh. Everyone attempts to deny his existence and ignore his personhood. In fact it was Dr. Bledsoe, the black college director of whom he first writes: 'He passed without seeming to see me' (Ellison 1965:123). The metaphor of invisibility morphs into the image of blindness speckled throughout the text:

- The young invisible man's blindfolded boxing;

- The statue of the empty-eyed founder at Bledsoe's college who is holding a veil over a kneeling slave which begs the question is he removing the veil or placing it over his eyes, giving the impression of hoodwinking him;
- The blind guest speaker who recounts the brave exploits of the founder;
- The crazed doctor at the Southern bordello Golden Day who declares that blacks are zombies and sleepwalkers;
- Dr. Bledsoe's statement that the moon is like a one-eyed white man;
- The blood-shot eyes of doctors who perform an electrical lobotomy after the paint factory accident;
- The glass-eyed Brother Jack who sucks out his life and fills it with his own; and
- The self-professed nymphomaniac Sybil looking for a sensual black rapist.

The image of distorted vision is repeated throughout the text to illustrate that invisibility is created by a sightless society whose self-reflection is fragmented by gazing in a fractured mirror. People can't look out if they can't look in. As such, they attempt to cover their psychological nakedness with garments snagged from other's artificial and insincere projections. Ellison captures the image of impersonation when his character, desperate to escape Ras' goons, dons a hat and dark glasses and unknowingly becomes Rinehart, a smooth quasi-religious hustler. Throughout the text, the Invisible Man impersonates a host of people, subjugating his identity for another's:

- The obedient Southern black at school and college (How had I come to this? I had kept unswervingly to the path placed before me, had tried to be exactly what I was expected to be, had done exactly what I was expected to do—yet instead of winning the expected reward, here I was stumbling along, holding on desperately to one of my eyes (Ellison 1965:122,123);
- The union worker / non-union worker at Liberty Paints;
- The respectful son to Mary;
- The militant civil rights Brotherhood leader who adopts a new name and persona and feeds the hungry crowds with useless lies: 'The new

> suit imparted a newness to me. It was the clothes and the new name and the circumstances. It was a newness too subtle to put into thought, but there it was. I was becoming someone else' (1965:271);

- The hip-hop gangster and Amen-spewing preacher Rinehart: 'At the first hat shop I went in and bought the widest hat in stock and put it on. With this, I thought, I should be seen even in a snowstorm—only they'd think I was someone else' (1965:389). 'And now I sat breathless asking myself how Rinehart would have solved the problem of information' (Ellison 1965:412) 'In short, I tried to manage things as I imagined Rinehart would have done' (1965:415); and
- Sensual black entertainer (1965:419) that Sybil calls 'Enormous brute 'n boo'ful buck' (Ellison 1965:425).

Ellison personifies the 'treachery' of submissiveness and opportunism through the deathbed warning of the protagonist's grandfather. Although a quiet obedient labourer who overcame his bosses with humble servitude, his grandfather condemned himself as a 'traitor and a spy' and spoke 'of his meekness as a dangerous activity (Ellison 1965:18). The invisible man found he was carrying out his grandfather's advice involuntarily.

> To make it worse, everyone loved me for it. I was praised by the most lily-white men of the town. I was considered an example of desirable conduct—just as my grandfather had been. And what puzzled me was that the old man had defined it as treachery. When I was praised for my conduct, I felt a guilt that in some way I was doing something that was really against the wishes of the white folks, that if they had understood they would have desired me to act just the opposite, that I should have been sulky and mean, and that that really would have been what they would have wanted even though they were fooled and thought they wanted me to act as they did. It made me afraid that some day they would look upon me as a traitor and I would be lost. Still I was more afraid to act any other way because they didn't like that at all (Ellison 1965:18).

He was always seen as someone else, mistaken as the stereotypical reflection

of black America, their identity always rooted to the enslaved south. Scofield, a Harlem looter and shooter calls to the Invisible Man as they try to sprint away from the police: 'You know man, I think I seen you before somewhere. You ever was in Memphis' (Ellison 1965:444).

It is at the text's fiery conclusion, in the midst of the throbbing angry masses of the Harlem riots that the Invisible Man himself admits to his own blindness and namelessness (Ellison 1965:431, 436). 'Ahead I saw Dupre moving. He was a type of a man nothing in my life had taught me to see, to understand, or respect, a man outside the scheme till now' (Ellison 1965:440) and which he silently seems to add: 'A man like me.'

The veil has been over his eyes. He has heard voices, spoken the lingo, adapted the look and the act expected by both white and black society.

> I was pulled this way and that for longer than I can remember. And my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but my own. I have also been called one thing and then another while no one really wished to hear what I called myself. So after years of adopting the opinions of others I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man (Ellison 1965:462).

It is the riot that brings together for the Invisible Man a firm sense of who he is:

> knowing now who I was and where I was and knowing too that I had no longer to run for or from the Jacks and the Emersons and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine (Ellison 1965:450).

He is finally able to embrace his heritage as a black man and secure his meaningful place in American society.

Yet it is in the darkness of the underground, the accidental escape into the depths of the earth that light dawns, and a revelation of independent, self-hood breaks through. Facing and conquering the fear of darkness that has crippled him from his youth, the invisible man lights the warm womb of

a New York basement with 1369 lights and is reborn a new man. 'I love light …. Light confirms my reality, gives birth to my form' (Ellison 1965:10). The spiritual symbolism is irrefutable. He emerges from the darkness having discovered and made peace with himself and the fragmented world around him.

The brilliance of Ellison's text is irrefutable. Every page is rich with symbolism that drops readers into the *Alice and Wonderland* rabbit hole of critical personal and societal introspection, compelling readers to investigate and analyse their own identity and demanding that they smell the stench of death and spring (1965:468). We are all frightened by the darkness within and terrified by the red-hot spotlight of self-examination, but nevertheless Ellison takes us there and forces us to look.

In conclusion, *Invisible Man* is a universal text resonating with the disenfranchised ensnared by the artificiality of impersonal modern society. It speaks to the blindness and invisibility of human beings who clothe their nakedness by impersonating a counterfeit image of reality neon lit with false importance. Yet it is also a testament of African American dislocation and dismemberment, portioned out by the carving knife of white determinism and arrogant superiority. Ellison brilliantly bridges the bitterness and pain inherent in invisible 'men' of all ethnicities. Like a soap-box preacher, he calls to everyone to know thyself, to acknowledge and appreciate who, what and where they are, to sculpt their identity with their own hands and be content with what they have independently crafted, a world, the invisible man suggests, in which diversity offers infinite possibility and true health (Ellison 1965:464).

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On Teaching Poetry

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After English Class
Jean Little
I used to like 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'.
I liked the coming darkness,
The jingle of harness bells breaking … and adding to
…. the stillness,
The gentle drift of snow ….
But today, the teacher told us what everything stood for.
The woods, the horse, the miles to go, the sleep …
They all have 'hidden meanings'.
It's grown so complicated now that,
Next time I drive by,
I don't think I'll bother to stop.

As a Faculty of Education lecturer in the discipline of English I have had much cause for dismay in relation to students' analyses of poetry, and in what I have observed while on teaching practice visitations. When given an assignment that involves the analysis of a poem, few students seemed to have gained much from their school experience. Possibly the present matriculation mode of asking specific questions about a poem, rather than inviting comprehensive analysis, has led to this lack of competence. Teaching practice lessons are flawed in one or more of the following ways: (1) too abrupt a shift into teacher's questions. This is all the more glaring when the page on which a poem handout is printed also contains the

questions to be answered. In other words there is little chance for learners to have wholehearted contact with a poem in its own right without being immediately distracted by questions about it; (2) excessive contextualisation e.g. providing a vast amount of often unnecessary information about the life of a poet such as Yeats in order to prepare learners for, say, 'The Wild Swans at Coole'; (3) too sudden a leap into complex matter such as tone before more fundamental aspects have been unravelled; (4) perhaps worst of all, the tendency to seize individual words out of context, or to make lists of words garnered from various parts of the poem to make a point. A related and very frequent tendency is for students to seize on lines from various parts of the poem with little or no concern for the development of the poet's thought and feeling. It has therefore begun to seem to me that nothing short of a revolution in the teaching of poetry is called for. This paper is intended to be a kind of rallying cry for this revolution even if I have not succeeded here in offering a worthy new model.

What Joan Little's 'After English Class' (used above as a kind of epigram) makes me aware of principally is that a poem should be the centre of an active and enjoyable experience. Creating a sense of liveliness and variety is essential. So wherever possible, one should teach what one likes and enjoys. Of course at the senior levels one has to teach a set of listed poems, not all of which one specially cares for. What is also important is the teacher's personality and reading skill. Good reading comes from having thought intensely about the subject beforehand. When teaching poetry the focus should be POETRY. So, one should be careful not to allow historical background or other kinds of background to obtrude. Many opportunities for reaction should be encouraged; scope for the learners' full and active participation should be as essential in one's lesson planning as knowledge of the poet's life and knowledge of her/his period.

As with all subjects it is important to recognize the varying needs of different children. And the teacher needs to develop much sensitivity to students' language capacity. On the other hand, one needs to be ready to go beyond what the learners already like; they need, as often as possible, to be challenged. Of course one has to confront the aversion of some learners to poetry. It is not easy to find reasons for their dislike. Perhaps they just do not appreciate the ways in which poets recreate their experiences. Personally, I think it is more likely that they have been put off by some earlier teaching.

That is a recurrent problem for teachers in all subjects. In the course of this paper I offer various suggestions about trying to handle this problem which, if it involves several learners in your group and is not remedied, can result in wrecking a lesson.

One has to recognize that there are two main methods in the studying and teaching of poetry: critical and non-critical (analytical or non-analytical). But these do not have to be too rigidly kept apart. Probably it is best to avoid an analytical method in the foundation phase. But in the intermediate phase one can start to encourage a more critical awareness. This process should be steadily developed till by FET phase learners are able to engage meaningfully with analysis. At this stage I had best warn that in the suggestions for teaching poetry that follow, techniques will *not* be the main focus of my suggestions (though naturally one has to take them into account).

My intention in what follows is to give specific attention to the teaching of poetry at different levels. But I should like to emphasise that teachers in the more junior phases should take careful account of what I say about the more senior phases, and vice versa. I start deliberately with the junior phases and I would hope that, in this case, senior school teachers will take the opportunity to remind themselves how poetry is primarily to be enjoyed, not analysed. On the other hand, I believe that junior school teachers need to be fully aware of what lies ahead of their learners in terms of a more analytical engagement with poetry. So I would want to have all parts of this paper to be regarded as important by teachers of poetry at any level.

Let me start then by making some general points about what I would regard as important for a teacher's overall awareness of the exploration of poetry. First I must emphasise that there are no formulae for understanding a poem. One needs to know the main concepts and terms but when one faces a new poem it is actually important to let it 'take us over' in a way, and forget the concepts and categories for the time being. Let us allow 'Jazz-Snazzy and Hunny-Bunny' to take us over!:

Jazzy-Snazzy and Hunny-Bunny
Norman Silver

Here comes fresh
curly-pearly-twirly-whirly-hurly-burly-Shirley-girlie.
She hotfire and steamy-gleamy,

make boyhead go creamy-dreamy.

What fool this
hunky-chunky-spunky-monkey-flunky-punky-funky-junkie!
He original murky-jerky,
how I roast this quirky-turkey?

Delicious
rooty-sooty-fluty-cutie-snooty-tutti-frutti-beauty
Syrup smooth she inky-dinky,
twisty lemon slinky-kinky.

Why he look
stubby-chubby-pubby-grubby-clubby-rubby-dubby?
Fashion boy dress randy-dandy,
inside he empty andy-pandy.

For sure you
jolly-lolly-folly-dolly-holly-golly-polly-molly!
Pleasure we sticky-quickie,
ride goodstyle with tricky-dicky!

Me know you
scruffy-chuffy-huffy-puffy-gruffy-roughie-toughie!
Meat and muscle scrawny-brawny,
Billy goat grow horny-corny...

Cheap talk you
saggy-slaggy-braggy-naggy-faggy-draggy-shaggy-baggy!
Why nogood girl so boozy-choosy?
Your reputation woozy-floozy.

You one big
flappy-yappy-sappy-pappy-crappy-rappy-zappy-chappie!
Bibber loudmouth manky-swanky
pocket up your hanky-panky.

I hope you enjoyed this experience, and got thoroughly caught up in spontaneous response to the poem without any immediate thought of analysis. It is precisely this kind of free and open opportunity that we, as teachers, should offer our learners.

There is a need for general, open discussion of a poem to begin with. Any contributions are acceptable! But one needs equally well to discourage concerns with items such as sound effects and rhythm until the meaning has been fairly satisfactorily unravelled. Gradually one can build up with a class an awareness of the stages in the process of interpretation and evaluation. Random questioning should be avoided; careful advance preparation of questions is best. But in any case the poem should not be treated solely as a basis for questions. Furthermore, whatever questions one asks should always direct attention back towards the poem.

The vital aim is to induce students to ask questions themselves. So one must make sure to allow time for their questions. What is needed in any case is a constant interplay between response and analysis. At the higher levels it is important to stress how we are engaged in a **search** for meaning. Jonathan Culler, the structuralist critic, speaks of the 'drive to find meaning'. What I suggest, though, is that this search cannot be imposed; we need to create the right circumstances and mindset through which the desire to search for meaning will be a natural response.

I turn now to deal with what I call teacher's awareness, an awareness which does not need to differ much for teachers at whatever level. It is what they do with this awareness, and how their adaptations of it suit the needs of particular phases, that goes into the construction of lessons on poetry. In the material that follows on teachers' awareness, however, I shall assume that the teacher is making explicit use of these with a Senior or FET group.

After the stage of preliminary, free discussion, using only some prompting questions where necessary, there are two fundamental aspects that learners need to take into account: (1) what I refer to as the 'fictional situation of utterance', relying on Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (pp. 166-168)*;* and (2) the question of whether the speaker of the poem is first—or third-person. The 'fictional situation of utterance' may be more simply termed the 'fictional situation' and refers to the construct we make of the circumstances, and possibly narrative aspect of the poem. One also needs to be specially careful to decide whether the first-person speaker is likely to

be the poet himself or herself, or another person to whom the poet is giving a voice. For illustration let us consider two poems:

Boy on a Swing
Oswald Mtshali

Boy on a Swing
Slowly he moves
To and fro, to and fro
Then faster and faster
He swishes up and down.

His blue shirt
Billows in the breeze
Like a tattered kite.

The world whirls by:
east becomes west
north turns to south;
the four cardinal points
meet in his head.

Mother!
Where did I come from?
When will I wear long trousers?
Why was my father jailed?

Piano
D.H. Lawrence

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

One needs to be clear at the outset, before proceeding to any further kind of analysis or exploration, that in Mtshali's poem a boy is imagined in motion on a swing and that the speaker is not the boy himself, but a third person observer. In Lawrence's poem on the other hand we have a first-person speaker who imagines himself next to a woman playing a piano sonata. In this case one has no reason to suppose that the first-person speaker is not the poet himself. If one is unclear, confused or mistaken about these two basic aspects of a poem, the fictional situation and the speaker, little progress can be made in analysis.

Later one can use Culler's idea of a-temporality (*Structuralist Poetics*, pp. 165-166), to clarify how a poem differs from, say, a letter, or a report since it is not the 'record of an empirical speech act' (165). Of course there may be poems for which the term, 'fictional situation' does not seem quite appropriate, for example, if they are purely descriptive. By and large, however, the term should prove useful.

Also at the outset of more formal discussion, one should stress the expectation that a poem should be complete in itself, and that all aspects/parts of a poem should cohere to create an organic whole. Whatever categories, and order of categories one employs in trying to understand a poem, this is the overriding expectation—the unity of the poem. My impression is that learners are often given lists (some of them quite lengthy and in a rather arbitrary order) of technical terms or categories, and in this way the concept of unity is somehow bypassed or devalued. Intimately related to the question of the unity of the poem is the need to trace the development of the poet's thought and feeling over the entire course of the

poem. Teachers who encourage a line-by-line type of analysis have a misguided notion of development in mind. But most poems involve run-on lines (otherwise known as enjambment) so a rigid, line-by-line approach will generally prove artificial. The bizarre results of such training can usually be detected in the learner who, when reading a poem, pauses at the end of every line whether there is a full-stop present or not! Whether the poem is continuous or in stanzas one needs to stress the importance of observing how each part contributes progressively to the whole.

When learners feel secure about the fictional situation and the speaker, one could move on to consider aspects of the language used in the poem, especially major images and figures of speech. Some time will be needed to clarify just what an image is. Judging from students' initial responses when asked what an image is, I conclude that the majority of teachers talk of images as picture-painting through words. So one needs much counter-stress to emphasise that images are not merely pictures but may work on one or more of the senses. Apart from the conventional five senses there is also the kinetic sense to consider. What is crucial is to get learners to realize how images are *a way of expressing, highlighting, or exploring feelings/attitudes*. These two concerns—images and feelings or attitudes—should always be linked in teachers' discourse because the frequent tendency I have noted is for students to feel satisfied if they merely manage to point out an image.

But of course images often also involve figures of speech. Senior and FET learners need to know what the main figures of speech are: simile, metaphor, personification, oxymoron. Intermediate learners could engage with basic simile and metaphor. Perhaps metonymy and synecdoche could be included at Matriculation level. It would be almost a revolution if more teachers helped their learners to be aware that figures of speech, perhaps especially simile and metaphor, are our natural way of expressing emotion. Too often figures of speech come to be regarded as fancy poetic devices, having little to do with the world of everyday life.

In fact one needs to convince learners that we are always using figures of speech, that in fact we cannot communicate without them.

One should now be able to give some attention to typography or formal organisation. This will include concern with the arrangement of words in particular lines, as well as the division of the poem into lines (and

stanzas where relevant.) A structuralist exercise would help to begin with: take a piece of prose and write it out as if in verse. This piece can then be used to discuss the fallacy that if a piece of writing is written out in this way, then it is a poem. More is required than just the *appearance* or *typography*!

One needs also to distinguish between verse in metre and free verse, dismantling in the process, a favourite schoolchild fallacy viz. that free verse is devoid, not only of rhyme, but also of rhythm. It might be useful here to inform learners that free verse is a comparatively recent phenomenon, dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. One will need to demonstrate the difference between the carefully thought-out use of enjambment (or run-on lines) and the arbitrary divisions used in an artificially constructed adaptation from prose. When dealing with enjambment one needs to use the opportunity to correct any lapses into truncated line-by-line reading.

With regard to metre and rhythm there is no point in frightening or overwhelming learners or students. Somehow one needs find a mode of demonstration which will convince them that some scansion can be fun! To begin with one could use nursery rhymes, songs; or very short poems. It is important to stress that the best way to detect metre is by clapping or tapping out the stressed beats, as if one were keeping time to music. One might use the comparison of skeleton to flesh to help pupils grasp the difference between metre and rhythm respectively. On the other hand, if learners cannot cope with scansion, there is no point in labouring it. Mostly they are not expected to deal with it in examinations. Above all, it should not become an artificial activity that is separated from meaning. One could use a ridiculous example of a piece which has a wonderful metre though made up of nonsense words!

For senior and FET learners it is very useful to understand how iambic pentameter works. Perhaps one could take samples of particular lines to demonstrate what is meant by a foot, an unstressed and a stressed syllable, an iamb, and a pentameter. Transparencies of selected lines from Shakespeare plays could be used for this purpose. Filling in the stresses in colour above each syllable in a line is an effective device but one needs to shift from regular lines to some irregular ones. For such demonstrations it is imperative to do some practice in advance. If one fumbles and flusters while filling in the metre, one can hardly expect one’s learners to feel confident! If

one feels insecure one can always have the scansion itself entered in advance, although this is not quite so dramatically effective.

Some will wonder why I leave sound effects and rhyme so late in my account. The main reason is to offset the exaggerated emphasis too often given to these devices of form. What I notice too in the lists some teachers give their learners is how each kind of sound effect, i.e. alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia, is given almost equal status with figures of speech and imagery or overall structure. This seems to me very misplaced. For this reason I deliberately group sound effects together so that learners become accustomed to looking out for any of the different types, even of these in combination, rather than becoming obsessed with one of them (invariably alliteration). Rhyme too can become a purely mechanical hunting exercise, abstracted from meaning and feeling. In any case schoolchildren have often adopted the fallacy that poems and rhyme are inseparable. They need to be swiftly disabused of this error.

Having decided on the fictional situation and the speaker of the poem, attempted to clarify the way the poet's thought and feeling develop over the course of the poem, and given attention to relevant features of language and structure, one should be in a position with learners to work more intensely on the meaning or crux of the poem. One should try to get them to test various hypotheses and then see which fits best. I favour the use of the word, 'crux' because its brevity suggests the need to arrive at a reasonably concise formulation of meaning

One might try to get pupils to work out various hypotheses about the meaning of the poem, preferably ones that are suggested by themselves, and then to see which fits best. At all costs one needs to avoid the imposing of a meaning by the teacher, and worst of all the situation where the teacher decrees, 'but here is the deeper meaning'. This approach has created generations of school children who have no confidence in their ability to discover meaning for themselves, but always feel that the teacher will tell us the 'deeper meaning'. In any case one needs to stress that decisions about meaning should be regarded as provisional. Further study or analysis might lead one to modify or radically alter the interpretation reaches at a particular time.

Finally of course one cannot shirk the task of evaluation. Just as one cannot decide on meaning till one has engaged comprehensively with the

various aspects of the poem, so one cannot reach a decision about its quality till one is fairly sure of what it means. So what is important above all, then, is to get pupils to realize that there is a **process** involved in interpretation. Although there is no formula for 'getting it right', one can use the various stages outlined above as a kind of checklist:

- Have I considered the speaker and the fictional situation (is the concept of 'fictional situation' actually relevant in this particular case?);
- Have I looked sufficiently at the language?
- Have I looked at the form or organisation?
- Have I been aware of how the poet's thought and feeling develop over the course of the poem?
- Have I tried to grasp the overall unity and theme?
- Have I pondered on how much the poem means to me, how impressive or appealing or profound I find it?

A timely reminder! All that I have been saying has been concerned with what I call teacher's awareness. Just how much of this one would use in a particular lesson with a particular class is cause for reflection. I cannot sufficiently stress however that one's aim should always be that of facilitation to enable the learners to make the crucial discoveries for themselves. Of course a particular lesson might well be used to highlight a feature of analysis that the class keeps neglecting or just has not thought much about. Even so one might well find fairly unobtrusive ways for stirring in attention to this feature.

Next I would like to give separate attention to the teaching of poetry in the various phases, especially the more junior ones. This is not the moment for senior school teachers to switch off however. The examples I give are meant to renew enjoyment of poetry and to insist on the idea of a continuum between lower grade and higher material and approaches.

ECD/ Foundation Phase—strategies and Poems

In relation to this phase one needs to bear in mind that conscious criticism is unsuitable. Children at this age should read and enjoy poetry uncritically.

One needs to allow lots of opportunities for soundplay. In his book, *Teaching* Poetry, James Reeves notes the qualities that endear nursery rhymes to the young: vigorous and well-marked rhythm; concrete, familiar language; lots of sensory images; simple events or situations (p.30), and he points out sagely that there is no room in nursery rhymes for humanitarian sentiment (e.g. 3 Blind Mice!). The nursery rhyme world, he declares, has 'as its purpose the celebration of language' (31).

So one should use items in which sounds are prominent. As my example I take one of Reeeves's own poems, 'Cows'. For such a poem one can allocate parts as choral speech is highly suitable for this phase. But the experience should not be turned into old-style recitation! Such poems should not simply become vehicles for stunts or exhibition.

Cows
James Reeves

Half the time they munched the grass, and all the time they lay
Down in the water-meadows, the lazy month of May,
A-chewing,
A-mooing,
To pass the hours away.

'Nice weather,' said the brown cow.
'Ah', said the white.
Grass is very tasty.'
'Grass is all right'.

Half the time they munched the grass, and all the time they lay
Down in the water-meadows, the lazy month of May,
A-chewing,
A-mooing,
To pass the hours away.

'Rain coming,' said the brown cow.
'Ah,' said the white.
'Flies is very tiresome.'
'Flies bite'

Half the time they munched the grass, and all the time they lay
Down in the water-meadows, the lazy month of May,
A-chewing,
A-mooing,
To pass the hours away

'Time to go,' said the brown cow.
'Ah,' said the white.
'Nice chat.' 'Very pleasant.'
'Night.' 'Night.'

Half the time they munched the grass, and all the time they lay
Down in the water-meadows, the lazy month of May,
A-chewing,
A-mooing,
To pass the hours away

The following comments are to suggest what might be in one's mind as a teacher, not necessarily what one is actually going to say or teach. The poem involves imagined cow conversations. The repetitive phrasing, 'Half the time …' and 'all the time …' creates a drowsy effect to imitate the cows' contented, lazy chewing of the cud. This effect is also created by the long lines at the beginning of each stanza with their rather slow rhythm. The typography itself highlights the chewing, and then the cows' 'conversation'.

Dramatic and choral reading can also be engaging even when the sounds are not so important a feature, as e.g. in 'The Flattered Flying-fish'.

The Flattered Flying-Fish
E.V. Rieu

Said the Shark to the Flying-Fish over the phone:
'Will you join me to-night? I am dining alone.
Let me order a nice little dinner for two!
And come as you are, in your shimmering blue.'

Said the Flying-Fish: 'Fancy remembering me,
And the dress that I wore at the Porpoises' tea!'
'How could I forget?' said the Shark in his guile;
'I expect you at eight!' and rang off with a smile.

She has powdered her nose; she has put on her things;
She is off with one flap of her luminous wings.
O little one, lovely, light-heated and vain,
The Moon will not shine on your beauty again!

This poem is about a shark's cunning plan to make a meal of the flying-fish. From the title onwards the frequent alliteration helps to create a semi-comic atmosphere (f's; p's; l's). Visual imagery (as in 'shimmering blue' and 'luminous wings') helps one to imagine the scene. The poem is organized over three stanzas: the first stanza is the shark's proposal; the second stanza the flying-fish's reply; the last stanza the response of the flying-fish followed by the response of the third-person speaker (= poet?).

Older learners in foundation phase could be engaged in more concern with narrative development without becoming too analytical. So one might use 'The Flattered Flying-Fish' and ask questions (adapted here from Amy Davies' list in *How to Teach Poetry)* such as:

A: Fact-type Questions

- Who/ what is this story about?
- Does anyone know what a shark is like? Is it wise to go near a shark? Why not?
- Has anyone ever seen a flying-fish? (If not, tell the learners that it is an attractive fish that sometimes leaps out of the water and flies through the air before returning to the water.)
- What is the first thing the shark does?
- What does the shark ask the flying fish to do?
- What does he ask her to wear for dinner?
- He says something with 'guile' on the telephone. Does anyone know what 'guile' means?

- The poem is called ‘The Flattered Flying-Fish’. Does anyone know what ‘flatter’ means?
- Does the flying-fish accept the invitation?
- What does the flying-fish do next?
- What will never shine on her again?

B: Inference and Generalization-type Questions

- If the moon will never shine on the flying-fish again, what does this tell us?
- Why did the shark invite the flying-fish to dinner then?
- What does the word, ‘guile’, tell us about the shark?
- Why do you think the shark smiles as he hangs up the phone?
- Why does the flying-fish accept the invitation?
- How does the shark flatter her?
- What would have happened if the flying-fish had refused the invitation?
- What lesson do we learn from this situation?

Some lyrics with a mixture of sadness and humour are suitable for foundation phase learners. My favourite for this purpose is ‘The Hippopotamus’s Birthday’.

The Hippopotamus’s Birthday
E.V. Rieu

He has opened all his parcels
but the larges and the last;
His hopes are at their highest
and his heart is beating fast.
O happy Hippopotamus,
what lovely gift is here?
He cuts the string. The world stands still.
A pair of boots appear!

O little Hippopotamus,
the sorrows of the small!
He dropped two tears to mingle
with the flowing Senegal
And the 'Thank you' that he uttered
Was the saddest ever heard
In the Senegambian jungle
From the mouth of beast or bird.

The story is of a baby hippo who gets a gift he does not want. His attempt to appear grateful cannot hide his huge disappointment. The absurdity of the situation—a hippo with a present—is in itself very appealing. And the poet succeeds, through the contrast between the two stanzas, especially the shift from the exclamatory line, 'O happy hippopotamus', to 'O little hippopotamus' to evoke quite strong sadness and pity amidst the humour. One of the most effective devices in the poem is the pause in the middle of line 7 so that the reader is forced to pause with the little hippo, pent-up with eager hopes.

If things go well with a particular class, one might venture to offer more thought-provoking poems, even ones that begin to involve metapoetry (i.e. poetry about poetry) as in 'One that got away'.

One That Got Away
Julie Holder

Write a poem
About a lion they said,
So from memories
Of lions in my head
I wrote about
Tawny eyes and slashing claws,
Lashing tail and sabred jaws –
Didn't like what I had written
And begin to cross it out—
Suddenly with a roar of rage
It sprang from the cage of lines

On the page
And rushed away into the blue,
A wounded lion poem
Half crossed through!
It's one that got away
Haven't seen it to this day
But I carefully look,
In case it's crouching, growling,
Licking its wounds and waiting,
Under cover in the leaves
Inside some other book.

And here I sit
After all this time,
Still not having written
A poem about a lion.

Here the poet uses fairly strong *descriptive* images in the first part where the poet/child tells us about the poem he had written but did not like (look at lines 6 & 7). But when he evokes the moment of real inspiration, he relies instead on images of *action and sound*: see lines 10-11. What a clever use of pun in the phrase 'cage of lines'—this makes it seem that he has been almost taken over by a creative force from outside himself. In the rest of the poem the poet blends the image of a wounded lion with that of an unfinished, only partly achieved poem—so we have a 'wounded lion poem'! Free verse is used which enables the poet to give special force to those crucial lines, numbers 10 and 11.

Intermediate Strategies and Poems

The main work in this phase is to extend the range of appreciation, and increase the power of interpretation through speech. One can also take opportunities to initiate the rudiments of a critical or analytical approach.

So in this case, as an initial example, I have included a poem with more challenging imagery, the 'The Ballad of Red Fox'. Such a poem

provides opportunities for drawing attention to similes and metaphors, while leading learners to distinguish between them.

The Ballad of Red Fox
Melvin Walter la Follette

Yellow sun yellow
Sun yellow sun,
When, oh, when
Will red fox run?

When the hollow horn shall sound,
When the hunter lifts his gun
And liberates the wicked hound,
Then, oh, then shall red fox run.

Yellow sun yellow
Sun yellow sun,
When, oh, when
Will red fox run?

Through meadows hot as sulphur,
Through forests cool as clay,
Through hedges crisp as morning
And grasses limp as day.

Yellow sky yellow
Sky yellow sky,
How, oh, how
Will red fox die?

With a bullet in his belly,
A dagger in his eye,
And blood upon his red red brush
Shall red fox die.

The story poem, 'The Ballad of Red Fox', is based on three consecutive questions and answers as the poet traces the fox's fate. The short line stanzas pose the questions while the intervening ones with longer ones give the sad replies. *When* will red fox run? The cause is stated. *Where* will red fox run? An impression of the extensive landscape is given to emphasise the desperation and determination of the fox. *How* will red fox die? The horrific, unnecessary violence of his death is revealed. The image of the yellow sun is very effective though it is hard to say exactly why—maybe it works mainly as a colour contrast with the red fox. Also of course it's a colour of life and warmth whereas the poem moves relentlessly towards death.

It is also very likely that discussion of method (e.g. for dramatisation) may be the equivalent of indirect criticism. However, this should happen spontaneously so that learners are not made too self-conscious about what they are observing. On the other hand, there should be a place also for passive enjoyment. In other words, sometimes it is enough just to read poems to the class without exploiting the poems for any particular purpose. If the learners make comments, 'go with the flow' and just see what happens. They might actually learn more this way than otherwise.

With this phase I would make the most of opportunities to bring in poems that have distinctly moral concerns or leave one feeling somewhat uneasy such as 'The Turn of the Road'.

The Turn of the Road
James Stephens

I was playing with my hoop along the road
Just where the bushes are, when, suddenly,
I heard a shout.—I ran away and stowed
Myself beneath a bush, and watched to see
What made the noise, and then, around the bend,
A woman came.

She was old.
She was wrinkle-faced. She had big teeth.—the end
Of her red shawl caught on a bush and rolled

Right off her, and her hair fell down.—Her face
Was white, and awful, and her eyes looked sick,
And she was talking queer,

'O God of Grace!'
Said she, '*Where is the child?'* And flew back quick
The way she came, and screamed, and shook her hands!
… Maybe she was a witch from foreign lands!

In this first-person poem the speaker is very closely involved with the situation. For convenience' sake I shall assume that the speaker is male because the poet's name is male. Also I assume that the speaker is a child because of the first line: 'I was playing with my hoop along the road'. The speaker hides on hearing a shout. The next event is the appearance of the woman. But the puzzling aspects of the poem begin here because we are not sure whether it was this woman who shouted. She is described as strange and rather frightening. But her words are a further puzzle, and cause us to be troubled. Who is she referring to? Is the child she refers to the same as the speaker? Yet she could not have seen him because he had hidden before she came round the bend. Is she in fact a witch as the speaker suspects? Had she wanted to seize a child for her witchcraft? Or is there some painful human tragedy lurking here? Surely a witch would not have said, 'God of Grace'. So maybe the point of the poem is in fact the child speaker's misunderstanding or misinterpretation of this strange woman. Maybe the poet is trying to show how difficult it is for a child to grasp tragic circumstances. You may wish to draw attention to the fact that there *is* rhyme in this poem and that most of the lines are in iambic pentameter, That metre assists the imagery in preventing us from treating the poem at all lightly.

This poem and 'The Ballad of Red Fox' also offer helpful contrasting opportunities for enabling learners to perceive how poems are structured. But one should let this happen through their own exploration—ask learners to try to work out how the poems are structured. They will probably find it fun, and especially interesting to note the differences between them.

One should be careful, at all costs, not to destroy the sense of mystery and wonder possessed by young children. If one grew up to dislike or even hate poetry, it may be useful to think back to how this might have been the result of misguided teaching. Whenever there is a chance, especially when one sees that learners have relished a poem, they should be encouraged to make their own poems. It does not matter if these are very derivative. They are still learning something about the creation of a poem. Futhermore, every now and then, especially when a lesson has gone well, one might ask learners to learn lines, stanzas or entire short poems that they enjoy, and present them after careful preparation at home.

Senior Phase: Strategies and Poems

We are now at a phase where direct engagement with analysis can be undertaken. But first I would like to deal with the fallacy of what is called the 'deeper meaning'. Initially I emphasised the need for concern with a 'search for meaning'. However, I did not say, 'search for a deeper meaning' simply because if one starts saying that, the implication is that one did not find the meaning in the first place. So what one is really looking for then is the meaning! Concern with a *deeper* meaning just fudges the issue. Sometimes, when people talk about a 'deeper meaning', what has happened is that they've mistaken the fictional situation for the meaning. So when they go on to analyse, that process becomes for them the concern with deeper meaning. But the fictional situation can never be the meaning; it is just the basis from which one has to start. Of course, as I have already stressed, often one does not grasp the full meaning of a poem for quite a while. Also sometimes one changes one's mind. But then what has happened is that one had not arrived at an understanding of the meaning in the first place. Only one's later efforts make one aware of it.

In this phase (but also possibly in earlier ones) one needs to be prepared for a negative reaction from some teenagers (especially boys) to all aesthetic matters. In any case it is best to avoid poems that might be thought childish. I would suggest that the best way of overcoming prejudice against poetry is to ensure that one has lots of humorous examples at hand such as 'A note or Something for Bruce'.

A Note or Something for Bruce
Richard Andrews

Did I tell you about the saxophonist
who was playing in a rock band
and who, on reaching a certain note
in their penultimate number
kept on playing that same note
And seemed to find unlimited breath for it
because he loved it so much;
and who, because he could not move
off this one note,
sent the rest of the band into total confusion
—a confusion of fingers and strings
and hair and sequins and things—
so eventually they had to unplug their instruments
and unravel themselves and leave him to it.
Meanwhile the audience were wondering
whether to clap or not, and finally
got up noisily from their seats and left
amid tumultuous coughing and complaining.
Which left the saxophonist on stage
playing this wonderful note
and looking to all intents and purposes
as if he would never stop playing it.

That's what the caretaker thought, anyway,
Who at midnight switched all the lights off
And carried the saxophonist offstage, still playing,
And put him in a taxi home
(though the driver shut the window between them)
and finally got him to bed,
still playing that same note.
His neighbours weren't very pleased.

Note:
Three years later and he's still playing it! He has a few problems

> eating and so forth, but he has got into the *Guinness Book of Records.* An American composer called Lamont Purcell has adopted the note and called it ‘Non-variations on a note by Splikowsi’ or ‘Something for Bruce’.

This is an amusing narrative poem which steadily becomes more preposterously farcical. It is about a saxophonist who could not stop playing the same note. So the first sentence, going on and on, seems to imitate the man’s (Bruce’s?) non-stop playing. And ‘note’ is the last word in no less than four lines. Comic images of the band (in lines 10-11, the only ones which rhyme, by the way), and of the audience (13-17) help to build up this hilarious situation where the saxophonist is left alone, still playing! The climactic moments of this farce are the caretaker’s having to carry Bruce out to a taxi; the driver’s having to block off that persistent repeated note; and the mention that Bruce was still playing the note in bed. Finally, the joke is extended into the *Note* accompanying the poem. This is deliberately intended to create the impression of a true story. Imagine what fun one could have turning this into a mini-play with a class. .

At this stage I need to stress that in these analyses, even for Senior Phase, I am dealing with *teachers’* awareness. One might not achieve all that I have suggested with a particular class. But until one has reached this stage of understanding for oneself, one should not begin lesson planning. When one *has* reached this stage, it will be easy to start devising questions, or dramatic activities, or other specific ways of encouraging learners to appreciate poetry.

Senior Phase learners should be able to handle first-person poems with a disturbing revelation such as Wilfred 0wen’s ‘The Letter’ which was composed to imitate the *last* letter written by an imagined World War 1 soldier:

> **The Letter**
> **Wilfred Owen**
>
> With B.E.F. June 10. Dear Wife,
> (O blast this pencil. ‘Ere, Bill, lend’s a knife.)
> I’m in the pink at present, dear.

I think the war will end this year.
We don't see much of them square-'eaded 'Uns.
We're out of harm's way, not bad fed.
I'm longing for a taste of your old buns.
(Say, Jimmie, spare's a bite of bread.)
There don't seem much to say jus now.
(Yer what? Then don't, yer ruddy cow!)
And give us back me cigarette!)
I'll soon be 'ome. You mustn't fret
My feet's improvin', as I told you of.
We're out in rest now. Never fear.
(VRACH! By crumbs, but that was near.)
Mother might spare you half a sov.
Kiss Nell and Bert. When me and you—
(Eh? What the 'ell! Stand to? Stand to!
Jim, give's a hand with pack on, lad.
Guh! Christ! I'm hit. Take 'old. Aye, bad.
No, damn your iodine. Jim? 'Ere!
Write my old girl, Jim, there's a dear.)

Cockney speech is used to give an authentic, realistic flavour to the poem e.g. ''Ere, Bill' (line 2); 'square-'eaded 'uns' (line 5) and 'Give us back me cigarette' (line 11). Accumulating realistic details initially have a semi-amusing effect. Then the sudden, intrusive exclamation in line 15 ('VRACH! By crumbs, but that was near') gives a bold hint of what is to come.

The ending is shocking: the writer is hit while trying to complete his letter to his wife. The short, stark phrases in line 20 convey this fateful reality. When the speaker gets his friend to inform his 'old girl', that final phrase, 'there's a dear', is extremely touching since normally such language would be unacceptable from one man to another. You'll see that a very intricate rhyme scheme underlies the poem. It looks in fact as if Owen chose to use a *sophisticated* technique to express his deep concern for the fate of a *common* soldier.

Learners in this phase should also be given the opportunity to immerse themselves in vivid imagery such as in Ted Hughes's 'Wind':

Wind
Ted Hughes

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,
Woods stampeding the fields under the window
Floundering black astride and blinding wet

The day rose; then under an orange sky
The hills had new places, and wind wielded
Blade-light, luminous black and emerald,
Flexing the lens of a mad eye.

At noon I scaled along the house-side as far as
The coal-house door. I dared once to look up—
Through the brunt wind that dented the balls of my yes
The tent of the hills drummed and strained its guyrope.

The fields quivering, the skyline a grimace,
At any second to bang and vanish with a flap:
The wind flung a magpie away and a black-
Back gull bent like an iron bar slowly. The house

Rang like some fine green goblet in the note
That any second would shatter it. Now deep
In chairs, in front of the great fire, we grip
Our hearts and cannot entertain book, thought,

Or each other. We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in,
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

Powerful tactile and kinaesthetic imagery is used here to create the experience of incessantly violent wind. Even the hills seem to have been moved. Forceful line arrangements together with intense sound effect can be observed in 'wind wielded/Blade-light' (6-7). In stanza 3 the first-person speaker gives a glimpse of himself (male poet) as if he is engaged in a sort of war. The wind seems even to 'dent' the 'balls of [his] eyes'. The very unusual metaphor for hills in line 12, tent and guy rope, is based on what the wind does literally to a tent—now the hills themselves are imagined as a battered tent.

There is a very good example of assonance in lines 14 to 16 through the repeated 'a' sound of the words, 'bang', 'vanish', 'flap', and 'black-back'. In pointing this device out, however, I need to give a warning: one should never give learners the impression that one can analyse meaning by picking words out of context. I would refer only to individual words, as in this case, for demonstrating a device like alliteration or assonance. The run-on lines 15-16 enact the idea of bending before we come to the word 'bent', and the slow rhythm reinforces the idea of bending slowly.

The way Hughes saves up 'Rang' for the first word of line 17 gives it enormous impact, enabling one to feel how the wind's power is penetrating the house. Now there is a glimpse of the house's occupants (two I assume): even the 'great fire' is not enough to comfort them. They cannot think of anything else but the wind. Even as the 'fire blazes', they feel that the 'roots of the house' (line 22) have shifted. The window's rattle makes it seem as if it is trying to come inside for comfort (how absurd in ordinary circumstances!), and the stones, lashed by the wind, seem to be crying out in agony.

So here Hughes offers a sense of an awesome, uncontrollable force, of how feeble and vulnerable everything else seems in comparison to the wind. Analysis of this kind, undertaken for oneself, should enable one to develop a lesson plan that would enable learners to be riveted by this poem. That entails enticing them *to see for themselves* what I have been noting.

There is no harm in introducing Senior Phase learners to the concept of metapoetry with accessible examples such as 'How to eat a poem' (p.4):

How to Eat a Poem
Eve Merriam

Don't be polite!
Bite in
Pick it up with your fingers and lick the juice
That may run down your chin.

You do not need a knife or fork or spoons
or plate or napkin or tablecloth.

For there is no core
or stem
or rind
or pit
or seed
or skin
to throw away.

This poem is just a way of encouraging readers to enjoy poetry, or, as I put it initially, of letting oneself be taken over by a poem. The first verse paragraph emphasises how a poem is always available and ready for our enjoyment. The second emphasises that the poem should be a delight and satisfaction in itself. The third verse paragraph elaborates this emphasis. It suggests that when the poem has been relished, it enters, as a whole, into one's mind because it functions as a whole.

FET Phase: Strategies and Poems

All the points I have made previously would be relevant again in relation to this phase. However, I shall use this opportunity to talk about some of the potential dangers one needs to look out for in teaching poetry at FET level (or Senior phase for that matter too).

First of course there is the danger of slack reading or sheer invention, when one has allowed one's own imagination to take over and import into the poem what is not there. In relation to Hardy's 'Beeny Cliff'

(see below) a slack reader might decide that '*The woman fell over the cliff*'! Some learners may be inclined to put form ahead of content (especially with regard to sound effects). This is usually the result of bad teaching at an earlier stage. If, when teaching 'Beeny Cliff', one were to wax excited about the 'f' sounds in line 2, or the 't' sounds in line 6, divorced from the actual meaning or effect of those lines, one would be mishandling the poem by privileging form over content.

Beeny Cliff
Thomas Hardy

O the opal and the sapphire of that wandering western sea,
And the woman riding high above with bright hair flapping free –
The woman whom I loved so, and who loyally loved me.

The pale mews plained below us, and the waves seemed far away
In a nether sky, engrossed in saying their ceaseless babbling say,
As we laughed light-heartedly aloft on that clear-sunned March day.

A little cloud then cloaked us, and there flew an irised rain,
And the Atlantic dyed its levels with a dull misfeatured stain,
And then the sun burst out again, and purples prinked the main.

—Still in all its chasmal beauty bulks old Beeny to the sky,
And shall she and I not go there once again now March is nigh,
And the sweet things said in that March say anew there by and by?

What if still in chasmal beauty looms that wild weird western shore,
The woman now is—elsewhere—whom the ambling pony bore,
And nor know nor cares for Beeny, and will laugh there nevermore.

One needs to watch out for those who try to impose biographical knowledge. This is a great danger in first-person poetry: awareness that Douglas Livingstone was a marine biologist might induce a learner to twist Livingstone's 'Sonatina of Peter Govender, Beached' till it emerges as a poem about marine biology. A related fallacy is the automatic assumption in

a first-person poem that the speaker is the poet. Consider how disastrous such a misreading of Livingstone's poem would be.

Sonatina of Peter Govender, Beached
Douglas Livingstone

Sometime busdriver
Of *Shiva's Pride, The Off-Course tote,*
The Venus Trap, and *The Khyber Pass Express.*
I've fathered five bright, beguiling,
Alert-eyed but gill-less children.
I had to fish:
First surf; then the blue-water marlin.
(I heard a Man once
walked water without getting wet.)
Old duels for fares:
The South Coast road—all we could get;
My left hand conning the wheel.

My last was *Dieselene Conqueror*
—night-muggings, cops,
knives, that coked and jammed injector
—right hand nursing in me a reel,
the cane cracking at the start of the day,
things of the land becoming remote.

My prime as oarsman:
Heroics of the offshore boat,
Catching all that steel slabs of sea could express.
My porpoise-wife is gone, seeded,
Spent, queen among curry-makers.
I'm old now, curt.

I've monosyllables for strangers
who stop by asking
questions while I repair my net.

Things learnt from the sea
—gaffing the landlord, the week's debt,
scooping in the crazed white shads,
twisting the great transparent mountains
past a wood blade—?
Contempt for death is the hard-won
Ultimate, the only freedom
(—cracking the cane at the end of the day—):
not one of the men I knew could float.

One one has to bear in mind also the tendency on the part of learners to substitute a paraphrase type of reductiveness for analysis. As an example I have paraphrased Vachel Lindsay's, 'Flower-fed Buffaloes', to demonstrate how it deflates the poem:
The buffaloes used to roam all over the prairies, feeding on flowers and grass. But the grass has been replaced by wheat, and the buffaloes, like the Red Indians, left long ago.

Flower-fed Buffaloes
Vachel Lindsay

The flower-fed buffaloes of the spring
In the days of long ago,
Ranged where the locomotives sing
And the prairie flowers lie low:—
The tossing, blooming, perfumed grass
Is swept away by the wheat,
Wheels and wheels and wheels spin by
In the spring that still is sweet.
But the flower-fed buffaloes of the spring
Left us, long ago.
They gore no more, they bellow no more,
They trundle around the hills no more:—
With the Black feet, lying low,
With the Pawnees, lying low,
Lying low.

Resistance to difficulty, rather than readiness to accept challenges, invariably generates disabled readings. This tendency may well become tangled up with resistance to valid interpretation (along the lines that everyone is entitled to his/her own!). Mostly this happens because one fails to test hypotheses about the meaning of the poem against its actual details and development. The meaning one has decided upon seems appealing so all alternatives are resisted. As an example consider James Wright's 'Evening' where such resistance, possibly as a defence after struggling with what seems difficult in the poem, might produce the idea that the poem is about a dead child who returns to haunt his father!

Evening
James Wright

I called him to come in,
The wide lawn darkened so.
Laughing, he held his chin
And hid beside a bush.
The light gave him a push
Shadowy grass moved slow.
He crept on agile toes
Under a sheltering rose.

His mother, still beyond
The bare porch and the door,
Called faintly out of sound,
And vanished with her voice.
I caught his curious eyes
Measuring me, and more –
The light dancing behind
My shoulder in the wind.

Then struck beyond belief,
By the child's voice I heard,
I saw his hair turn leaf,
His dancing toes divide

To hooves on either side,
One hand become a bird.
Startled, I held my tongue
To hear what note he sang.

Where was the boy gone now?
I stood on the grass, alone.
Swung from the apple bough
The bees ignored my cry.
A dog roved past, and I
Turned up a sinking stone,
But found beneath no more
Than grasses dead last year.

Suddenly lost and cold,
I knew the yard lay bare.
I longed to touch and hold
My child, my talking child,
Laughing or tame or wild—
Solid in light and air,
The supple hands, the face
To fill that barren place.

Slowly the leaves descended,
The birds resolved to hands;
Laugh and the charm was ended,
The hungry boy stepped forth.
He stood on the hard earth,
Like one who understands
Fairy and ghost—but less
Our human loneliness.

Then, on the withering lawn,
He walked beside my arm.
Trees and the sun were gone,
Everything gone but us.

His mother sang in the house,
And kept our supper warm,
And loved us, god knows how,
The side earth darkened so.

Such a poem might also inspire someone to a daring flight of symbolism, for example: *The boy is a symbol of the wonderful world of nature*. Unfortunately it is quite common for learners to leap dizzily into symbolism. My own advice is rather to avoid a symbolic level until it becomes absolutely clear that the literal level is inadequate.

Let me end with a reminder of my main emphases. Poetry lessons should have poetry as their dominant focus. They should involve a lively search for meaning, but not for 'deeper meanings'. The teacher should endeavour by every possible means to spur learners, through avid discussion, to make the crucial discoveries for themselves. Learners should not be offered anything like a formula for analysis. On the other hand, teachers should show how there are sensible and logical ways of grouping together the various categories of attention that exploration of poetry requires, and that the process of exploration involves taking account of certain features before others. Above all, teachers should try to create lessons in which learners have the opportunity to become engrossed with poetry, enchanted discoverers of that most fascinating of all the worlds created by language. *A luta continua*!

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Literate English for Epistemological Access: The Role of English Studies

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This paper discusses literature that concerns itself with the history of literary studies and the extent to which such history has influenced the broader field of English Studies in South Africa[1]. This discussion engages critically with debates about the institutional separation of English literature departments and English language departments, a common feature in most universities nationally and internationally. The main argument of this paper is that within the context of a society marked by decades of past racial (and present economic) inequalities, modules that focus on the development of linguistic and academic literacy skills offered in English departments need not maintain a pedagogic practice that is either based on grammatical rules or academic writing and criticism, without an attempt to integrate the two. If this pedagogic approach persists, I want to argue, and unless English departments in universities reclaim English language as part of their scholarly engagement, students' development in 'literate English' will be compromised[2].

[1] English Studies as a field includes more disciplinary tracks than just literature. It includes such disciplines as language, media (newspapers, film, advertising, popular culture), translation, oral texts. (For more details see Dimitriu 2002; Green 2001; Pope 1998; and Greenblatt & Gunn 1992.)

[2] Wallace (2003: 93) describes 'literate English' as 'language which is not spontaneous but planned. It is more elaborated than informal speech, makes explicit its grounds and provides useful bridge into expository written language'.

Writing about the study of English literature, Horn (1999) maintains that the knowledge sought for is 'knowledge about ourselves, about our ways of thinking and speaking, about individual existence which is also and always a social existence' (81). The centrality of language in the approach to, and the focus on, the study of literature (as Horn understands it) cannot be overemphasised. This centrality is in terms, first, of our understanding and critical engagement with this knowledge ('about ourselves, about our ways of thinking and speaking …', as Horn, puts it), secondly, the construction of alternative knowledge(s) other than knowledge presented by mainstream cultures (through literary works) and, thirdly, thinking about ways in which such knowledge may be disseminated. Successful engagement with English literary texts, within this context, depends entirely on a certain level of competence in the language of instruction and, without such a level, it is unlikely that students will attain the kind of knowledge with which the study of English literature is concerned. The relevant level of competence in the language of instruction in order for students to engage with literary studies as expected in English departments can only be acquired if language is taught, and understood as, a medium that is able, as Halliday and Matthiesen (1999) put it:

> to create meaning because … it is related to our material being in three distinct 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 … (602).

The above assertion seems to suggest that given the fact that literary texts use language about physical space and time, language in literature needs to be understood as a theory about our physical existence and experiences, and is thus able to capture the natural and social processes in the environment. According to Green (2001), this understanding brings about the level of awareness with regard to the nature of language that the discipline of English literary studies attempts to inculcate into students' thinking. English literary studies does this through the analysis of ways in which language in literary, oral, and visual texts, as well as in media and popular culture, is used to construct meanings about individual and group identities. In the context of

my paper this is the basis upon which pedagogic practices in English departments can introduce innovative ways of teaching language akin to the broader field of English Studies:

- The relationship between purpose of a text and how such a purpose informs the author's grammatical stylistic choices;
- Our ways of thinking, writing, and speaking about individual existence as presented in literary texts and other forms of communicating experience, which is also, and always, a social existence;
- Distinction between knowledge *of* and *about* language, and knowledge *of* and *about* discourse communities;
- To transcend the particular and abstract from the physical and social context in order that the knowledge from literary texts, media, visual and written texts, may be transformed into something more generalisable;
- The ability to generalize, to grasp relationships such as cause and effect, to predict the consequences of events, to grasp the essential message of a speech, novel, a written text, and to evaluate situations through writing; and
- To examine ideological presences and pressures, typical writing practices in a given situation or discipline, and common or expected methods of inquiry.

Within the context of South Africa, literary studies have not pursued entirely all the concerns of the broader field of English Studies with language as outlined above. Instead, literary studies have followed theoretical developments in the United Kingdom (Balfour 2000). On the one hand, there were the advocates (F.D. Maurice & Charles Kingsley) of great literature, classical languages, maths, geography and rhetoric as a means of attaining equality for colonised people, whilst on the other hand, other scholars saw 'the teaching of English [as providing] the clearest case of how English Studies served colonial purposes by alienating students from their national language[s] and culture[s]' (Miller 1997: 282). Eagleton (1983) reminds us that,

> Chris Baldick has pointed to the importance of the admission of English literature to the Civil Service examinations in the Victorian period: armed with this conveniently packaged version of their cultural treasures, the servants of British imperialism could sally forth overseas secure in a sense of their national identity, and able to display that cultural superiority to their envying colonial peoples (29).

It is for this reason, as Balfour (2000) puts it, that: 'other scholars argued for less access to European culture, on the basis that it de-valued indigenous cultural forms' (78). Pennycook (1994) draws our attention to similar sentiments in India, where financial resources were spent on English education, 'producing too many English-educated Indians to take up the limited number of jobs available in the colonial administration, and … insufficient time and money being devoted to education in the vernacular' (87). In contexts where the trend was reversed, that is, more support given to vernacular languages than English, however, the coloniser still benefited more than the colonised. Said's (1989) *Orientalism* alerts us to the fact that the coloniser often succeeds in their enterprise by using education to construct the colonised 'Other', and this often manifests in education policies. In relation to this issue, Seng (1970) observes that:

> much of the primitive Malay education that continued to be supplied by the British Government was in no small degree due to [its] attempt to preserve the Malay as a Malay, a son of the soil in the most literal sense possible … these views led to the continued championing of Malay vernacular education … and strong emphasis on a 'vocational' element in Malay education, including an almost fanatical devotion to basket-weaving (in Pennycook 1994:90).

This is education for the preservation of the *status quo*, 'to prevent students from entertaining any ambitions above their humble stations in life, and to encourage them to feel thankful rather than resentful towards their colonisers' (Pennycook 1994: 88). The few indigenous people's access to English became a form of colonial patronage, and

> an English-educated boy [drew] a far higher salary than a boy who only [knew] his only language, and [had] an opening for advancement which is closed to the other, the principal aims of education in Malaya were to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been (Maxwell 1997:2 in Pennycook 1994: 89).

It is on the basis of these sentiments that both Orientalism and Anglicism may be seen as complementary discourses of colonialism which, while they worked both to marginalise and to divide the colonised, functioned to 'domesticate' (or lull) indigenous peoples' resentment against invasion. Culler (2000) points out that English literature in the colonies of the British Empire, as a subject of instruction, 'was charged with giving the natives an appreciation of the greatness of England … in a historic civilising enterprise' (36). Reddy (1995), a South African literary critic and educationist, has observed the following about the relationship between traditional approaches to English and Apartheid ideology:

> In importing the metropolitan norm, especially the 'Great Tradition' to South Africa, its proponents assimilated it into the Apartheid system. The irony is that Leavis did not advocate academic traditionalism at the expense of social privilege. When his theories were implemented as part of the Apartheid curriculum, their importation into this country served the specific ideological purposes (despite protestations to the contrary by liberal-humanists of the time) of foisting a particular cultural heritage which ignored the cultural hybridity of the nation (6).

A number of assumptions about literature and literary studies in English are also associated with the canonical approach, an approach that emerged through Matthew Arnold (1876), I.A. Richards (1929), and F.R. Leavis (1948). According to Arnold (1876), an influential cultural historian and critic, literature was central to civilisation because,

> great men of culture are those who have had a passion for … carrying from one end to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of the time … to humanise it (70).

This view influenced the choice of texts to be studied. Drawing from Arnold's view, the selection of texts for study in institutions of learning required an accompanying pedagogy emphasising the authority of the text and teacher. In the 1920s 'New Criticism' pioneered by I.A. Richards, invested the teacher with authority, thereby glossing over a definitive interpretation of the text. Young (1987) provides an insight into the actual practical implications of this view in classroom practice:

> The teacher would become the explicator of the text's meanings or would offer a powerful role model to pupils … learning the technique of unlocking textual meanings and internalising the canons of literary judgement and taste (in Cocoran & Evans 1979:11).

Leavis (1984) further developed Richard's (1929) notion of teacher and text by advocating that the critic and reader should achieve 'unmediated community with his text and with his presumed audience' (Mulhern 1979:166). For Mulhern, Leavis' legacy on English Studies can be described as having three elements:

> A critical-historical canon defining the major traditions of English literature; a loosely formulated methodology of critical practice; and a cluster of ideas concerning the nature of literature and its place in social life (1979:328).

The Leavisite approach to reading and text was not without criticism. Arguing against Leavis, Moon (1990) points out the fact that 'traditional reading practices assume literary texts to be 'perfectly' complete and unified' (34). It was apparent to Moon and Mulhern (1981) that Arnold, Richards, and Leavis represented a continuum in English Studies because they all, in different respects, adhered to a notion of the text as a source of authority. Eagleton (1983), a British literary critic writing almost a century

later than Arnold, suggested that English Studies during this period:

> was an arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence-what it meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationship with others, to live from the centre of most essential values were … made the object of the most intensive scrutiny (31).

This understanding of the nature of English Studies shared a utilitarian view of learners as empty pitchers into which knowledge was to be poured, and this made the study of literature an intellectual exercise meant to produce knowledge as an end in itself.

In the 21st century, however, the 'universality of the dollar, the English language, and the Internet' have brought about a major shift in the study of English literature as an academic (intellectual) discipline because 'educators are faced with the challenge of continuing education for the advancement of skills to cope with technological developments' (Sarinjeive & Balfour 2002: ix). This is not a suggestion, however, that English is the only language with potential, and perhaps better positioned than other languages, to bring about the advancement of skills to cope with technological advancements of the 21st century. Roy-Campbell (1998), for instance, draws on the works of Diop (1974; 1991) to point out that the achievements of Africans during the age of antiquity in mathematics, architecture, chemistry, astronomy, and medicine were accomplished in African languages[3]. It is important to point out that all these areas required technical vocabulary and conceptual frameworks, all of which was made possible in African languages. Brock-Utne (2000) asserts that:

> Walter Rodney (1976) has described the process by which Europe underdeveloped Africa, technologically and scientifically deskilling Africans. The accounts of both Cheik Anta Diop and Walter Rodney are a statement to the vast capabilities of African peoples realised through the indigenous African languages. One of the forms of written language in the world—Ge'ez—was found in Africa, in the area currently known as Ethiopia. But European mythology about

[3] Cheik Anta Diop (1974; 1991) has written extensively on the African past.

> Africa, which came to be accepted as the early history of Africa, did not recognise the achievements of African societies in pre-colonial times. From the perspective of these Europeans, the activities worth recording began with their contact with this 'dark continent'. Africa was presented as comprising peoples speaking a multitude of tongues which did not have written forms. Roy-Campbell points to written African languages dating to 3000 BC that are still used today (143).

As part of the initiatives that wished to observe these profound research findings, Brock-Utne (2000) reminds us of the Phelps-Stokes Fund which set up the Education Commission for Africa. It is this fund that assisted in the establishment of a segregated educational system for Black Americans and 'had subsequently been requested by the British to organise a similar system for their colonies. Its 1922 Report makes a strong argument for the use of African languages as instructional languages in school' (Brock-Utne 2000:146). Despite attempts of this nature, African countries resisted attempts to implement ideas in the Report. Brock-Utne (2000) reports that:

> The Africans felt … that most of the colonial language policies suggesting that Africans use their vernaculars in school were inspired by racial prejudices regarding the supposedly intellectual inferiority of Africans, a factor making them incapable of benefiting from a Western education. The Africans suspected that the language policies were designed to keep them in their social ghettos in the same way black Americans had been disadvantaged by their education in separate institutions which were inferior to the ones the white children attended (146f).

This attitude is similar to sentiments referred to earlier with regard to the use of Malay in educating indigenous people of Malaysia. These same sentiments prevailed even after independence in most African countries where the languages of the colonisers remained the main languages of instruction in education. Wright (2002) associates the persistence of this attitude among younger speakers of indigenous languages with the drastic

decrease in students' enrolment in African languages departments in most universities of this country.

> We are all familiar with the alarming decline in registrations at African languages departments in South African universities. The most astonishing figures are those published in relation to UNISA (South Africa's major distance-learning university) and reported in the *Sunday Times*: According to UNISA, the only institution that offers tuition in all African languages, the number of undergraduate students registered for these courses has dropped from 25 000 in 1997 to 3 000 this year [the year 2000]. The number of postgraduate students has also decreased, from 511 to 53 in the same period. Other institutions confirmed an annual decline of 50% (*Sunday Times* 4 March 2000, in Wright, 2000:4).

Among other things, this decrease means there is no guarantee for the availability of future expertise in indigenous languages for their development, codification, and standardisation. This is crucial if indigenous languages are to thrive and compete successfully in a country where capitalist ambitions and knowledge of English influence decisions in the most important spheres of society (Crystal 1998). It is partly because of these factors, furthermore, that, as Sarinjeive (2002) notes: 'courses such as English Language Studies, Reading and Interpretation, Knowledge and Production, Literary Studies and Cultural and Media Studies, to name a few innovations, began making an appearance in university curricula' (36). These new directions reflect, among other things, Eagleton's (1983) old questions about what constitutes literary studies, as he asks:

> If there is such a thing as literary theory, then it would seem obvious that there is something called literature which it is the theory of. We can begin, then, by raising the question: what is literature? …. a distinction between fact and fiction seem unlikely to get us very far … our own opposition between 'historical' and 'artistic' truth does not apply to the early Icelandic sagas. Novels and news reports were neither clearly factual nor clearly fictional…What about jokes,

> football chants and slogans, newspaper headlines, advertisements, which are verbally flamboyant but not generally classified as literature (5f).

Most recently, Pope (1998), drawing from Evans (1992:184), points out that 'the point about "English" as the name of a subject is that it is an adjective made to serve as a noun. So 'English' is always pointing towards an absence—the noun. Is the subject English literature, language, society, culture, people?' (16). In writing about the study of English in the university, Green (2001) refers to ways in which the English Department within his context has observed, and in some senses transcended Eagleton and Pope's observations above. Writing about the research interests of his colleagues in the English Department that is 'still a defining characteristic of university as opposed to other forms of tertiary-level teaching', Green (2001) notes that:

> 'English' in our context is not only a whole variety of literatures in a variety of englishes … but also (to choose examples from our own teaching at the University of Natal) woman's magazines, shopping malls, the beach, legal documents, medical texts, historical discourse, journalism, visual images, popular fiction, detective fiction, graphic fiction, oral performance, rap music, publishing, creative writing, or—to really test the fundamental definition of 'English' as an adjective—just about any of the above in translation (3).

All these developments point to the extent to which English literary studies has evolved, and will continue to take new directions, as a discipline. Regardless of these developments, however, meaningful and successful engagement with content still depends entirely on a great deal of sophistication, first with the discourse characteristic of the discipline of literary studies and, secondly, the language of instruction through which knowledge and skills are constructed and transmitted. Throughout this paper I argue that successful access to both, that is, the discourse of the discipline of literary studies and the language of instruction, can be made easier when taught within the context of one module. For the purposes of the subject of

this paper, I would focus on two aspects in the field of English Studies: English language and English literature. This is because, unlike Modern Languages Studies such as Italian, Dutch (or even Afrikaans and isiZulu in South Africa), where both language and literature concerns have successfully co-existed in single academic departments, this has often not been the case for English Studies, both in national and international contexts.

The teaching of English language and English literature within one academic department at most universities remains, as Janks (1990) puts it: 'a contested terrain'. In most contexts English departments focus on cultural and literary texts, not language. As a rationale for this arrangement, Bateson (1971) presents 'language' and 'literature' as different specialisations in the field of English Studies. He describes the former as,

> always headed towards total description—a detached, objective, universally available discipline … 'language' … has its ineradicable subjective core … grammar, for one thing, is essentially logical in its linguistic presupposions, and as such it is governed by the principles of non-contradiction; literary criticism, on the other hand, assumes in the verbal material criticised the presence of opposite and discordant qualities whose provisional balance and reconciliation the common reader will agree under certain circumstances to accept. Those circumstances, considered linguistically, can be summed up in the word 'style'—a term that includes the whole armoury of rhetoriccal devices, phonetic and semantic, with their larger structural extensions such as tragedy and comedy. The function of style is to unify … literature's disparate parts. As such it is the exact opposite of grammar, whose function is not primarily to unite but to divide (57).

As a consequence of this logic, Titlestad (1998) observes that 'too many English departments at universities have for too long regarded themselves as mainly departments of English literature' (34). In his *Literature and Linguistics* (1971), Fowler points to the hostility between language and literature as something that has 'marred English Studies'. Such hostility manifests itself in the writings of literary critics such as Vendler (1966). Her main reservation against the formation of academic alliances between the study of English literature and English language is that '

> linguistics has given us no critics comparable in literary subtlety to certain men like Richards, Spitzer, Burke, Blackmur, Empson, and others, whose sense of linguistic patterning is formidably acute (Fowler 1971: 43).

As a response to the criticism, Fowler (1971) points out that Vendler (1966) fails to acknowledge the fact that 'the corpus of linguistic writings on literature is as yet minuscule and could hardly be expected to yield riches on this scale. Inevitably in the very first years of any new "movement" there will be uncertainty, infelicity, and changes of method' (43).

Fowler's (1971) response suggests that Vendler's (1966) criticism is premature, ill-informed, and entirely inappropriate. Individual disciplines and various perspectives in relation to questions relating to the subject matter evolve over time, and are continually in a state of flux. English literary studies itself underwent similar instabilities and uncertainties at its initial stages but, because of constant inquiry and research, it has evolved until its current stage (Eagleton 1983). As one of the disciplines under the broader field of English Studies, literary studies' scholars over the years have laboured to maintain the literary territory. Vendler's (1966) charge against the discipline of English language (one of the disciplines within the field of English Studies) as presented above is typical of attempts by literary scholars to 'preserve' what they consider to be a literary territory. Fowler (1971) points out that:

> The hostility in Mrs Vendler's voice is depressingly familiar to those of us who have suffered from an unnecessary schism between 'language' and 'literature' which has so long marred English Studies. Her tone betrays the fear, common among teachers of literature, although less so among the great critics, that linguistics may invade and ravage precious literary territory (43).

Within this 'literary territory' it is important to understand what is studied, and what then is this 'language' that must be stopped from the act of ravaging the 'literary'. Fowler (1971) asserts that,

> Literary study comprises historical, stylistic or openly technical

> investigation: genre description, stylistic test of authorship, metrical analysis, for example. For some reason 'interpretation' (an exceedingly difficult term) and 'evaluation' have come to be regarded as the only activities which are worth doing and which are actually done (46).

The approach to literary study and criticism that focuses simply on interpretation and evaluation to the exclusion of such aspects as genre description and its linguistic manifestation in literary works, for instance, arises from a very particular understanding of literature. Bateson's (1971) definition of literature illustrates this point:

> A work of literature is successful linguistically, the best words in the best order, when appropriate stylistic devices co-operate to unify humane value-judgements, implicit or explicit, on some aspects of life as it is lived in the writer's own society. As for the reader of such a work, he will only be successful if he registers, consciously or at least semi-consciously, the unifying stylistic devices that enable him to respond to the human situation available to him in it. In a word, the role played by grammar in description is *comparable* to that of style in evaluation. But if comparable they are also mutually incompatible, because grammar is primarily analytic in its methods and premises, whereas style is essentially synthetic (58).

The need to shift the analysis of literature away from the language-free analysis of many of the New Critics, towards a more methodically and linguistically aware analysis is an idea that has been shared by Birch (1989), the notion that 'literature is language'. Writing about what he calls an Empsonian approach applied by Nowottny (1962) in her analysis of literary works, Birch (1989) notes that:

> Her approach is Empsonian, using a close *explication de texte* method of reading that marks her out as someone who believed firmly that there needed to be recognition *within* intrinsic criticism that linguistic analysis of literary text was a necessary and not

> simply an obstructivist aberration. Her theorising of language and style never moves beyond a concentration on the supremacy of words; she believes firmly that these words somehow 'contain' meanings, and she argues for maintaining a formalist distinction between poetic and non-poetic language as a means of defining literature. Style…is effectively language manipulated in ways that signal it as different from 'ordinary' language (100).

For Van Wyk-Smith (1990), this is precisely what defines the field of English Studies: its concerns with ways in which texts (written and spoken) use and manipulate language to represent instances of life as lived in different contexts. Birch's (1989) representation of Nowottny's concern as having to do with *how* literature works as opposed to approaching literature from an intrinsic critical tradition signals Nowottny 'as someone on the language side of English Studies, rather than on the literature side—a powerful system of classification in the politics of university English departments' (Birch 1989:100). This is the reason Van Wyk-Smith (1990) encourages a focus on language features in addition to studying literature in English departments:

> unless language studies are centrally concerned to show why it is important to know how complex discourse works, and literary studies return to their linguistic base, we simply end up teaching two distinct subjects under one roof (9).

The reason for 'teaching two subjects under one roof', as Van Wyk-Smith (1990) puts it, is that whenever English departments attempt to teach 'language', such programmes focus either on grammar teaching or on academic development. Both attempts fail to draw from the field of English Studies' concerns with the role of language in constructing and contesting different subject positions, identities, and knowledge as discussed above. This is because the artificial separation of language studies and literature studies in English departments usually results in pedagogic practices that leave students, either understanding texts and able to discuss them orally, or with the ability to regurgitate what they have copied during lectures and can

draw from memory. The consequence under these circumstances is that students are left with an in ability to construct complex and persuasive arguments in writing and failure to engage critically with detail. Writing about the correlation between mastering conceptual and linguistic knowledge for students with English as an Additional Language, Clayton (1994) correctly points out that,

> The problem of language proficiency in relation to academic achievement in second language students becomes even more acute if we realise that those same students may not reveal any language barriers in conversational settings and hence appear to be able to articulate their ideas adequately (30).

Clayton's (1994) observations above compare with a study (Mgqwashu 1999) conducted at the University of Natal where, according to one of the study's participants: 'students' verbal responses do not match their writing abilities' (66). Balfour's Foreword in the module pack for *An Integrated English Language Course* (2001), a module offered by the former University of Natal's English Department, represents attempts to respond to such challenges. It spells out clearly the undisputable dominance of the English language over the globe, and therefore an urgent need for the teaching and learning of it. As though to alert his readers about (and therefore prepare them for) one of the future inevitabilities with regard to this language, Balfour (2001) asserts that:

> The 21st century will be characterized by the accelerated growth of already established 'global' languages. English is only one such language. Yet it is neither more nor less helpful in expressing meaning than any other language. English is not an inherently superior language. Nonetheless, it is true that the language occupies an anomalous position in South Africa. While English is the language of education, the media, the economy and politics, it is not the native language of the majority of South Africans. Though this is no accident, the educational opportunities to learn in and through English, for you the learner, are considerable (i).

Balfour's observations remind us of the priority that needs to be accorded to English language teaching by institutions of higher learning in South Africa. This, as the Foreword clarifies, is not a suggestion that other languages are inferior to English, or that universities should not pay attention to them. It is rather an attempt to point out that English is a global language, the language of wider communication, and already a dominant language in most institutions of higher learning and crucial employment institutions in South Africa. This is the reason why, although the Foreword is addressed to students, the corollary in it is that university practitioners are themselves challenged to take seriously, and put concerted efforts into, the teaching of English language if students' success in *and beyond university education* is to be a reality. Sarinjeive (2002) alludes to the fact that:

> Given the inadequate preparation for tertiary education and language difficulties experienced by … students to whom English is a second or third language, focussing on language skills, in the English Department, would appear to be the most practical and realistic way to begin to meet urgent needs (42).

The flip-side of Sarinjeive's postulation above is that the skills in critical engagement with, and analysis of, literary and cultural texts that English departments have traditionally attempted to develop in students may not necessarily be what most students need (at least in the earlier years of their university education). In the study she conducted at the Sebokeng campus of Vista University, Sarinjeive (2002) found out that 'most students wanted to learn English to speak, read and write well, be familiar with rules of grammar, think, analyse concepts, solve problems and increase vocabulary' (42f).

Introducing modules to address these needs, however, is the manifestation of an inherently common-sense idea that the difficulties experienced by students as they engage with tertiary study are attributable to issues related to 'language', and not to their failure to master a secondary (academic) discourse. Such initiatives reveal, furthermore, what Jacobs (2006) defines as,

> an understanding of language as an instrument of communication

> rather than as a means for making meaning … a typical institutional response to language and content integration (182).

Jacob's (2006) understanding of strategies of this nature as part of attempts to address students' linguistic and/or academic literacy needs suggests that despite research findings in Sarinjeive's (2002) study, the issue of whether meeting these needs may be achieved through initiatives integrated within the disciplinary discourses or through modules outside mainstream offerings remains unresolved. Gee (1990) defines a discourse as,

> … a socially accepted association among ways of using language, thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network' or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role' (143).

His definition of literacy is pertinent to this paper. For him, literacy means 'mastery or fluent control over a secondary discourse' (Gee 1990:153). Within this context, students' educational problems in an institution of higher learning, a university in the context of this paper, are rooted in their status as outsiders to academic discourses and in their lack of familiarity with the literacy or 'deep rules of [academic] culture' (Boughey 2005). An understanding that students are experiencing difficulties with academic literacy, and not with language (grammar) *per se*, calls into question many of the language intervention programmes which have been established on the assumption that what students need is tuition in the structures and vocabulary of English, the additional language which is the medium of instruction at many tertiary institutions. Balfour's (1995) study about one of the modules that adopted this line of thinking (students' difficulties are with academic literacy) in an English Department reveals that the new programme:

> assumed (inaccurately) a degree of linguistic competence already in place. Teachers became aware that the new approach was evidently not compatible with the approach adopted in schools where language and literature continued to be taught separately (or language not at

> all) (96).

The programme Balfour (1995) refers to was an attempt to socialise first-year students into the 'academic discourse' of literary studies by way of introducing a syllabus which 'used discourse analysis for the teaching and explication of texts, with a view to encouraging the acquisition of critical literary skills' (94). Jacobs (2006) argues that programmes of this nature are,

> related to the framing of students, particularly second language speakers of English, in a deficit mode … these discourses … tended to reinforce notions of academic literacies as autonomous generic skills, which in turn led to … add-on, generic academic literacy skills-based courses (184f).

While Balfour (1995) associates the failure of these programmes with students' lack of grammatical competence, Jacobs (2006) argues that the failure has more to do with the fact that lecturers got subjected to 'discourses [that] exonerated them from the need to reflect on how they were or *were not* making explicit for their students the rhetorical nature of their disciplines' (185).

Several studies (Balfour 1995; Clarence-Fincham 1998; Balfour 2000), which have attempted to investigate issues of language and learning in the context of the University of Natal (Howard College and Pietermaritzburg campuses) all regard English language proficiency as an enabling and/or disenabling vehicle for tackling university education. Balfour's (1995) study, after identifying grammatical competence as a necessary prerequisite for studying literature, concluded that the teaching of grammar *ought to carry the same weight as discourse analysis in its literary form* in English Studies. On the other hand, Clarence-Fincham's (1998) study concerned itself with the theory of critical language awareness, arguing the need for modules that will teach students to be aware of power relations implicit in the language we use as an effective way of facilitating language acquisition. This is language teaching with a view to developing students' academic literacy rather than a narrow focus on grammatical competence. Balfour's (2000) recent work extends his earlier thesis by

suggesting that language teaching using literary material is an effective method, for it develops students' rhetorical features awareness as used within the context of literary works.

I share Balfour's (1995; 2000) concluding remarks about the place of language teaching having to be accorded the same status as the study of literature in English departments, *albeit* with two fundamental differences. On the one hand, I am persuaded that language teaching by English departments needs to raise students' awareness of how complex discourse works within the discursive, cultural, and social critique. On the other hand, language used in literary texts is often a product of a 'slavish' observation of specific 'imposed' literary conventions alien to ways in which we use language under ordinary circumstances and/or when producing texts (spoken and written) within the scope of different academic genres valued within the university. The adoption of Balfour's approach, it may be argued, could lead to a situation where students may learn to string correct sentences and construct proper paragraphs, but not be developed in what Wallace (2002) calls literate English'. The attainment of this level of language competence requires more than just the teaching of, for instance, types of sentences, parts of speech and tenses as identified in a novel or a short story, and giving students exercises to either label such sentences in an extended text or writing short paragraphs using two or more types of sentences. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is through raising students' awareness and understanding of different genres relevant to the discipline of English literary studies' language conventions, and how grammatical choices are largely a result of discipline specific discourses, and the purpose for which texts are produced to make meaning. Stacey's *Exploring the Development of Voice in Student Writing in a Literature Course at Foundation Level* (2001) reveals that,

> Students identified the following problems: in lectures and seminars they did not hear lecturers because they spoke too fast…the significance of examples or illustrations was often missed; there was lack of background knowledge and uncertainty about how to integrate lecture knowledge with reading or own knowledge. Some of the basic problems students had in studying and interpreting literature were their view of literature as narrative only, and their

> difficulty in identifying literary techniques or how they worked. As a result of the difficulties students had with the amount of independent reading required many texts were unread or unfinished so much of the significance of what was discussed in class was lost (15).

Much of the lecture and seminar discussions that get lost are a consequence of students' unfamiliarity with the linguistic codes, what Stacey (2001) calls 'literary techniques [and] how they work'. It is what gets lost that becomes the criteria in terms of which students are assessed. Often what goes on in lecture halls exposes an assumption that students already possess the relevant disciplinary expertise and cognitive sophistication to grasp abstract meanings intrinsic in what Bateson (1971) calls 'style' in literary fiction. Balfour's (1996) reference to a response by one of his research participants in an English Department is a classical example of this assumption at work:

> … students do not seem to see that interpretation is the process of questioning and weighing what they already have an innate awareness of. They also do not seem to realise that this is what we are rewarding (23)[4].

As pointed out earlier, Fowler (1971) sees '"interpretation" [as] an exceedingly difficult term' (46) owing to the nature of the activity itself (subjective, draws from different and sometimes contradictory discourses, and with which most students are not familiar). As a first year student, for example, I was not aware of what interpretation meant within the English literary study; and I did not know what the discipline was rewarding, and not rewarding. These aspects of the discipline were not made explicit to me along the lines presented by Bateson (1971) above. I relied entirely on my limited Bantu Education secondary school learning experiences. Lecturers, on the other hand, simply assumed that I knew these intricate disciplinary dynamics which are only accessible to individuals who have conscious

[4] The title of the Report is *An Inquiry into Pedagogy and Syllabus Implementation in the Department of English at the University of Durban-Westville* (1996).

control over the deployment of the discourse of literary studies.

According to Reppen (1995), learning to have conscious control over the deployment of any discourse requires 'direct instruction in certain text features [in that discourse] such as text organisation [and] sentence structure' (35). While students experience a sense of loss of control over the deployment and organisation of the discourse of literary studies, lecturers still evaluate students 'by their control of these features' (35), as exemplified by Stacey's (2001) and Balfour's (1996) studies above. Reppen's main concern, as exemplified through Balfour's (1996) study in particular, is that students are expected to manipulate language academically, a skill which presupposes a constellation of acquired abilities. These abilities, it may be argued, can only be learned if interaction between students and lecturers is underpinned by principles of reflexive pedagogy, that is, an explicit teaching practice driven by a view that pedagogic communication needs to signal the discourse's constructedness (Bourdieu 1994). Reppen (1995) defines this as the teaching practice that 'brings forms and patterns of language use to conscious awareness:' (35). This is pertinent within pedagogical communication, as Ellsworth (1989) asserts:

> [T]here is no communication without disturbing background effects, and this 'static' is likely to be greatest in the pedagogical communication between one who knows and one who is to learn...Communication can only be regarded as pedagogical when every effort is made to eliminate the faulty 'signals inherent in an incomplete knowledge of the code and to transmit the code in the most efficient way (89).

What Ellsworth asserts involves developing students' awareness of the fact that, as Pecheux (1985) puts it: 'meaning [is] a function, not of particular words or wordings, but rather of the discursive formation in which ... expressions occur' (in Montgomery *et al.* (1992:7). When language is in use (whether in writing or in speaking), the discursive formation functions as a set of regulative principles that underlie actual discourses. Within this context, meaning becomes an effect upon the human subject, but not a stable property of the subject (Bourdieu, 1994). This is the level of sophistication to which reflexive pedagogy can expose students.

Pedagogic practice in most universities, however, does not lend itself to principles underpinning this kind of pedagogy. The latter is seen by most academics as too elementary, and is therefore rejected because it clashes with their pedagogical philosophy that students are favoured by lecturers' expertise. What this philosophy ignores is the fact that learning implies acquiring both knowledge itself, and the code of transmission used to convey a particular body of knowledge. One of the lecturers in Balfour's (1996) study insists that '… I expect students to have done prior reading and also to have at least considered the questions I posed to them at the end of the previous tutorial. I assume that my students learn from each other' (33). Assuming that students will understand the academic discourse as they read set works and secondary readings, without explicitly reflecting on these texts' constructedness, is to ignore the fact that language is not just a collection of words, but provides us with 'a system of transposable mental dispositions' (Bourdieu 1994:11). Given the demographic changes experienced by universities in particular, and changes our country has undergone, it would be inadvisable for English departments to maintain a teaching practice that is essentially content-centred, and relies on unverified assumptions about students' linguistic and/or academic literacy abilities.

Disciplines under the broader field of English Studies are supposed to teach students to be creative and critical in their engagement with broader societal changes and the accompanying challenges. For this to happen, the adoption of reflexive pedagogy as a teaching methodology so that we can be able to present our students with opportunities that will develop critical grounding in the fundamentals of their respective disciplines, that is, the disciplines' constructedness, is a necessity. In the case of teaching English literature, this entails making students aware, through pedagogical practices, that 'the study of literature [and other modes of communicating experience] is about our ways of thinking and speaking about individual existence, which is also, and always, a social existence' (Culler 2000:67). By choosing to mystify the language which includes academics as members of the disciplinary group, while ignoring the fact that they themselves are not 'authors' of such a language, (but are simply 'interpellated' (to use Althusser's term), by specific discursive formations), academics 'conceal the contradictory character of their discourses to both themselves and to

students' (Montgomery *et al*. 1992:5). Stacey's (2001) account of the nature of the essays produced by students in one of the English literature modules illustrates this point:

> Vague and unsubstantiated discussion and minimal analysis in essays resulted from students' avoidance of any close examination of the language of the texts because … [their] concerns about essays were all to do with content—understanding what they were required to discuss and finding enough to say … concern with content (15).

Essays written under these circumstances often display poor mastery of language as students seek to reproduce the academic discourse. It is a common thing to hear lecturers making comments about students such as 'another problem with students … is expression … evident in the essays' (Balfour 1996:33). Ironically, while this is the kind of attitude most lecturers have toward students, the former still expect the latter to manipulate language academically. This expectation betrays a rather flawed image of students by institutions of higher learning. They are seen as a socially homogeneous group who differ only according to individual talent and merit. Because of this image, comprehension and manipulation of language in writing are the first points on which students' knowledge is judged. This is the reason Rose (2005) insists that:

> Many of us are working on writing, but the function of writing at school and university courses is primarily to demonstrate what we have learnt from reading. So I'm going to suggest that if we wish to explicitly address the learning needs of our students, then we need to make a significant shift in our teaching practices at all levels of education (1).

Drawing on this theoretical understanding of the role of reading in the construction of knowledge, pedagogic practices in the field of English Studies will assist academics to identify, recognise, and deal with the factors that separate them from students. According to Delpit (1988), such

separation is a consequence of the fact that

> members of any culture transmit information implicitly to co-members. However, when implicit codes are attempted across cultures, communication frequently breaks down (283).

The identification and critical engagement with these classroom dynamics lead to an acknowledgement of the centrality of students' knowledge of the nature of the code of communication, and the dependence of this knowledge on factors such as social origin and school background. Writing about strategies that could be deployed to make the code of communication accessible to all students, Delpit (1988) points out that for those who 'are not already participant[s] in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier' (282). In his *Class, Codes and Control* (1971), Bernstein (1971) points out that 'people learn their place in the world by virtue of the language codes they employ' (178). He distinguishes between what he calls 'restricted code and elaborated code' (135). According to Bernstein (1971),

> The restricted code works … for situations in which there is a great deal of shared and taken-for-granted knowledge in the group of speakers. It is economical and rich, conveying a vast amount of meaning with a few words, each of which has a complex set of connotations and acts like an index, pointing the hearer to a lot more information which remains unsaid …. The elaborated code spells everything out, not because it is better, but because it is necessary so that everyone can understand it. It has to elaborate because the circumstances do not allow the speaker to condense (26).

The implications in terms of the use of an elaborated code are that its effectiveness can be experienced in situations where there is no prior or shared understanding and knowledge of academic discourses. Such circumstances require more thorough explanation for students' learning to be meaningful, for, academics introduce new concepts and ideas to individuals (students) they have never met before. It is thus through an explicit teaching

practice, with the use of elaborated code as a matter of principle, that students may develop in literate English and begin to cope with the study of literature, and be in a position to expand the boundaries of the discipline.

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Language Policy and Education in South Africa: An alternative View of the Position of English and African Languages

Rajendra Chetty and
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The Interface between Language Policies and Social Transformation

The claim that English marginalizes learners has to be seen within the complexity of language teaching and learning in a changing society**.** More realistically, learners who do not have an African language in South Africa are deprived of the opportunity for meaning construction within the African context that forms their life world. We argue that the problem lies more with the quality of the teaching of English. A cognitive approach to teaching ensures that we succeed in presenting English as a potentially emancipatory force in students' lives. There is no linguistic and cultural deficit among English second language learners as they have cultural capital and they have a language. No child is empty of language. Language teaching needs to be underpinned by radical and critical educational studies to ensure that it serves emancipatory interests. Freire contends that the form and context of knowledge, as well as the social practices through which it is appropriated, have to be seen as part of an ongoing struggle over what that counts as legitimate culture and forms of empowerment (Aronowitz & Giroux 1986:156).

We argue that providing English knowledge is legitimate and it empowers learners. Good command of English will aid in minimizing socio-

economic disadvantage, especially within the post-apartheid context of South Africa. However, we also acknowledge that the language issue is both sensitive and controversial and the debates are highly contested. Proponents of English as medium of instruction, like Kachru (1986:1), contend that knowing English is like possessing the fabled Aladdin's lamp as it opens the linguistic gates of international business, technology, science, and travel as it has linguistic power. In direct opposition is Cooke's notion of English as cultural intrusion, the property of elites and the expression of the interests of the dominant classes (1988:59). Teacher educators and trainees will find it beneficial to understand the complexity of the debate and to include in the curriculum the nature of conflict (Apple 1990). Apple theorises that a significant block to transforming massified consciousness into critical consciousness is the ideology that in the pluralistic society the interests of all the groups are the same, and that policy and institutions are formed by consensus, in this case English as lingua franca (1990:87). Conflict, contradiction and resistance should be viewed as the basic driving force in society. A theory of resistance is therefore central to the development of critical educational studies. It helps to nuance the debate more carefully, understand that all language learning is political and point to the ideology underlining curricula, the reasons why some knowledge is foregrounded and others marginalised and engage critically with working class knowledge.

At the present moment, English serves as an important vehicle for socio-economic cohesion in our country. It also serves as a linguistic bridge for communication amongst black South Africans in a changing society. The reason why Nelson Mandela and subsequent African liberation leaders mostly use English in their addresses can be interpreted in different ways, including that English confers some attributes of neutrality or that the use of English is an attempt to foster the constitutionally entrenched values for an inclusive society. It can also be seen as an attempt to unify a people susceptible to be divided along ethno-linguistic lines. In a sense one can argue that English equalizes our society. Ideally, because of our location on the African continent, an African language should be playing this role and indeed, current efforts to promote African languages into higher status functions should be encouraged. However, the fact remains that at least in the foreseeable future, English will continue to be a major language in this country and the world at large. One can therefore argue that imperatives for

the foregrounding of English as language of teaching and learning should be examined so as to provide every South African child with an opportunity to master the language that might control his/her access to the means of socio-economic and educational empowerment.

It should be noted however that, for second-language speakers of English, the attainment of better mastery of English should not negatively affect their first language abilities. Teaching strategies should be found for learners to value and not reject their first language and culture yet also embrace, appropriate and claim both cultures and languages as theirs. Mother-tongue based bilingual education should aim at providing learners with good command of English, which constitutes an essential tool for success in the global arena. However, the maintenance of the learner's mother-tongue will remain an important additional pillar for success at local and national level. Therefore, the quality of the teaching of English needs to be reinforced.

Metaphors of English

The discourse about English in the South African context draws on an interesting spectrum of metaphors including the following: English as a liberator, a gatekeeper, a killer of other languages (Skutnabb-Kangas 2006; Pennycook 1994) or a colonizer of minds (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986).

Skutnabb-Kangas' view, which in essence argues that English is a killer language, have been espoused by a number of language researchers. Pennycook's notion of linguistic curtailment refers to the fact that English pushes other languages out of the way not necessarily killing them (1994:14). Pennycook's argument is relevant to the South African situation where English remains the language in which much is written and a language in which much of the visual media occur, thus curtailing the usage of other languages in spheres of power. The promotion of African languages appears to be one of the effective ways to counter the devastating negative impact suffered by African languages. Unfortunately, such a view falls short of acknowledging that English is not the only killer language. The promotion of Kiswahili in Tanzania has led to the marginalization of numerous indigenous languages. In our South African context, the dominance of isiZulu in Kwa Zulu-Natal is a result of the little discussed marginalization (quasi

disappearance) of other African indigenous dialects of the province. The issue is not necessarily the presence or absence of English but the lack of support for a particular language may result in its marginalization (disappearance). Further to this sociolinguistic argument, one can add a psycholinguistic argument which can be evidenced by the fact that language attrition can occur in any individual if he/she does not use that particular language (in writing, listening, speaking and reading).

In Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Decolonizing The Mind*, he argues that languages are not neutral means of communication but are also an embodiment of culture and values. He further maintains that values are the basis of people's identity (1986:5). His argument for the rejection of English lies in the fact that for him embracing the English language and thereby its culture and value system amounts to embracing a Eurocentric world view with the detrimental effect of perceiving the African languages, cultures and values as inferior (17f).

Unfortunately, this idea echoed by many other scholars throughout the world and in South Africa opposes on the one hand the English language and on the other hand the African languages as if these two blocks were easily delineable. We know that African languages are diverse and represent a diversity of moral, ethical, and aesthetic values. They also represent a diversity of cultures. Furthermore, in the African context, bilingualism and multilingualism are a normal occurrence. The link between language and culture means that most Africans are multicultural and this does not mean that one of the cultures is necessarily viewed as inferior to the other. Two or more language-cultures can coexist in a fruitful symbiosis. In the South African context, one may wonder whether being from the Xhosa ethnic group and speaking isiZulu and English amounts to mental colonisation. Our contention is that the proverbial *colonised child* is not colonised because of the language he/she uses but rather because of a lack of critical thinking. Critical thinking remains central to any decolonising enterprise. Critical thinking can use any linguistic vehicle to attain autonomy or freedom and the example of the South African liberation movement's use of English remains a case in point.

Ngugi wa Thiongo's argument also posits a link between language, values and identity which indeed does exist. However, identity should not be construed in the narrow sense of a single static construct. Identities are

multiple and dynamic constructs. They can be traded, exchanged and negotiated depending on the context. Learning a new language can also be considered as acquiring a new tool. Teaching English is a way of providing learners with a necessary identity kit which is essential for opening doors of opportunity in the future.

Is English a Liberator or a Gatekeeper?

English is established among individuals from a variety of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds (although less so in the rural than in the urban areas, and amongst the working class). Especially amongst the educated, English functions as a lingua franca and is a primary language of government, business and commerce. Educationally, it is a compulsory subject in all schools, and is the preferred medium of instruction in most schools and tertiary institutions (the only other medium of instruction at advanced levels at present being Afrikaans). It is firmly embedded in the fabric of South African education and society.

English was chosen as language of communication by the liberation organizations during the 'freedom struggle' and has been seen as the language of liberation and black unity (Gough 1996: xviii). It should be added however that the usefulness of English in the liberation struggle came from the fact that it was an additional medium of communication and not the only one. Many other languages were needed to ensure adequate mobilization and effective communication with the masses, the black elites, the forces of oppression and external supporters.

Today, the reality is that the high cost of multilingualism with 11 official languages is beyond the reach of South Africa. Despite the efforts of government to communicate with local populations in their own languages, English remains the only national language that allows government to function effectively. The Drum decade writers, the Soweto Poets and protest writings in popular journals like *Staffrider* used English as medium of communication. Is it because English could make their writing accessible to a larger audience? Is it because of the buying power of their targeted audience or because of their own difficulties to write creatively in their mother-tongues, themselves being products of an English-based education system? Whatever, the reasons and motives, one cannot refute the fact that even on a cultural level, English serves as the natural and arguably neutral choice.

The workplace of post-apartheid South Africa is transforming racially, culturally and linguistically to reflect our national diversity. Yet English remains the most used language for higher status occupations. This can be due to the fact that most African language speakers working as accountants, lawyers and scientists are, in fact, English mother-tongue speakers when it comes to debate on issues pertaining to their field of expertise (Mwepu 2005). It is curious that even a course like African Linguistics is taught through the medium of a foreign language i.e. English. This goes against the prediction of the 1996 National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) which suggested that it was only a matter of time before [South Africans in general and] the speakers of African languages [in particular] realised that 'English only' or 'English mainly' options were not adequate in terms of redressing the imbalances of the past (NCHE 1996:-381-385). The African Language development plan aimed at ensuring that certain courses 'which lead to regular contact with the population such as social work, nursing, law and public administration' be taught in African languages is far from being accomplished more than fourteen years later. This is in spite of attempts that are being made to teach science subjects in African languages at school level (Nomlomo 2004) and the development of terminology to support the teaching of science in indigenous languages (Jokweni 2004).

The ability of South Africans to communicate in English facilitates the evolution of a nation state. English is the language of the state and government documentation appears mostly in English. From the perspective of Bourdieu (1993) this represents cultural capital. English is therefore central to those who wish to succeed within the parameters of state-sanctioned power. Those who have good command of both English and an African language stand even a better chance of success. Yet mastery of other languages only (without English) seriously limits a person's chance of success. In the school environment, Kapp (2001) noticed that second language learners of English are enthusiastic to learn the language because of the perceived potential that English provides in terms of access to higher education, power and economic resources.

Alexander (2000) points out that unless a person has a command of standard English or of standard Afrikaans, he/she is simply eliminated from competition for jobs that are well remunerated or simply excluded from

consideration for certain positions of status and power. Although, this declaration was stated to emphasize the need to promote African languages and curtail the marginalisation of the majority (75%) of the African population, one can also see through this declaration a somewhat covert call for better teaching of English so as to provide our schooling population with a chance to acquire standard English, especially because of the intricate relationships which exist between language, schooling and economic empowerment.

In academic settings, Bangeni (2001) found that, given a choice, bilingual students would still prefer to submit their written academic essays in English rather than writing them in their indigenous languages because arguably, writing in their mother-tongue would limit their ability to utilize all the educational resources available to them.

Does English Entrench Unequal Power Relations?

It is only the intelligentsia that hold the view that the presence or dominance of English entrenches present unequal power relations. How can English not be neutral if it is the main language of the democratically elected African nationalist government, and the language of the media, commerce and industry? Is this by default or by design? The truth remains that South Africans speak a plethora of languages and it is an ill-informed viewpoint that English discriminates against the majority of the country's citizens. The state has been vociferous in entrenching the rights of indigenous languages and multilingualism in South Africa as a prerequisite for democracy. Numerous initiatives were taken in this regard, including the recruitment of multilingual frontline clerks, capable of communicating with the public indigenous languages as well as the provision of interpreting services in courts, health institutions and the parliament. Yet especially in parliament, the interpreting services are hardly used because, the majority of the Members of Parliament prefer to use English so as to give everyone direct access to the substance of their argument. In the context of the South African Parliament, the effort to address everyone in English (parliamentarians and the members of their constituencies, through the airwaves) seems to bear witness to the view that English is an equalizing linguistic vehicle. But beyond this, addressing everyone in English sometimes appears to be a sign

of courtesy, impartiality and civility in a country that uses so many languages.

The history of English in South Africa shows that this language was initially forced on people. The English Language Proclamation of 5 July 1822 unilaterally imposed English as an exclusive language for all judicial and official acts, proceedings and businesses in the colony. This policy or imposition was considered as a means of uniting the loyal subjects to their common Sovereign, the Queen of England. Giliomee laments that English was imposed even though more than 90 percent of Europeans [and probably 99% of Africans] in the Colony spoke no English (2003: 3). Notwithstanding this sad history, various other reasons have contributed to the fact that the English language has been appropriated by South Africans at national level as theirs. Moreover, any effort of unbiased language promotion should give due consideration to the fact that English indeed remains a South African language.

Theoretical Constructs of Marginalization

Integral to the process of affirmation of the language rights of learners are two factors: the ideological context of English in public schools and the theoretical constructs of marginalization/exclusion on the basis of language. Drawing from critical educational studies (Giroux, Freire, Shor and Apple) and the post-structuralist theories of Foucault, we maintain that the dichotomy between English versus mother-tongue and the resultant debates around identity politics and strategies of social engineering ignore the complexity of language teaching and learning in post-apartheid South Africa. The poststructuralist theory of language as discourse is sufficiently powerful to explain why English is far from neutral. The Foucauldian archaeological model with its genealogical approach to history, theory of power and discourses, and notion of discursive space is invaluable in a study of exclusion, especially in post-colonial contexts faced with the dichotomy between the dominant discourse (English) and the local marginalized 'other' (African languages). A genealogical study of the role of English as dominant language in South Africa will uncover the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements, decentre discourse and, reveal how discourse is secondary to systems of power (Chetty 1998:4). The

critical questions within this context is how does one promote English teaching and learning in a land where language is racially segmented, where the Eurocentric approach in the teaching of English is dominant, where major struggles were waged against language e.g. Soweto 1976, and where academics still speak of a 'high culture'. How can content in the language classroom be liberating and empowering? An appropriate intervention in language teaching is transdisciplinarity. Through its self-reflexivity it attempts not simply to accumulate knowledge but to ask what constitutes knowledge, why and how, and by whose authority, certain modes of understanding are certified as knowledge and others as non-knowledge (Zavarzadeh & Morton 1994:66). Unlike interdisciplinarity, it is a transgressive form of redrawing the map of learning in a fashion that opens up new spaces for emergent radical and revolutionary subjectivities.

Issues like authority, knowledge and power introduce to students conflicting ideologies and cultural processes. Within the South African context, it helps to counter the dangers of historical amnesia currently encouraged by processes like reconciliation and the notion of the 'rainbow-nation'. Foucault (1972:208) notes that it is the intellectual's role to struggle against the forms of power that transforms the individual into its object and instrument in the sphere of knowledge, truth, consciousness and discourse. Foucault also regards theory as practice and a struggle against power, revealing and undermining power where it is most insidious and invisible. In the English literature classroom, for example, some progress is being made in the shifting of marginalized capital to the centre in the teaching of English literature—the concept 'book' is not viewed as the starting point for literary studies since South African students are not confronted only with the printed word, but also with the oral performance, the handwritten manuscript, the pamphlets, the pictographic script of the rock paintings, the songs and folklore, rituals and ceremonies, trance dances and dreams, etc. It is a creative way of teaching English that is needed to ensure that the language can play a role in liberating the previously disadvantaged in South Africa.

The linguistic competence of African learners testifies to an elaborate and complex pattern or broader communicative competence and points to the importance of multilingualism as a resource in the South African classroom Gough (1996). It is with this in mind that the new curriculum makes provision for three languages at senior certificate level.

We disagree with the notion that the language policy operates as social exclusion. In reality, English ensures social inclusion. Although English is not the most widely spoken mother-tongue in South Africa (it is lower than isiZulu, isiXhosa and Afrikaans) it is a language of access and serves as favorable condition for success both in higher education and internationally. English does not perpetuate the privileged status of an elite class, on the contrary, English promotes structural-economic development and social inter-group and inter-personal interactions, vital components for reconciliation and growth in a new democracy. In spite of postcolonial critique by language activists, English does not regulate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources between groups as South African speakers of English are not defined on the basis of language. All South Africans have access to English and an indigenous language. As such they may decide to claim any of the official languages as theirs.

Our tertiary institutions admit students who speak all the major South African languages, as well as from many African states, Asia, China, Europe and the Americas. The use of English in this context is relevant and appropriate. Students choose to learn in English and whether we interrogate the notion of English as a powerful language that is used to gain greater personal, economic, or political advantage or an appropriate language given the tower of Babel situation in our campuses. It is ultimately the choice of the students.

Most parents want their children to be taught through the medium of English. Political change has made it possible for increasing number of black people to enter the corporate and business world, established political activities and educational institutions from which they were previously excluded. As early as 1991, research in South Africa proves that significant numbers of black parents have opted for English for their children, even from the first year of primary school (NEPI 1991:13f).

Some critics however challenged the NEPI report because of the way some of the questions in that investigation were formulated. Rather than positing a dichotomy between English and African languages, the NEPI investigation should have given the parents a choice between on the one hand English as the only medium of instruction and on the other hand English and African languages. Nonetheless, any attempt to reject English as a medium of instruction may not be supported by parents. English plays a

central role in education and it is perceived as a powerful instrument against marginalization.

Developing New Attitudes to Language Teaching

Teacher training should be underpinned by critical educational studies. The focus on problem-posing in contrast to problem-solving—together with dialogical rather than 'banking' education is relevant for curriculum reconstruction in teacher training, especially in view of the need to address the low literacy rates. Giroux and McLaren (1991:159) maintain that critical language teaching as a form of cultural politics speaks to a form of curriculum theory and application that stresses the historical, cultural and discursive in relation to classroom materials and teaching practices. It enables teachers to examine, dismantle, analyse, deconstruct and reconstruct pedagogical practices. Teachers are empowered to ask how meaning is produced, and how power is constructed and reinforced in the classroom.

Teachers should understand language curricula as an expression of struggle and to acknowledge that it constitutes a primary agent for introducing, preparing and legitimizing forms of social life. There should be a shift from reading to writing and teachers should consider both content and methods. Humanistic methods without critical content cannot help students become subjects capable of using critical knowledge to transform their world. The experiences and social practices that students bring to the institutions (like indigenous languages and cultures) should be validated. Such experiences should form the basis of the teaching programme thus ensuring that students have an active voice in the content taught instead of the traditional approach of silencing them by ignoring their cultural capital. The challenge remains with our tertiary institutions to educate future teachers to learn to appreciate their learners' languages, cultures and values. Such appreciation should lead to finding ways of building on the learners' capital. Space should be created within the classroom for the learner to use his/her home language. For example, learners can be given a chance to debate a specific problem and solve it using their mother-tongue freely, then report the findings to the class in English so as to be understood by everyone. Multilingual teachers can use code switching to tap on the linguistic ability of their learners. Literature could be another site of multilingual exchange.

Unfortunately, literature teaching in language lessons remains problematic, especially when we interpret texts for students. Students' own responses are conditioned by cultural backgrounds and biases and more interpersonal factors of culture and society and certain levels of literacy competence. Strategies should be implemented to maintain the interest of the reader especially with the longer works of fiction and also to encourage reading. When the content is interesting and relevant, it motivates the student to continue reading, even if the language is difficult, the reading exercise is more successful. Local writings have a direct relevance to the students' lives. Where an intrinsic motivation to read has been developed, students will read texts regardless of factors that will facilitate their reading comprehension. Ideally, learners should be exposed to literary texts both in English and their mother-tongues. This will help to foster a culture of bi-literacy in South Africa. The challenge is therefore in the hands of government, together with publishers and other stakeholders, to stimulate the emergence of South African literatures in all the official languages.

In the interim period, English fictional classics can be translated into South African languages and vice versa. However, in the long run, South African writers will be encouraged to create a body of literature with a South African flair and capable of speaking to the nation's soul. Literature production in this country, especially literature in indigenous languages needs to be revived. Such revival may take the form of activism whereby community members meet to write, not for pecuniary reasons but as socio-political cause worth pursuing. Unless the teaching of literature in schools is also revolutionized, many students will continue to be ill-equipped for tertiary studies.

It is fiscal reasons that restrict the appointment of new language teachers to ensure the implementation of the language policy. Language policy seems to have simply moved African languages from the margin to the centre (on paper only) as a form of redress and there have been little training of African language teachers. Of serious concern is the low intake of students at foundation phase level to offer mother-tongue instruction in indigenous languages. What is needed is a concerted programme to ensure quality intake for teacher training and an effort by the state to reduce material inequities in schools as a step to attract quality teaching trainees. The quality training of language teachers is unfortunately not foregrounded

as there are more serious issues within the complexity of teacher education to be addressed.

Conceptual Linguistic Knowledge

Teacher Education institutions should conceptualise language-in-education programmes that are designed for long term solutions. There is no quick fix solution and strategy to enhance language proficiency in schools is a long term project. Integral to scholastic achievement is the emphasis on academically related aspects of language proficiency, or what Cummins (1989) labels as conceptual-linguistic knowledge. We argue for a greater accent on cognitive/academic language proficiency in the training of teachers, along with the reconceptualisation of the role of languages in teaching and learning. Language courses are limited to archaic pedagogics and consist of formal aspects of language, limited literature study and basic communication in English. The silences in these language courses include semantics and functional meaning, academic language proficiency, pragmatic aspects of proficiency, bilingualism and code-switching.

Meaning construction (Freire 1971), a theory fundamental to critical educational studies, is the basis of context-embedded teaching, especially within post-colonial contexts. The teacher has to be trained to encourage learners to negotiate meaning and interpret texts.

Training of Teachers

In her study of language and learning science in South Africa, Probyn (2006) concluded that teachers indicated a strong preference for English as the language of teaching and learning. The lack of training in teaching in second language was evident and teaching resources were limited. Teaching cannot be done in a language in which the teacher does not have an appropriate level of mastery.

The contextual frame that continues to condition English teaching in postcolonial contexts is daunting and should be addressed in teacher training:

- Pedagogy is based on European models

- The most prevalent teaching methodology is the transmission mode;
- The prescribed texts are drawn from predominantly middle class, high culture positions;
- Classrooms are characterized by a polarity between first language and second language speakers whose cultural capital is excluded;
- A culture of silence results from non-mother-tongue based learners loosing confidence (Ashworth & Prinsloo 1994:125f).

A Call for Better Teaching of English

Webb (2006) attributes the non-use of African languages in education *inter alia* to the fact that in South Africa for example, the process of domination and subjugation has resulted in the perception that indigenous cultural values, beliefs and norms are inferior. Can English be taught to Africans in a way that allows space to challenge such negative perceptions? Especially, given the fact that learning English is accompanied with the tacit acquisition of the values of English. Halliday (2007) highlights the fact that there is probably no subject in the curriculum whose aims are so often formulated as those of English language yet they remain by and large ill-defined, controversial and [sometimes] obscure. A critical look at the aim of the English course in the South African context is necessary. Can English be taught in a manner that empowers speakers of indigenous languages? Can it also be taught in such a way that it facilitates the acquisition of other subjects such as mathematics? These questions can be adequately addressed if the teaching of English goes beyond the transmission of basic linguistic skills. Christie, Frances and Macken-Horarik (2007) argue that the teaching of English should go beyond basic skills to integrate issues of cultural heritage, personal growth, functional language studies, cultural studies and new literacy studies.

Conclusion

In this paper we have interrogated the controversies and (in)sensitivities of the imperatives for the foregrounding of English as language of teaching and learning. We argued that the problem lies more with the quality of the teaching of English rather than the language itself. A cognitive approach to

teaching will ensure that we succeed in presenting English as a potentially emancipatory force in students' lives.

There has been little retraining of teachers with regards to the multilingual nature of open schools (pre-1994 South African schools were largely segregated). English second language learners are marginalized and silenced in such contexts due to teacher preparation, not necessarily due to English as language of instruction.

If it is to be a 'liberator', English should be a resource to be appropriated and owned by all, not just the elite, to be used as a gateway to the wider world. For this to happen, creative solutions (and massive expenditure) would have to be applied to the teaching of English, particularly in schools where indigenous languages are the mother-tongue of learners. If well managed, mastery of English in previously disadvantaged settings may be an invaluable tool of exchange between those living in the margins of society and those who are part of the global village.

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Reconfiguring Home: Charlotte Brontë Meets Njabulo Ndebele

Camille Tabosa-Vaz

This article derives from my MA dissertation, *A Postcolonial, Feminist Reading of the Representation of 'home' in Jane Eyre and Villette by Charlotte Brontë* (2007)[1]. Focusing on questions of home, homelessness and marginality, the title arises from Brontë's overt preoccupation with conditions of female social marginality and orphanhood—issues central to the postcolonial problematic. A postcolonial feminist reading of the representation of home in Brontë's novels reveals the dynamic and unstable qualities of a concept that prompts a new and different reading of Victorian literature. One can begin to question the notions of home that are operative in the fictions of the old metropolis from a new centre (South Africa). This allows a reading across boundaries which has the potential to change the configurations of empire. It is also argued that a situated rereading of classic nineteenth century texts can shed light on more contemporary representations of home, homelessness, marginality and the subaltern. I pursue this possibility through a comparative reading of home and homelessness in Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*.

'Home' has a strongly subjective nature due, in part, that it is here where personal values are lodged, and that this initially indifferent space is imaginatively transformed by its inhabitants. It only becomes the 'home' when inhabited by people, who confer identity on it by giving it function and meaning, and who in turn, through formative experiences within the home, establish their own sense of self and ways of relating to others.

[1] The dissertation was supervised by Professor M.J. Daymond.

An analysis of the condition of nineteenth century women exposes the marginal figures in society who remain homeless and bereft of their histories because the process of identity formation has been radically disrupted, sometimes over several generations. By presenting her two heroines as orphans, we may see, through a postcolonial lens, that Brontë complicated the concept of 'home' and interrogated myths associated with this concept. Loyalty to the physical and symbolic location of 'home' and nostalgia associated with that place are sentiments which are destabilised by the protagonists' orphaned status and the fact that both Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe are 'homesick with nowhere to go' (Martin & Mohanty 1986: 206). Thus, Brontë's exploration of the home and marginality reveals the 'surrogate' nature of home for the orphan figure, who is the marginal outsider and the woman, who is the imprisoned insider. Brontë questions the ideal of home and illustrates an ambivalent attitude toward home which may be seen to pre-empt postcolonial concerns with the instability of home and the question of liminality.

The situation of women in nineteenth century society was one of social marginality and constraint. Because women have historically been prescribed a specific place in the home as carer and nurturer, the space of 'home', which is sometimes seen as a creative area, is not always a nurturing place for women. For some, the 'home' has the potential to offer the freedom and security to explore the artistic imagination. For many women, however, the often enclosed and imprisoning space of 'home' finds them confined to the 'homeplace' and not permitted to pursue any aspirations which would take them outside the prescribed roles of the nineteenth century accepted and imposed by society. Economically, legally and socially subordinate, women were paradoxically situated as both marginalised outsiders and insiders who are imprisoned within the home. With regard to nineteenth century life, womanliness and accepted standards of behaviour and decorum were notions entrenched by both women and men. Women were not encouraged to explore a creative space in society which might jeopardise their place in the home, or take up any career (such as that of writer) which might affect the execution of their prescribed duties and transform the self-effacing, submissive 'angel' of the house into the ambitious, assertive 'monster'. Confined to the home, nineteenth century women did also not often *own* the space of home and so were relegated to position of housekeeper as opposed

to householder, a position occupied largely by men (Heyns 1999: 21). The fact that homeowners were predominantly male prompts the questions of who *belongs* to the home and who is entitled to the creative space of the home and, furthermore, at what price such aspirations are purchased. Thus women were allowed to develop as individuals only within certain confines and to exist according to certain prescribed regulations.

These nineteenth century women, who exist rule-bound and confined in homes they are unable to own, are therefore also subject to the experience of 'homelessness'. This problematises the concept of 'home' and proves the instability of this 'ideal'. Brontë writes about the home, exploring the universal, inherent need to establish a suitable 'home', while questioning the fundamental ideals upon which the concept of 'home' is founded. The home is not merely a physical structure that provides shelter from the elements. It is the place where life begins, where character and identity are developed, where the human soul is nurtured and where fond memories are created. Such places become symbolic, when a sentimental attachment to the home and what it signifies is formed, and feelings of loyalty are cultivated. These comprise some of the assumptions associated with the home, the sentimental attachments to a place often associated with childhood. 'Home' becomes more than a physical space, as ordinary as bread and children, but of vital importance to growth. Individual identity is derived from the sense of 'home'. The material objects serve to represent the house, representing family name and standing in society, and is symbolic of belonging in society and social aspirations. Belonging implies not only integrating into the space of home but into the space of society. The trope of the house reflects the significance of individual human life in relation to the social structure. Therefore, if you belong in the home, it may be inferred that 'home' makes a further 'place' for you in society, facilitating belonging in an intimate private space and in the public arena.

Brontë's idea of 'home' is an uneasy one and complicates these fundamental ideals mentioned above. The ambivalent attitude to home, expressed by female first-person narrators Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, who grapple with the task of telling their own story in a society of self-*less* women, is further complicated by their orphaned condition. The usual condition of homelessness in both novels is exacerbated by the protagonists' position as 'orphaned'—bereft of family, without social connections,

therefore economically and socially precarious. The stories told by Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, the orphaned female protagonists in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* respectively, represent the condition of the orphan as a position which emphasises the marginality of an individual, without connections and without an authentic sense of 'home' or identity as defined by domicile and relations. Every place in which an orphaned individual attempts to locate him/herself therefore serves as a surrogate home and the temporary and impermanent nature of these homes lends the individual's sense of self-worth and self a precarious and unstable quality. Jane Eyre's orphan status, for instance, renders Gateshead a surrogate home, as she has no direct family connections: 'I was a discord in Gateshead Hall: I was like nobody there …' (1998:16). Jane's cousin, John Reed, emphasises this state of dependence and lack of belonging when he states:

> You are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals as we do, and wear clothes at our mamma's expense…all the house belongs to me (1998: 11).

Bretton is, too, a surrogate home for Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. There is a pervading sense of impermanence in her life, emphasised by her deliberately evasive story-telling technique: 'My godmother having come in person to claim me of the kinsfolk with whom was at that time fixed my permanent residence' (1949: 10). Lucy does not elaborate on the nature or familial ties of these unidentified 'kinsfolk' with who '*at that time*' was fixed her permanent residence. There is no sense of real attachment to a place, no sense of a stable home or home life and the significant factor of her solitude is thus foregrounded.

This surrogate home plays a significant role with regard to the marginalised individual as the homeplace functions as the site for identity-formation. As the home initiates and nurtures identity, the condition of being home*less* and not belonging impedes growth as the development of identity is halted. The question arises of how the orphaned condition of such individuals affects the construction of identity and sense of belonging in society. The home as nurturing space is a notion that is taken for granted and such conventional, accepted notions of the home do not take into account the

marginal figures which exist on the periphery, such as orphans, who function as deprived and excluded *outsiders* in society. These figures are *without*, literally and symbolically, as they are unable to locate themselves physically in any given site where they may begin to feel at home. These figures are significant to an understanding of the construction of a society, as the figures left on the outside and on the periphery serve to define those at the centre. The periphery comprises part of a whole and therefore marginal figures, while problematic, are necessary to existence. Thus, the orphaned marginal figures can signify an alternative to a socially constructed and controlled 'reality' as one explores how such individuals fit into the conventions and rules of society. Brontë's exploration of both the marginal outsider (an orphan) and imprisoned insider (a woman) informs an understanding of the position of the subaltern today, a position still defined by gender, class and, furthermore, by race. Therefore Brontë explores both the marginal outside and imprisoned inside. Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe reflect the complex condition of liminality with regard to the home as they have *no* primary home and no sense of attachment.

The issue of place and space is another example of where postcolonial theory has the potential to offer an interesting new angle on classic nineteenth century texts. The question of belonging and the unstable location of orphaned marginal figures in society are underpinned by the practice of conferring an identity on space and making it *place*. Gilbert and Gubar point out that the major preoccupation in this process of self-definition for all Brontë's heroines is the '[struggle] for a comfortable space' (2000: 437), which is prompted by the lack of belonging and the absence of an authentic home. Lucy Snowe's attempts to discover a 'comfortable space' take place at the school, where her space-clearing gestures take on literal proportions when she encounters the '… deep and leafy seclusion' of a neglected garden on the school property (1949: 121). Lucy states, 'I made myself a gardener…I cleared away the relics of past autumns …' (1949: 124). This fundamental process of clearing a comfortable or 'felicitous' space is developed by Bachelard, who observes that '… Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to measures and estimates of the surveyor…' (1969: xxxiii). Thus Lucy attempts to personalise the 'indifferent' space of the garden in order to create a place where she may begin to cultivate the traditional sentiments of loyalty and

nostalgia, feelings usually attached to the home. She chooses the garden as this cultivation may not be achieved inside the surrogate home of the Pensionnat. Jane Eyre's need for solitude is similarly evident when she finds a space which stands outside the structural confines of Thornfield. Similarly to Gateshead, the building itself does not necessarily provide the needed location of selfhood, and this provokes the space-clearing gestures on the part of Jane. Thornfield is not 'home' and Jane does not feel that she belongs, and therefore she attempts to 'colonise' a space of her own.

> I walked awhile on the pavement; but a subtle, well-known scent—that of a cigar—stole from some window; I saw the library casement open a handbreadth; I knew I might be watched thence; so I went apart into the orchard. No nook in the grounds more sheltered and more Eden-like; it was full of trees, it bloomed with flowers: a very high wall shut it out from the court, on one side; on the other, a beech avenue screened it from the lawn…Here one could wander unseen …. I felt I could haunt such shade for ever … (1998: 260).

Reading Brontë through a postcolonial lens promotes a re-examination of the fundamental requirements implicit in the connotation of 'home' of 'shelter, comfort, nurture and protection' (George 1996:1), needs that are not necessarily accessible to marginalised figures. These fundamental requirements of shelter, comfort, nurture and protection are interrogated by post-colonial critics, Barnes and Wiley, who contend that 'home is a form of coalition' (1996: xv). Their term coalition, serves to signify a concept of 'home' formed by the alliance of originally distinct elements, for instance 'belonging and exile':

> Home is not always a comfortable place to be… home is always a form of coalition: between the individual and the family or community, between belonging and exile; between home as a utopian longing and home as memory; home as safe haven or imprisonment or site of violence, and finally, between home as place and home as metaphor (Barnes & Wiley 1996: xv).

This postcolonial interrogation of home as a ' coalition' informs an under-

standding of Brontë's ambivalent attitude to the home. Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe endeavour to 'locate' themselves symbolically and literally as their attempts to create both a viable sense of self and an authentic place to call home are inexorably tied together. Barnes and Wiley state that, 'The relationship between self and place is an interactive and changing one; the politics of where we locate ourselves is an integral factor in the construction of female identity and subjectivity' (1996: xvii). When one reads *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* from a feminist, post-colonial perspective in which home is a coalition, as an ambivalent space it has the potential to provide safety and shelter *and* to represent danger. For instance, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane's traumatic childhood experience in the 'red room' in Gateshead causes her to imaginatively transform the indifferent space of the room into a threatening and dangerous place in the house. If we follow Bachelard's proposition that, 'there is ground for taking the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul' (1969: xxxiii e.i.o.), then we may infer that the imaginative transformation of the 'red-room' into a treacherous place reflects Jane Eyre's own feelings of insecurity and dislocation. Jane is locked in the 'red-room' as punishment for her retaliation and the element of the gothic is introduced, as the room assumes perilous and threatening qualities:

> Mr Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this chamber that he breathed his last; here he lay in state; hence his coffin was borne by the undertaker's men; and since that day a sense of dreary consecration had guarded it from frequent intrusion …. no jail was ever more secure …. I lifted my head and tried to look boldly round the dark room: at this moment a light gleamed on the wall …. I thought the swift-darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings: something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down—I uttered a wild, involuntary cry … (1998: 14, 17f).

This scene provides a further example of how the structure of Gateshead, which may serve as the nurturing place of 'home' to the Reeds, does not hold similar connotations for Jane.

Reading the conclusions of *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* through the prism

of postcolonial theory affirms George's notion that the home is a place that is 'fought for', as each female protagonist seeks to establish a home for herself. The idea that home is the 'exclusive domain of a few' informs recent post-colonial and feminist debates as it mirrors, for instance, the status of the marginalised immigrant in the post-colonial context, who struggles to establish a home in a foreign environment. The process of searching for a suitable 'home' is thus integral to the creation of identity, specifically in the case of the immigrant, where the establishment of a sense of self in new and unfamiliar surroundings is imperative to this marginal figure that is 'homesick with nowhere to go'. The marginalised female in feminist discussion struggles to escape the enclosed space of the home, thus having 'nowhere to go' in a different sense, and the process of establishing an appropriate homeplace is affected by the fact that women frequently occupy the position of housekeeper as opposed to homeowner.

George suggests that a representation of the experience of post-colonial homelessness is marked by '… an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material'. This process of establishing a suitable homeplace also rests on the idea of material and spiritual belongings affecting the sense of belonging in the home. Jane and Lucy arrive at their respective destinations of Marsh End and Villette penniless and without any possessions. The precarious nature of their positions as penniless, female orphans and their subsequent vulnerability in unfamiliar and foreign locations is foregrounded. This raises the question of whether possessions (material, such as mementoes or spiritual, such as memories) 'impede or facilitate belonging' (1996: 171). In *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, the female protagonists struggle to belong in the various 'homes' which locate their characters and the lack of possessions and connections in society allow Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe to, in essence, create new, unfettered lives. However, they are unable to define their identity according to, for instance, the material possessions of mementoes (which store memories that construct identity) or draw support from connections which privilege other members of society and are forced at various intervals to accept assistance. In this way, the assistance facilitates a degree of assimilation into the mainstream of society as Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe fulfil their inherent need for 'home'. Similarities with postcolonial theorising are clear here and this theory may be used to confirm that the 'home' as explored by Brontë reflects 'home' as

it is understood in a contemporary context. For instance, Martin and Mohanty emphasise the sacrifice implicit in attempting to establish a home, as one learns at what price '… privilege, comfort, home, and secure notions of self are purchased' (1986: 203). Therefore, this assimilation into the mainstream, into conventional society is, in Martin and Mohanty's words, 'purchased' at a price by Jane and Lucy.

It is no coincidence then, bearing Marxist and New Historicist views of identity and class in mind, that the principal female protagonists in two of Charlotte Brontë's major works, *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, are a governess and a teacher respectively, forced to seek employment due to their orphaned condition. Terry Eagleton mentions that Brontë's portrayal is symptomatic of a 'more widespread exploitation' of her sex, and the limited and often debilitating options available to women in the nineteenth century (1988: 8). Issues of entitlement, property rights, inheritance and class are related to the orphan status of the two women and the fact that they are forced to seek employment in the homes of others gives rise to their sense of not belonging. Jane and Lucy, are forced to seek out professions as governess and teacher respectively, common typecasts for women in Gothic fiction. These professions also serve to highlight the notion of home by exploring the limited options available to women with no familial ties in a patriarchal society.

To some extent, Jane and Lucy remain marginal figures in society as their success and happiness are tempered with tragedy and they are unable to achieve, of their own volition, the full measure of happiness available to members of mainstream society. The forces of nature, fairies and celestial influence, coupled with the male heroes in the story, provide aid in Jane and Lucy's quests. This confirms Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that 'when a heroine rises she does so through the offices of a hero' (2000: 67). The problem of marginality remains largely unresolved in the two novels. Jane is fulfilled in marriage in Ferndean, the last of the locations and final phase in her character's development in the novel. But it is both 'her good fortune and Rochester's catastrophe [that] lessen his social and economic advantage over her' (Pearson & Pope 1981: 167). Eagleton reiterates this idea, stating that the '… the 'lower' character [Jane] is able to exercise power because of a weakness in the 'higher' character: Rochester is crippled ...' (1988: 59). Thus, having lessened Rochester's social and physical advantages over Jane,

'Brontë provides both with the happy ending of an egalitarian relationship' (Pearson & Pope 1981: 248). One may infer that, due to the curtailing of Rochester's potential, Jane is able to progress and succeed in attaining some happiness. Lucy too, manages to achieve a similar sense of fulfilment when she obtains her own school and home at the last location of her story, Faubourg Clotilde. However, M. Paul Emmanuel dies in a shipwreck while returning to Lucy. Gilbert and Gubar state that M. Paul must die in order for Lucy Snowe to exist, as 'only in his absence … can she exert herself fully to exercise her powers' (2000: 438). In a sense, *Villette* may be seen as a reworking of *Jane Eyre* as the socially acceptable sense of fulfilment Jane Eyre achieves at the conclusion of the novel, self-sufficient *but* married, is not what the experiences of Lucy Snowe lead her to realise. She progresses one step further, the reader assumes, and achieves fulfilment despite her final solitude. Brontë introduces the ideas of self-sufficiency and independence with the 'proud' Jane Eyre, but truly develops the concept of the new woman in the 'unfeminine' Lucy Snowe, whose assimilation into society is achieved on her own terms. Lucy Snowe is thus the prototype of the independent and self-sufficient 'new woman', an idea that the novel *Jane Eyre* briefly introduces but does not bring to fruition. Thus, it may be inferred that, though Lucy Snowe 'succeeds', it is only at profound cost. The conjecture made here may be both post-colonial and feminist in its inference that marginal female figures are entitled to or deserving of the 'privileges' of comfort and home and the associated establishment of an authentic identity only once they have made some sacrifice for their aspirations of self-sufficiency and ambitions for an assured sense of self.

The concern with 'home', relevant today, was anticipated by Brontë, who took up the idea of a marginal figure, and developed the fictional orphan figure that is both an insider and outsider to the home. Charlotte Brontë explored the possible life choices available for women during her time. Through her fictional representation of women and 'home' and her oppositional position, she simultaneously maintained and challenged accepted principles of femininity. Brontë presents a comprehensive portrayal of the marginal figure, yet inevitably, given her time, desires assimilation for her orphaned female protagonists, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe. As a Victorian writer, Brontë evidently felt that she could challenge but not cross the accepted boundaries of her time, and thus she represented, to the best of

her capabilities within her cultural constraints, fulfilling destinies for her characters which would not be deemed 'improper'. The conclusions of her novels are testament to her conscious decision to comply with convention: in *Shirley* the narrator observes of recounted traditional, happy endings, '… There! I think the varnish has been put on nicely' (1949: 611). In both *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, Jane and Lucy's direct address to the reader is further example of the anticipation of reader expectations: Jane assures her audience, 'Reader, I married him' (1998: 473), and Lucy lessens the blow of tragedy for her readers when she states: 'Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life' (1949: 558).

These concerns with the home and the socially marginalised continue to resonate in literature today. In the final section of this article, I consider ways in which a reading of homelessness in Brontë's novels can be made to reflect forwards onto (or back on) the exploration of home in Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. The reason for this choice is in all three novels, the main protagonists occupy a similar class position, that of lower middle class ambivalence. The question of home is particularly pertinent in South Africa, which may be considered a 'new nation', arising from the collapse of the old political structure of Apartheid. The condition of homelessness is one which may be observed in a South African context, applied to men and women and similarly linked to the problematic process of identity formation. This is commented on by Ndebele in his article entitled 'A Home for Intimacy', where he affirms that the state of homelessness and the loss of homes is '… one of the greatest of South African stories yet to be told' (1996: 28-9). Ndebele explores the unstable nature of the homplace further in his novel, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, and what effect this has on construction of South African identity. One of the female protagonists in the novel, Marara Joyce Baloyi, reflects on this effect:

> How has the growth of the imagination or the nurturing of new values been affected by the dramatic oscillation of individuals and communities between comfort and discomfort, between home and homelessness, home and exile, between riches and poverty, love and hate, hope and despair, knowledge and ignorance, progress and regression, fame and ignominy, heroism and roguery, honour and dishonour, marriage and divorce, sophistication and crudeness, life

> and death, returns and departures? Have dislocation and contradiction becomes part of the structures of thinking and feeling that may define our character? A nation of extremes! Which way will the balance ultimately go between creativity and destruction? (2003: 70-71).

Here, Ndebele echoes the contention mentioned previously by Barnes and Wiley that 'home is a form of coalition' (1996: xv). The alliance of originally distinct elements is reiterated by Ndebele as he refers to a 'nation of extremes' that oscillates between, for example, 'home and exile'. This example of postcolonial theorising can be made to look back on the fiction of the past as it simultaneously illuminates more contemporary works. Ndebele states in his article:

> There must be relatively few South Africans who can still point to a home that they associate with rootedness. At some point in their lives the roots of the social memory are cut, and traumatic fresh beginnings had to be made and endured. Individual and social growth became a series of interrupted experiences (1996: 28).

When Ndebele writes of 'interrupted experiences', he understands that the construction of identity is based on the expectations and aspirations normally taught within the home. Ndebele's thoughts on interrupted experiences may be used to illuminate the displacement felt by the respective female protagonists in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* as they shift from each surrogate home, forced through their circumstances to 'relocate', thus disrupting the experience of home and suspending attempts to establish some sense of belonging.

As Ndebele's arguments illuminate aspects of classic European texts, so Brontë's texts can be made to speak to present-day concerns. For all the differences of time and culture, the prevailing interest in home in Brontë's work has particular South African relevance, specifically with regard to the *loss* of homes and the condition of homelessness. The story of the loss of homes, through colonial invasion, migratory labour policies, evictions in line with Apartheid policies, all of which has resulted in the destruction of intimacy in family life, has become a South African narrative. Ndebele

questions the position of home in actual life in South Africa and his views bear pertinently on a rereading of Brontë's work, as concerns that Brontë raises may be seen to anticipate those of Ndebele:

> Where so many homes have been demolished, people moved to strange places, home temporarily becomes the shared experience of homelessness… It is the loneliness of millions of South Africans who lost their homes. The loss of homes! It is one of the greatest of South African stories yet to be told. The demise of intimacy in our history of sensibility (1996: 28f).

The South African story—the loss of homes—continues to evolve, and Dennis Moss, a South African urban designer, advises: 'We must consider the act of dwelling', because '[y]ou can't divorce human life from place …' (2006: 18f). Similarly, Max Ntanyana and Fonky Goboza, activists in the Mandela Park anti-eviction campaign, discuss the recent government evictions of squatters in Mandela Park, highlighting the idea that individual and community identity is defined by the home, and the intertwining relationship of human life and place:

> Apartheid was undone bit by bit by endlessly multiple acts of resistance and lines of flight. By the early 1980s people were moving from the rural Transkei, where apartheid sought to keep them, and on to Cape Town in such numbers that the state lost the capacity to regulate the borders between its two opposed zones. Around the country *people who were taking control of new spaces gave those spaces names*. And the people who moved to the edge of Khayelitsha defiantly called their space Mandela Park in honour of their hope … (2003, e.a.).

The reason the home is a site of contestation is explained by bell hooks, who illustrates the political significance of the home and the possibility of resistance inherent in the homeplace.

> It is no accident that the South African apartheid regime systematically attack[ed] and destroy[ed] black efforts to construct

> homeplace, however tenuous, that small private reality where black women and men [could] renew their spirits and recover themselves. It is no accident that this homeplace, as fragile and transitional as it may be, a makeshift shed, a small bit of earth where one rests, is always subject to violation and destruction … (1990: 46f).

This is no doubt a factor which motivated the forced removal and destruction of homes by the system of apartheid; by destroying homes, the growth of individual and community identity was detrimentally affected. There is a close personal connection with the homespace, the sense of community implied by 'home' and the experience of homelessness. The 'sacred' memories of home, desecrated through historical processes such as Apartheid in South Africa, have been replaced; in place of the intimacy associated with 'home' is the experience of loneliness. A new story of homelessness comprises the history of South Africans. I intend to look at *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* in the light of my previous argument regarding the condition of nineteenth century women in Brontë's novels as viewed through a postcolonial lens. It is useful to compare *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* with *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* because of their shared preoccupation with home and the liminal figure in society. In *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, the novel is described as '... an imaginary book about South African women during the long years of struggle against apartheid' (2003: 1). The three women in the opening chapters are understood to be the 'three descendants' of the *Odyssey's* Penelope, the 'remarkable woman who waited nineteen years for her husband, Odysseus, to return home from his wanderings' (2003: 1). The women in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* are presented as '... figures of liminality and incorporation, as symbolic threshold figures ...' (Samuelson 2007: 2). This is not to conflate the Victorian class concerns of Brontë's two white female protagonists with Ndebele's 'three descendants' but both may be said to generally share middle class concerns of the homeplace. These liminal members of South African society are similarly not entitled to homes and the temporary nature of the townships, for instance, mirrors the surrogate homes of the orphaned women in Victorian society. There is similarly no place for these liminal creatures in Victorian or contemporary South African society and this continuing search for surrogate homes becomes a shared experience of homelessness which extends beyond

South African borders and may be read back to the 'centre'.

This shared experience of homelessness which affects the construction of identity is again reiterated in *Cry of Winnie Mandela* when Marara Joyce Baloyi, asks:

> Do you remember the experience of space, and the sense of distance and time through travel in the old days of apartheid? .... It was psychological time without space. I had to endure the absence of space. Space was no longer the sense of dimension beyond the self; it had become the claustrophobia of self; the self whose existence could be challenged at any moment in any form. (Ndebele 2003: 68f).

The idea of the violation of the fragile homeplace of South Africans in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* where a fire destroys the Mandelas' house:

> ... many years later this home, this very same home, was to be set alight by vengeful school children. The fire raged in a macabre ritual of emptying out. It is written: 'All the Mandela family records were destroyed in the fire, all the letters, all the photographs and all the gifts they had been given over the years. Also destroyed was the slice of wedding cake that Winnie had been keeping for Nelson's release .... In 1976, in the wake of the Soweto uprising, Mandela had a recurring nightmare. He dreamt that he had been released from prison. There was no one to meet him. After walking for many hours, he arrived at No. 8115. "Finally I would see my home, but it turned out to be empty, a ghost house, with all the doors and windows open but no one there at all"' It was an intuition of emptiness. The death of the dignity of memory at the hands of folly. An intuition for the emptying out of the vision by the squalor of the means of realising it. An intuition for the ultimate death of home (2003: 74).

As mentioned previously, George suggests that a representation of the experience of post-colonial homelessness is marked by '… an excessive use of the metaphor of luggage, both spiritual and material' (1996: 171). The

same concerns are evident in Brontë's work and *Cry of Winnie Mandela*. In *Cry of Winnie Mandela*, the loss of Nelson and Winnie Mandela's material possessions such as mementoes (letters, photographs, family records) is shown to impede belonging, as Nelson and Winnie Mandela's relationship disintegrates. In this way, Ndebele foresees the 'death' of the home leading to a death of intimacy. Through testimony Mandela relates the events following his return from prison and reveals how the death of the home, whether through literal destruction or the mental devastation of repeated house invasions, leads to the death of intimacy:

> For me, No. 8115 was the centre point of my world, the place marked with an X in my mental geography .... Ever since I came back from jail, not once has the defendant ever entered the bedroom whilst I was awake. I kept on saying to her: 'Look, men and wives usually discuss the most intimate problems in the bedroom I have been in jail a long time. There are so many issues, almost all of them very sensitive, I would like to have opportunity to discuss with you.' Not once has she ever responded …. I was the loneliest man during the period I stayed with her (2003: 76).

Ndebele, in his article, proposed that individuals need to restore the intimacy of home by establishing the place of home and restoring the relationship of people within the home. In this way, individuals are able to form a society that coheres. When examining the home, one simply cannot ignore the relationship of people to the home, as it is impossible to divorce human life from place. However, this fundamental relationship is complicated in a post-colonial context (as in Charlotte Brontë's fiction) by the presence of marginal figures, insiders and outsiders who maintain an ambivalent relationship with 'home' through their shared experience of the unstable homeplace. With regard to the South African situation, Ndebele refers to the change in the political and geographical landscape of South Africa, where inhabitants in African rural and urban areas were denied homes, evicted and forced to live elsewhere as buildings were demolished. These homeless South Africans were made marginal figures, and in a fictionalised setting, the 'double bind' of the female characters of *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* being both female and 'non-white' exacerbates this liminality. The

ambivalent attitude towards home, explored by Brontë in her nineteenth century fiction, is echoed in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* in Marara Joyce Baloyi's thoughts:

> What on earth is a home? Is it a meaning of myself that has assumed the shape of a rectangular dwelling? Or is the dream of self-actualisation beyond the rectangular dwelling, that takes the form of conventions of behaviour acted out within and without that dwelling? What is it that one does within the privacy of one's home which transforms the home into an eye of society looking at you at every turn in your life? (2003: 66).

The unstable position of Brontë's female protagonists in society and in relation to the home is again echoed by Marara Joyce Baloyi as she states:

> I have also become uncomfortably aware that I may no longer have the keen and vital sense of feeling for home as a specific place and a house with so many rooms, so many brothers and sisters and relatives, with family and community experiences stretching back many years. This kind of home for now has been mere convenience for me to live in from one day to the next. This thought has frightened me as I have begun to wonder about the fate of intimacy. Can there be any society without private lives—without homes wherein individuals can flourish through histories of intimacy? (2003: 71).

Now, enfranchised South Africans are attempting to resettle in areas of their birthright or establish homes in new areas of settlement. Ndebele's concern is that South Africans damaged by previous dislocation and alienation cannot successfully settle and carry out the work of establishing the relationships that properly belong in a new home. Thus a stable society is not being productively created. Those who comprised the margin of society now have voice, but as the boundaries shift it has become difficult to establish who we are in relation to where we live as the 'surrogate' impermanent nature of 'homes' in the new South Africa affects the process of identity-construction. Ndebele does not propose a 'happy endings' for the three

descendants of *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, and, like Brontë's female protagonists, the survival and success of the three female protagonists comes at a price.

In a contemporary context, however, there are further possibilities for such marginal figures. Currently a feminist and post-colonial understanding of the periphery sees it becoming a creative space in which people can begin to establish a productive 'homeplace'. Current commentators do not face the same restrictions of long-established settled customs as Brontë did, and bell hooks, for instance, seems to envisage a more permissive selfhood, where assimilation into mainstream society is not deemed a prerequisite to a happy and fulfilled life. hooks still recognises the value of and inherent need for the place of home, 'I had to leave that space I called home to move beyond the boundaries, yet I also needed to return there' (1990: 148), yet views the margins as a potentially creative location: 'There may be some value in the idea that the space at the margins of society may be perceived to be a radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity …' (hooks 1990: 153). hooks suggests that the periphery has the potential to serve as a productive space, which is a step beyond Bachelard's earlier views regarding the transformation of indifferent space through the imagination. In her view, the often demoralising space of the periphery and margins may be adapted to serve as a positive, reaffirming place where the freedom of marginality may be celebrated.

The peripheral space occupied by marginal figures is viewed by hooks as a space of possibility, emphasising the agency of marginal figures and their potential to transform space:

> I make a definite distinction between the marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one *chooses* as a site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility (1990: 153, e.a.).

With regard to Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, their marginality is a result of the oppressive patriarchal structures which existed in the nineteenth century; however it is important to note that these women are able to reorganise and reorder these potentially oppressive sites through space-clearing gestures in their respective novels. Jane at Thornfield and Lucy at the Pensionnat make

concerted efforts to literally and figuratively make a comfortable space for themselves, namely in the gardens of their respective locations. Thus, the idea that hooks proposes, of the periphery serving as a radically open, creative space may be seen to have its origins in an understanding of the search for a comfortable space in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*, which Gilbert and Gubar believe is the primary concern of Brontë's female heroines. These space-clearing gestures on the part of Jane and Lucy are testament to this search for a creative comfortable space, and an attempt as marginal figures to create their own 'felicitous space', however provisional. By modifying the environment, people create a viable place in which to begin to [re]create feelings of belonging.The possibilities available to marginal figures may be seen when reading forward to *The Cry of Winnie Mandela,* where one of the three descendants, Mannete Mofolo, is able to create a creative comfortable space of her own:

> My shop and my house became village landmarks next to the road. Buses began to stop not far from my shop, until the bus stop came to carry my name: Ha'Mannete....I will show him the latest map of Lesotho which has the name Ha'Mannete against the many black dots that indicate places on the map....Great cities of the world also have dots against their names...I will hope that in his wanderings, my husband will have learned how to read maps. He will see how my name has become part of the world....Over the years I have built with my children a new home. Everyone can see it. It stands out in the village. I go in and out of it through big doors. From inside I can see the entire lovely valley through its huge windows. It has many rooms. At night, we flick on a switch for light (2003: 82f).

Thus the assimilation and acceptance into the mainstream which still rests largely with the presence of a husband or 'offices of a hero' is no longer the only limited possibility available to marginal female figures. The situation of 'homelessness' is, according to hooks, not necessarily destructive. hooks proposes that the 'homeless' need to establish a new 'homeplace', advising that these figures in society renew their concern with the homeplace in order to make home, '… that space where we return for renewal and self-recovery, where we can heal our wounds and become whole' (1990: 49). The

'homeplace' becomes imperative, according to hooks:

> We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make a radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world (1990: 153).

George discusses the 'strange empowering knowledge' that Bhabha attributes to the immigrant (or marginal) figure and feels that '… those at the margins may read their marginality as a positive, even superior stance from which to experience the modern nation' (George 1996: 189). This is pertinent in relation to the stories of Jane and Lucy, who may be seen to learn from their 'interrupted' experiences. Q.D. Leavis states (with regard to *Jane Eyre*), that '… each experience initiates a new phase of being for [Jane], because she has learnt something new about the possibilities of living and so can make a further demand on life' (1966: 14). The difference is, however, that Brontë thought of her protagonists' re-entry into mainstream society.

The situation of nineteenth century women may usefully be understood as a condition of 'homelessness', therefore the application of the postcolonial frame is appropriate. By drawing on Brontë to illuminate the concept of home, I have been able to understand the multi-faceted nature of this concept and the new possibilities inherent for marginal figures at what was once seen as the periphery. The rereading of classics such as *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* brings out the complexities and instabilities of home, something which may have been overlooked in previous analysis. Brontë explored and developed the marginal figure, and her characterisation of this circumstance may be seem to facilitate, via post-colonial and feminist criticism, further claims about the potential of 'home' and a reading forwards to the present. The current notions of home, liberty and creativity are evolving where new possibilities become available to previously dispossessed members in society and assimilation into the mainstream no longer becomes a necessity. Despite the fact that the concept of home will continue to confound expectations and assumptions and evade conclusive definition, the appeal of the elusive home remains the same. George suggests that, '… perhaps the stance to take, while writing and reading fiction as much as in living, is to acknowledge the

seductive pleasure of belonging in homes …' (George 1996: 200). In South Africa, Ndebele suggests, 'home' is (still) a practical and psychic necessity rather than a lingering and seductive idea. The appeal of 'home' surpasses seduction to fulfil an intrinsic, perennial human need: 'It is in this new universe that new political meanings and values will emerge. It is there that we may find new homes' (2003: 71).

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Re-reading *The Purloined Letter*

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1 Introduction

The work of Edgar Poe has served as a touchstone for shifts in psychoanalytic criticism throughout the twentieth century. There is a vast array of critical interpretations that have developed around his work, it might seem that Poe has become all things to all critics. In particular, the critical body that clusters around the story *The Purloined Letter* forms a dossier of debates within psychoanalytic literary interpretation. L.R. Williams (1995:38) asserts that it is hardly surprising that Poe should have become a special object of psychoanalytic interest as his stories and poems pivot around such concerns as: mental aberration, decay or the indefinitions of sexual identity, the exquisite impossibility of fixed knowledge in a world in which truth is an endlessly circulating, maddeningly unfixed ideal or image, never to be pinned down or guaranteed. Debate around *The Purloined Letter* has been prolific. The average reader might consider *The Purloined Letter* to be just an intriguing detective short story. However, the story has profound psychological implications which lift it above a mere detective story; otherwise psychologists would not have spent so much time analyzing it.

Jacques Derrida based his extremely vehement critique of Jacques Lacan's 'phallogocentrism' on the latter's mercilessly minute analytical commentary of Poe's *The Purloined Letter.* Lacan thought so highly of this commentary that he placed it first in the collection of essays published under the title *Ecrits*, the rest of which appear in chronological order. As with certain commentaries in philosophy, Lacan's essay became more famous than the story on which it comments. *The Purloined Letter* is far from the best of Poe's *Extraordinary Tales*, but Lacan turns it into a striking

myth: truth, woman, and castration are all clearly revealed to be lurking in the text.

This paper analyzes the debates surrounding *The Purloined Letter* with special focus on Lacan's reading of *The Purloined Letter*, Derrida's deconstruction and Slavoj Žižek's defense of Lacan. I will also discuss Lacan's return to Freud and examine the implications that this has for feminist criticisms of psychoanalysis. The discussion takes place in the following stages: firstly, I discuss Lacan's reading of *The Purloined Letter*. There are two scenes in particular that Lacan likes to compare. The first scene begins with the Queen receiving a personal letter that could compromise her integrity should the King see it. The Queen leaves the letter face down on the table and the King does not notice it when he comes into the room. The Minister does see the letter and takes it. The Queen is aware that the Minister has the letter. In the second scene Dupin steals the letter from the Minister. The Minister does not realize until later that Dupin stole the letter. Lacan in his Seminar emphasizes the repetitiveness of these two scenes. Lacan said that both the Minister and Dupin saw the letter at a glance. They noticed a letter that should be hidden is exposed. Other important issues that Lacan focuses on are: displacement, the circulation of the lost object, the letter as signifier, the position of the letter in the Symbolic Order, the theory of the gaze, castration as a factor of ultimate truth, and the idea that a letter always arrives at its destination.

Lacan feels that through Edgar Poe made the story seem to be mystery, in fact, according to J.P. Muller and W.J. Richardson (1988:33), it is anything but a mystery. Lacan believes that it cannot be a mystery because everything which constitutes a mystery—motives, execution, how to find and convict the culprit, are all told to the reader at the beginning of the story. Poe uses his characters and fictive creations to delude the reader. He shows us this not only in the way the story is written but also in the relationship between the characters, the Prefect and Dupin. In the story, of particular interest to Lacan and his theory of language is the fact that Poe makes Dupin use coded language and plays on words in order to make the Prefect look stupid. Poe also allows the Prefect to use cryptic language when informing Dupin and the narrator about the missing letter. Secondly, I look at Derrida's deconstruction of Lacan's reading of *The Purloined Letter*. In fact, one of the most important challenges to Lacan's reading of literature has come from

Derrida, whose own debt to psychoanalysis is profound. In a 1975 essay on Lacan's Poe Seminar called *Le facteur de la Verite* (The Postman/Factor of Truth), Derrida critiques Lacan's seminar on *The Purloined Letter* the following reasons: Lacan's failure to make reference to the author (Poe) in his literary analysis, his exclusion of the narrator from intersubjective triads, his overlooking the formal structure of the text, his emphasizing and looking at the text in isolation without mentioning the Dupin trilogy; his postulation of castration as a factor of ultimate truth—here his objection is not to castration itself but rather to its promotion as 'transcendental signifier' and Lacan's assertion that a letter always arrives at its destination. Thirdly, I examine Žižek's defense of Lacan. Žižek pays special attention to Lacan's thesis that 'a letter always arrives at its destination'. He attempts to give credibility to this by drawing on the triad of the Symbolic, Real and Imaginary.

Lacan's Reading of *The Purloined Letter*

One of Lacan's most well-known excursions into literary criticism is his seminar on Poe's *The Purloined Letter* in which he focuses on the conjunction and the interdependence of the concepts of castration, the phallus, sexual difference, signification and the symbolic. As a classic piece of Lacanian criticism, it has attracted much interest. Before attempting a critique of Lacan's reading of *The Purloined Letter* I will give a brief synopsis of the text.

The story concerns the quest to retrieve a letter received by and then stolen from the Queen, the potentially compromising contents of which are veiled. The King enters her boudoir; in order to conceal the letter from him, the Queen places in on a table to make it appear innocent. The duplicitious Minister D- enters and perceiving the letter's importance, substitutes another for it, purloining the original and attaining political power over the Queen by virtue of his possession, a power based on 'the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber' (Poe, *Selected Writings* 1984:371). This is the story's 'primal scene'. The Queen must retrieve the letter in order to be released from this compromising position, and so the Prefect of Police is called in. In secret, his officers microscopically scour the Minister's apartment, and when they fail to locate the letter, the detective Dupin is

engaged. Reading the method of appropriation as a key to the method of concealment, Dupin surmises that the best way of hiding the object is to place it on show. Dupin states:

> do you not see the Prefect has taken it for granted that all men proceed to conceal a letter … in some out-of-way hole or corner … such researcher's nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions (Poe, *Selected Writings* 1984:374).

Dupin looks elsewhere—not in a hiding place, but in the open room and at what lies right in front of him. He visits the Minister, and spies the letter hanging visibility from a rack on the mantelpiece. Repeating the Minister's initial act of appropriation, Dupin substitutes another in its place, and is able to return the original to the Queen—a scene which repeats the first 'primal scene', but, with a key difference, for the second time round, a solution is reached, not a problem created.

Lacan's seminar on *The Purloined Letter* formed part of a series he presented in 1955 on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* entitled *The Ego in The Theory of Freud and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, published just after the First World War, according to Williams (1995:55), is best known as Freud's primary articulation of the theory of the death drive—a complex of ideas attempting to explain certain puzzling psychic phenomena which didn't 'fit into' Freud's earlier accounts of desire and mental regulation. Freud was also faced with the phenomenon known as 'repetition compulsion', and in its role as a response to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Lacan's essay on *The Purloined Letter* forms an extended meditation upon 'repetition compulsion'. For Freud, according to Williams (1995:55f), pain and the possibility of pleasure in pain, was crucial to 'repetition compulsion'. One of the factors which led him to the formulation of the death drive was the phenomenon whereby those who had experienced extreme trauma continued to relive the trauma, with no apparent resolution, in fantasy, long after the original moment had passed. For Lacan, according to Williams (1995:56), the question of repetition is focused on loss than on pain and *The Purloined Letter*, with its repeated losses of a circulating object (first by the Queen, and then by the Minister), becomes in Lacan's reading a crucial literary articulation of this compulsion. At the

heart of Poe's 'original' is a repetition: it is a narrative within a narrative, as the story is itself told (repeated) by the 'I' narrator who hears and repeats the tale of the filched letter, which is retrieved through the same pattern of the original filching. The original repetition is then critically repeated. Thus, at the heart of the story itself lies both an absence and a pattern of repetition, which is then mimicked in subsequent readings which try to find the text out. Williams (1995:56) believes that Poe is himself already *The Purloined Poe* culturally retrieved through the same strategies suggested by his own text. The story's second scene—which repeats the story's 'primal scene' but with a difference—is also the key to how Lacan understands the text as allegory. Williams (1995:56f) views this as repetition with understanding: the narrative repeats as psychoanalysis does, reworking and unknotting anxieties of psychic pre-history. Thus, it is only with the second scene that the whole story emerges as an allegory of the psychoanalytic situation, with Dupin acting as analyst in 'restoring' the Queen to herself. Of this, Shoshana Felman (1980:147) writes:

> In what sense, then, does the second scene in Poe's tale, while repeating the first scene, nonetheless differ from it? In the sense, precisely, that the second scene, through the repetition, allows for an understanding, for an analysis of the first. This analysis through repetition is to become, in Lacan's ingenious reading, no less than an allegory of psychoanalysis. The intervention of Dupin, who restores the letter to the Queen, is thus compared, in Lacan's interpretation, to the intervention of the analyst, who rids the patient of the symptom.

Williams (1995:57) stresses two points of difference, both of which are highlighted by Felman in her reading of Lacan's essay. First, the way in which Lacan handles Poe's narrative repetition-with-difference is important to our understanding of identity in his work. Felman (1980:148) says:

> … for Lacan, any possible insight into the reality of the unconscious is contingent upon a perception of repetition, not as a confirmation of identity, but as the insistence of the indelibility of a difference.

If Dupin is in effect the Queen's 'analyst' (or the 'analyst' of her dilemma), as with any other act of analysis for Lacan, this is not necessarily because of any knowledge he has of the letter or the actors in the primal scene. Dupin as analyst doesn't 'cure' the situation because he has a certain knowledge, but because of the position he occupies in the chain of repetition. Felman (1980:147) states:

> By virtue of his occupying the third position—that is, the *locus* of the unconscious of the subject as a place of substitution of letter for letter (of signifier for signifier)—the analyst, through transference, allows at once for a repetition of the trauma, and for a symbolic substitution, and thus affects the drama's denouement.

It is not then what the analyst knows which facilitates the analysis, but his position as activator of a repetition of the original problem—his occupancy of a position which facilitates transference. Marie Bonaparte's (1949:102) technique was the opposite of this, based on 'cracking the code of authorial desire'. She also urges that analysis should not be the work of the author, who must ideally remain ignorant of and somehow separate from the processes and images buried in his text for fear of censoring their guilty, libidinal parts:

> Of all the devices employed by the dreamwork, that of the *displacement of psychic intensities* … is the most freely used in the elaboration of works of arts, doubtless because such displacement is generally dictated by the moral censor, which is more active in our waking thoughts than in sleep. The conceiving and writing of literary works are conscious activities, and the less the author guesses of the hidden themes in his works, the likelier are they to be truly creative (in Muller & Richardson 1988:645).

Williams (1995:58) feels that analytic mastery, which keeps the writer from direct access to parts of himself and ensures that access takes place via the analyst, is thus necessitated by the analysand's (here, the author's presumed desire to self-censor, were he to 'know' the truth about himself). Lacan reads the situation differently, however, and not through the

direct application of masterful 'codes'. A suspicion of mastery and knowledge is, then, crucial to how we understand Lacan and how Lacan suggests ways of understanding the text—even, or perhaps especially, difficult texts. Dupin then approaches the problem of how to find the letter as Lacanian analysis addresses a difficult analytic situation, and we as Lacanian readers should approach an obscure or 'ungiving' text not through the prior knowledge and the desire to master, conquer, or solve the mystery through whatever form of power, but by entering into the mystery's own codes and strategies, opening it up from within and using the tools it provides.

It is the loss within the story, and the circulation of the lost object as its loss is replayed, which is fundamental to Lacan's reading of Poe through *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—the movement and circulation, rather than content and truth are the key terms. Thus, Lacan's project is to rework Freudian phases of human development from infancy onwards, emphasizing the interconnection of the subject's entry into language and the development of gender identification. Lacanian psychoanalysis is consequently sometimes known as 'structural psychoanalysis', and its critical focus is not authorial symptoms breaking through on the page, or the behaviour of characters, but the circulation of signs in the text.

Williams (1995:59) points out that Lacan's importance for literary criticism is not simply that he offers a superannuated theory of gender and subjectivity but that he brings a theory of language to his reading of key Freudian concepts of sexuality and the psyche. Reworking the basic Freudian models of Oedipal development and castration anxiety, he maps out differences within the routes through which girls and boys enter language (the Symbolic order). It is this different linguistic relationship which at the same time underpins the child's uneasy entry into sexual difference. The child moves into the Symbolic Order from the essentially narcissistic space (the Imaginary), characterized by the inability to see the world as Other. In the Imaginary, into which the child enters through the mirror stage, everything is an image of the child's own self. Sameness rather than difference means that here the child's experience is characterized by the illusion of unity—its own, and its own with the world. In moving forward into the Symbolic Order, the child has to confront Otherness in a number of forms (lack, castration, desire) as he recognizes his difference from a world

(and a linguistic order) which he has not created, and which imposes on him the laws of the social order—he is, then, subject to a system he cannot control, and so his developing subjectivity comes into being through an experience of power (of the Other in its various forms) and lack (of control, of his own narcissistic self-unity which the social order does not recognize). Lacan (1977:05) writes in his famous essay *The Mirror Stage* that the end of this moment ushers the child into the socially- governed system of the Symbolic:

> This moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the *imago* of the counterpart and the drama of primordial jealousy …, the dialectic that will henceforth link the I to socially elaborated situations.

It is here, when the 'I' is linked to socially elaborated situations that desire which is predicated on lack becomes possible, and also here that entry into language begins uneasily to take place, at the same time as an equally difficult move towards gender identification. This, then, is the beginning of subjectivity, since it is only through language as a system of difference that subjective identity can be stated, thought, articulated—it is also the moment at which the unconscious is born, since here repression takes place. Sexual difference and language are thus both effects of entry into the Symbolic Order. Entry into language is differently negotiated by girls and boys. However, girls do not view the mother, castration, or the threat of the father in the same way, in Freud's final model (from the early 1930's essays on femininity onwards), or in Lacan's work. They do not feel the loss of the mother's body as boys do, and so the work of Symbolic substitution (and consequently their entry into the Symbolic) does not, for Lacan, come as easily. As Ragland-Sullivan (1992:421) puts it:

> Language itself serves as the signified that tells the particular story of the knotting (or not) of the three orders (Imaginary, Symbolic, Real) in an individual's life in terms of acquisition of gender as an identity.

How, then, is this manifested in Lacan's reading of Poe? First, in his emphasis on the function of the letter itself. At the core of the story is not just the letter but an absence of its content, as the details of the letter—what it actually says—are evaded through paraphrase. This is characteristically Poe—even his gothic tales tend to circulate around an absent centre or object, something either never revealed or revealed as a cipher. It is this emphasis on process rather than revelation or substance which is Lacan's focus. We hear nothing of the purloined letter's content: it is passed around, at each turn demonstrating something of the relationship between people, and in this sense it acts as the means by which relationships are established. Muller and Richardson (1988:57f) describe the process:

> As the letter passes from the Queen to the Minister to Dupin to the Prefect back to the Queen, the content remains irrelevant, and the shifting parameters of power for the subjects concerned [is] derived from the different places where the letter is diverted along this 'symbolic circuit' …. The 'place' of the signifier is determined by the symbolic system within which it is constantly displaced.

For Lacan, this makes the letter itself a 'pure signifier' because it has been completely estranged from its signified: what the letter means is entirely irrelevant to the way in which it is passed around in the story. The story plays out a pattern:

> … in which the subjects relate to each other in their displacement of the intersubjective repetition. We shall see that their displacement is determined by the place which a pure signifier—*The Purloined Letter*—comes to occupy in their trio. (Lacan in *The Purloined Poe* 1988:32).

The act of repetition is then divorced from the meaning or content of what is repeated. For Lacan, the letter functions in this story not because of what it says in terms of its content (which we never know), but because of its position between people, its role in producing certain interpersonal effects and subjective responses: the Queen's embarrassment and fear, the Minister's power through possession of it, Dupin's act of retrieval

understood as a moment of revenge carried out through the very same strategy which was used to take it in the first place—even the King's ignorance of the letter's very existence. All of these moves focus on the letter, a letter which forces responses without ever revealing itself. Each character finds him- or herself already in a relationship of action and reaction with a sign which has no essential presence—it is never 'filled out'.

> The letter was able to produce its effects within the story: on the actors in the tale,including the narrator, as well as outside the story: on us, the readers and also on its author, without anyone's ever bothering to worry about what it meant (Johnson 1980:115).

It is because we never know its content or its origin, that its function, as it circulates between people, can be revealed all the more starkly. Each subject in this story is changed by the effects of the letter-as-signifier, an instance in miniature of how the subject does not create and control, but is constituted by and through the Symbolic Order. The subject is, then, constructed through a crucial developmental relationship to the sign as an image of lack. According to Williams (1995:63), for Lacan the combination of absence and movement which characterize the letter make it the exemplary signifier: it is both there and not there in the sense that it lacks an identifiably meaningful content. It behaves in the story as signs do in psychic life, since its 'heart' is always absent. According to Lacan:

> the signifier is a unit in its very uniqueness being by nature symbol only of an absence. We cannot say of the purloined letter that, like other subjects, it must be or not be in a particular place but that unlike them it will be and not be where it is, wherever it goes (Lacan in *The Purloined Poe* 1988:41).

There is also, then, a story centrally concerned with things out of place but never wholly lost, with the significantly misplaced but apparently insignificant detail.

It seems that Lacan did not look to this story out of interest in *The Purloined Letter qua* letter, nor to guess at the letter's content. Rather the actual letter was a signifier, moving from place to place, leaving an impact

of real effects in its wake. Ragland-Sullivan and Bracher (1991:09) believe that Poe's story fascinates Lacan most probably because it is empty of content, laying bare the path of signifying effects that catalyze the desire to narrate as itself a defense against desire. Neither Lacan, Poe, nor Dupin seek to know what is in the letter.

The letter offers a focus for an allegory of gazes—a story concerning the 'right way of seeing', for only those who know how to look for it will find it, only a specific interpretative strategy will reveal the object (even though its content remains veiled). The police, failing to find the letter, are 'realists', operating on reality with a common-sense stupidity which can only see selectively. Muller and Richardson (1988:40) state:

> Theirs is the realist's imbecility, which does not pause to observe that nothing, however deep in the bowels of the earth a hand may seek to ensconce it, will never be hidden there, since another hand can always retrieve it, and that what is hidden is never but what is missing from its place, as the call slip puts it when speaking of a volume lost in a library. And even if the book may be on an adjacent shelf or in the next slot, it would be hidden there, however visibly it may appear.

To Dupin, as to the psychoanalyst, nothing in the unconscious, or the library or the text is ever lost or finally hidden. Psychoanalysis, like detective work, thus becomes a question of developing the right way of seeing, of casting off the imbecility of the realist. How did Dupin guess the hiding place straight away? An accurate assumption, he tells us, that the clever Minister would be sure to avoid all the most obscure places of concealment (which were bound to be searched by the conscientious police), and would place the letter in a prominent, open position. The average intellect, Dupin argues 'suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident' (Lacan in *The Purloined* Poe 1988:20). According to Ruth Van Herik (1985:50) by Lacanian extension, the 'proper place' of the letter, obvious only to Dupin (who stands in for the analyst), is the place of castration represented by the woman's body. Lacan (1985:50) describes the 'spot' in these terms:

> And that is why without needing any more than being able to listen in at the door of Professor Freud, he will go straight to the spot in which lies and lives what that body is designed to hide …. Look! Between the cheeks of the fireplace, there's the object already in reach of a hand the ravisher has but to extend.

Van Herik (1985:50) contends that what is so obvious it cannot be seen must also be named. The phallus, unspecified, is thus replaced on the woman's body through the seductive play of phallocratic signification. What is lost, the phallus/letter, is returned to circulation, back to the Queen, the woman's body, from which it has been castrated. As empty signifier, the phallus, like the letter, is something to which meaning is ascribed by everyone but from which it is also missing.

According to Muller and Richardson (1988:48), Lacan states that when Dupin enters the room wearing green sunglasses, spread out before him is an immense female body, waiting to be undressed. Lacan avers that Dupin did not need to listen at Professor Freud's door to know where to look for the object this body is made to conceal. It is there, between the legs of the fireplace, within reach, waiting to be ravished. But Dupin restrains himself, recognizing that if the Minister knows that the letter has been ravished and that the ravisher is under his control, Dupin will not leave the house alive. Thus, Dupin prepares an act that fictionally will be the ravishing of a female body, one where the subject of the body will not know immediately that the body has been ravished or by whom. Stuart Schneiderman (1991:15) asserts that Dupin knew that he could not take possession of this signifier, of an inscribed signifier, a localized signifier, without leaving in its place a facsimile, a substitute, an object, a worthless piece of paper whose destiny will be to be rolled up into a ball and tossed out with the trash. However, Dupin did not believe that his facsimile was worthless; but Lacan emphasized the unlikelihood of this substitute producing the effect Dupin expected. There, of course, Dupin did suffer a lapse of judgement due, as Schneiderman (1991:153) said, to the fact that those who take possession of the letter are possessed by it. Dupin repeated the scene in which the Minister purloined the letter in the first place, because, when the Minister substituted a worthless piece of paper for the precious letter, Muller and Richardson (1988:40) state that Lacan writes that

a remainder whose importance no analyst will fail to recognize. Schneiderman (1991:153) states that there are now two letters of which only one is a signifier and which are thus certainly not doubles. The second letter, the facsimile, is the object 'a' and its connection with the original letter as barred signifier constitutes the structure of a phantasy. Schneiderman (1991:153) believes that Lacan's fiction was generated out of the phantasy he read in the text.

Catherine Clement (1983:190f) states that Poe emphasizes certain details that could not fail to arouse Lacan's interest: the Minister is a poet, a madman, and a mathematician, and an author of a book on differential and integral calculus. The fantastic combination of attributes drew Lacan's attention to questions of inspiration, madness and the matheme. Clement (1983:190) believes that Lacan analyses *The Purloined Letter* from the Minister's point of view, fascinated by the man behind the Minister—a thief—and by his relationship to the woman. She is not just any woman, she is the Queen. This changes the nature of the story: she becomes a possession. By absconding with the Queen's letter, the Minister takes possession of the sign of the woman and is himself possessed by it: it is 'in his possession'. We see him hide the letter by adopting a stratagem similar to a trick an animal might use to escape from a predator. Lacan sees this as a device used by the ostrich—an animal that hides its head in the sand, believing that it would not be seen because it can't see anything. The Minister's dependency is absolute: he is in possession of the letter, but he does nothing with it beyond hiding it by placing it in an obvious location. The Minister, according to Clement (1983:191) becomes a woman. He gives off the most obvious 'odor di femmina'. He turns the envelope inside out as one turns the skin of a rabbit and writes—or has someone else write his own address in place of the Queen's. So we have a Minister who writes a woman's letter to himself—whatever the real contents of the stolen letter may be. *The Purloined Letter*, like an immense female body, is displayed in the Minister's office when Dupin enters. Dupin already expects to find the letter here, but through eyes shaded by green glasses he now has to only undress this immense female body. The Minister has been castrated by Dupin, who occupies a place analogous to that of the psychoanalyst. From a neutral position he observes the strategies of one who thinks that he is not being observed but who is in fact, like the ostrich, standing with his behind in the

air. The Minister thus receives a message of his own, the theft of the letter, but in an inverted form: the theft of the letter by Dupin, who lets the Minister know that he has stolen the letter back by writing two verses from Crebillon on the page that he substitutes in the letter in the envelope. A model of all communication: the transmitter receives his own message back in inverted form from the receiver.

But, what is the relationship of this semiotic analysis with the questions of desire and subjectivity which have been crucial to the forms of psychoanalysis? For Lacan, in Muller and Richardson (1988:40) desire itself is predicated on absence, the development of subjectivity takes place in terms dictated by the sign. *The Purloined Letter* thus demonstrates according to Muller and Richardson (1988:29) how crucially subjectivity and the Symbolic are linked for Lacan:

> It is the Symbolic Order which is constitutive for the subject—by demonstrating in the story the decisive orientation which the subject receives from the itinerary of the signifier.

It is not only the subject which is thus orientated; it is skewing which, for Lacan 'makes the very existence of fiction possible' (Lacan in *The Purloined Poe* 1988:29).

This pattern of repetition which takes place both inside and outside the story is, then, like the processes of the psychoanalytic situation itself, with the text as focus, rather than the author or character's psychic state. According to Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy (1982:101f) one approaches texts, whether literary or analytic, by following the path of the signifier. Benvenuto and Kennedy (1982:102) go on to state:

> The Poe essay is a reasonably clear illustration of Lacan's notion of the Symbolic Order in that he uncovered what he considered to be similarities between the story and the psychoanalytic situation, for example concerning the kind of knowledge needed to discover the patient's truth. In analysis a 'letter' can be found, put aside, diverted or hidden by the patient. The basic analytic task, in Lacan's view, was to find this letter, or at least find out where it is going, and to do this entails an understanding of the Symbolic Order.

The letter then acts as the key decentring element in the text, in that it insists on being heard and affecting everyone in its proximity, even if they cannot decode its meaning into a consciously realized truth. In this sense it exemplifies what Lacan calls 'the insistence of the signifying chain', and chain of unconscious thoughts which Freud identified as the controlling psychological element.

Another issue which runs through Lacan's text is the question of the gaze, which is central to his theorization of the development of the subject and, in turn, crucial to the important work on subjectivity and the image which took its cue from Lacan. Since *The Purloined Letter* for Lacan hinges on a dynamic of mis-seeing; it also offers an allegory of how the gaze operates in psychic life. Lacan's seminal essay of 1949 *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I*, focuses upon the moment upon which the infant (aged between six and eighteen months) first identifies with a whole *gestalt* image of itself as separate from the world, a unity which is self-sufficient and contained. No longer, from this moment onwards, undifferentiated from the mother's body or the sensual world around him, the child recognizes himself through identification of and with a self-image—a reflection in the mirror, or through identification with another body like its own. This startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror is described by Lacan (1977:1f):

> Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial … he nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image.

This is a transformative experience, signaling for the child entry into the Imaginary; the child imagines itself as whole through identification with the image it sees. Lacan (1977:1f) continues 'we have only to understand the middle stage as an identification, namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image'.

The Imaginary is then opened up not only by the narcissism of the child at this moment before lack intrudes, but by an essentially visual experience—whether the child goes through this by actually looking in the

mirror or not, still the moment is psychologically a visualization of the self as a whole. How do these questions of looking and identity manifest themselves in the seminar on *The Purloined Letter*?

Lacan sees a strong dynamic of power exchanged between the seeing and the blindness operating in Poe's story. Concealment of the lost, guilty object is ensured not by making the thing itself invisible (hiding the letter in a secret draw, or under the floorboards) but by understanding that 'concealment' can be ensured on quite different conditions: the story is 'about an observer being observed without observing that she is being watched in turn' (Muller & Richardson *The Purloined Poe*, pvii). Both acts of purloining the letter rely upon an understanding that the subject is blind in certain situations, even though he or she can technically see—what Freud (1896:181) was to call in *Studies of Hysteria* 'that blindness of the seeing eye'. For Williams (1995:73) what Lacan refers to as the story's 'primal scene'—its establishing moment—is like all primal scenes in classic psychoanalysis, predicated upon a dynamic of seeing and of unseeing—another key visual experience in the formation of the subject, which finds its way into Lacan's theory of gender alongside the mirror phase. From this scene of the story, the letter passes on the first stage of its journey. The Queen places on display, as if to conceal it, the guilty object which threatens the law, the position of the King. The three characters here—King, Queen and Minister—cannot be decoded as the father/mother/child of the Freudian tryptich, for Lacan the visual power and anxieties of the primal scene are nevertheless present. But more than this, the story is a web of exchanged glances. People see each other's actions, and see that they are being seen, the primary element in Lacan's theory of the gaze, which is always rooted in what is at stake in being observed 'we are beings who are always looked at, in the spectacle of the world', writes Lacan (1981:75). The relation of the subject with the domain of vision is to be a screen, receiving the Other's gaze but lacking its plenitude, not the reverse. For Lacan, then, the subject does not possess the gaze, but is primarily constituted by it. This supremely paranoid concept is an important element of the child's growing experience of the world as Other, in its entry in the Symbolic. Indeed, this is already a component of the child's experience of its *gestalt* image in the mirror phase, for although this was primarily a narcissistic experience (in which the child saw an image of itself in the mirror), it is also the first moment at which the

child relates to himself as if his image were that of another. This moment is the beginning of difference, which is to be fully confronted as the Other which the child confronts upon entering the Symbolic. Thus, in reading *The Purloined Letter*, Lacan identifies a dynamic of glances which are more important for the way they act out a drama of being seen than of seeing—the power one might have only has meaning in terms of being seen to have that power by the other's glances. The letter, with its absent content, has no identity of its own, save the role it plays in being passed around. Nevertheless, the letter lends its possessor a certain power, and this is its role as an object of desire as it passes between people: 'The ascendancy which the Minister derives from the situation is thus not a function of the letter, but, whether he knows it or not, of the role it constitutes for him' (Lacan in *The Purloined Poe* 1988:46). There is blindness in this story, but there are also at least two forms of seeing. The letter has power because it is seen to be possessed by some characters (whose visual positions change). Lacan's emphasis on repetition thus takes a visual turn, as he focuses 'three moments, structuring three glances, borne by three subjects incarnated each time by different characters' (Lacan in *The Purloined Poe* 1988:46). Here, there is visual exchange and recognition at each twist of the tale. Along with the power which the letter gives to its possessor, the power of the glance is also passed around—from Queen to Minister, from Minister to Dupin. The gaze, and a subject position founded in it, is thus something liable to shift as the subject's relationship to the others in its network also changes, but it is always set up in terms of the difficult gaze of the other rather than the potent look of the self. Psychoanalytic visual theory has found a very specific life in the analysis of the circulation of power in a literary text. Here, then, Williams (1995:73) points out Lacan's old theories of the gaze which negotiate the visual dynamic represented in *The Purloined Letter* itself, a move closer to applied psychoanalysis than one might initially have thought Lacan would be engaging in—although he does, of course, resist a specific analysis of author-through-text: 'Where the Freudian method is ultimately biographical' writes E. Ann Kaplan (1990:32) 'Lacan's is textual'.

In this seminar, Lacan also points to Poe's treatment of the boy who always wins at odds-and-evens in the story: the boy explains that he is able to do so because he imitates (Lacan calls it 'egomimie') the facial expression of the other player, and, once his face has so patterned itself, he allows his

mind to find the mental state that corresponds to the physiognomic set. According to Juliet Flower and Mac Cannell (1986:31), Lacan's response to such an explanation is to demystify it:

> We are, then, Lacan says, in the realm of symbolic signification: that of the 'plus-moins' and the 'moins-plus', not in the realm of the real, where in a random series 'at each throw, you have as many chances of winning or losing as on the previous throw'. The coins tossed in the game are re-marked with a signifier of their value not as coins, but as 'odd' or 'even'…. And in this region of the symbol, it is two that is the odd number. Johnson points out that what Lacan is trying to think through here is not the eternal (Oedipal) triangle, not the number One, but the number two. But she does not offer us the reason why. On the one hand, Lacan re-emphasizes the purely imaginary character of the binary, dual relation once the symbolic holds sway. But on the other, he evokes the idea that the two might be thought outside the confines of the symbolic.

Flower and Cannell (1985:32) observed that Barbara Johnson misses one trick in Lacan's seminar on *The Purloined Letter*, where we find the meaning of the 'two' Lacan is trying to rescue for the first time. Because Johnson is not attending to the importance of the form of the social tie in Lacan, she overlooks the major question Lacan's text leads up to, asking of the hegemony of the signifier, a hegemony which he himself so amply illustrates: the question of the heterosexual relation. In the Poe story, this is the King and the Queen's relation. To get to that relation we need to return to Lacan. He has distinguished in the seminar between two registers. The first register is that of 'exactitude' of measurement, of accuracy. This register appears in the *Compte Rendu* of the affair given by the Prefect of the Police. His narrative depends, contend Flower and Cannell (1986:18), on its exactitude being 'guaranteed' by his neutrality. He is merely a messenger, a means of 'linguistic transmission'. The other register is that of 'truth', the narrative register which invests Dupin with all manner of ambiguities, aporias and enigmas. Here 'truth' is given a gender: it is a 'woman'. (I will explore this further when discussing Derrida's critique of Lacan). There is, however, another woman in *The Purloined Letter*: the Queen. She appears

anything but 'faithful' and 'true'. She is also, as Queen, in a social position or role that is, clearly symbolic—in the 'merely symbolic' sense of the term—since she exercises, obviously, no ultimate power. She fears the King, and as such is literally subject to him, to his power. Flower and Cannell (1986:32) write:

> *Son seigneur et maitre*—her Lord and Master. Not light words for Lacan, who analyzed the discourse of mastery as one of the four discourses, the four forms of the social tie. The Queen is really subject neither to the signifier as such nor to the neutral code (the way things are) but to the specific institution of marriage in which her husband is her 'Lord and Master'.

As such, she has to play the game of the signifier, and bow down to it because the Queen is subject to the moral order, an order in which a very concrete other—the King—has all the prestige, power and authority to make her keep her place. According to Flower and Cannell (1986:32), like Johnson, we all easily overlook the social tie. Possibly Lacan wanted to demonstrate how willing we are to overlook it, to keep it offstage in our involvement with the signifier. But Lacan also wanted us to remember how disconnected we are.

Lacan concludes his seminar on *The Purloined Letter* with the remark that 'a letter always arrive at its destination'. This lends credence to Lacan's belief that the letter operates as a signifier whose signified is irrelevant and it can have and lose its place only in the Symbolic Order. I will discuss this in detail when evaluating Žižek's defense of Lacan.

3 Derrida's Critique of Lacan's Reading of *The Purloined Letter*

However accomplished his writing, Derrida's criticism of Lacan has a predictable ring. Schneiderman (1991:154) states that to refute Lacan, Derrida falls back on the points Lacan has always been criticized for: the failure to give sufficient weight to the imaginary, to the ego, to narcissism, to the horrors of corporeal fragmentation. In a sense one may rightly say that Lacan could have given more weight to these areas, though one should in the

interest of fairness note that Lacan did devote considerable theoretical effort to them. The point is that Lacan asserted the primacy of the symbolic over the imaginary, and Derrida sees the imaginary as swallowing the symbolic. Thus, we find Derrida accusing Lacan of everything his psychoanalytic adversaries have criticized him for: the overevaluation of the Oedipus complex, the overestimation of the phallus, overintellectualizing, being too interested in philosophy, failing to take into account the pre-oedipal fears of corporeal fragmentation, failing to give place and importance to the ego; there is even a sense that Lacan is being accused of giving insufficient place to affects. What is Derrida's scriptural strategy and to what is he opposed? That is not a very difficult question to answer. Certainly *Le Facteur de la Verite* is an overwritten and overwrought text that reads like an indictment. It constantly repeats the same charges, piling up evidence of tendencies that appear to be deserving of condemnation. The tone is moral and the text is animated almost throughout by a seemingly indubitably correct moral passion. Ultimately, that is the secret appeal of deconstruction. Regarding deconstruction, Žižek (1992:25) postulates the following:

> Since this recourse to common sense takes place more often than one might suspect, *systematically* even, within the 'deconstruction', one is tempted to put forward the thesis that the very fundamental gesture of 'deconstruction' is in a radical sense *commonsensical*. There is namely an unmistakable ring of common sense in the 'deconstructionist' insistence upon the impossibility of establishing a clear cut difference between empirical and transcendental, outside and inside, representation and presence, writing and voice; in its compulsive demonstration of how the outside always already smears over the inside, of how writing is constitutive of voice, etc. etc.—as if 'deconstructionism' is ultimately wrapping up commonsensical insights into an intricate jargon.

Žižek considers it to be one of the reasons that it is so successful in the USA which he views as the land of common sense.

Underpinning Derrida's critique of Lacan's essay on Poe is a much wider discussion about the relationship between deconstruction and psychoanalysis, a complex issue which rests upon Derrida's reading of

Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis through a critique of logocentrism. Johnson (1980:119) asserts that as well as Derrida accusing Lacan of a general laxity in his deployment of philosophical sources, Derrida was concerned to identify and deconstruct the key metaphysical patterns mapped out by classic Oedipal triangulation. The model family structure which traces the child's developing Oedipality is three-cornered, with the father intervening as the 'third term' to disrupt (in the child's eyes) the relationship of the mother and the child. But, according to Williams (1995:75) the triad might be read in other ways too: through his subsequent anxiety, the child sees himself as the intervening factor between father and mother (hence the father's role as threat), whilst it is the mother who represents the love-object for both father and child. In each pattern, a third person intervenes in the dyad of unity, introducing rivalry to the pattern. On one level this triangulation might seem to present a topographical critique of binary structures—the 'either', or the dynamic upon which the logocentrism which Derrida deconstructs rests. The Oedipal structure is an interrelationship with three corners (or moments) not two. How then do we understand Derrida's charge made in his essay *The Purveyor of Truth* that Lacan is operating with an implicit Hegelian brief, that psychoanalysis itself is founded upon a family structure which is itself at root logocentric? R.A. Champagne (1995:84) states that for Derrida the third term of the Oedipal triangle does not act to deconstruct the relationship between the other two positions (which would mean that the father's intervention unravelled the network of family relationships in which he is implicated). Rather, the Freudian and the Lacanian third term is incorporated in an Hegelian moment of synthesis, or *Aufhebung*. Of this Johnson (1980:122) writes:

> The problem with psychoanalytic triangularity, in Derrida's eyes, is not that it contains the wrong number of terms, but that it presupposes the possibility of a successful dialectical mediation and harmonious normalization, or *Aufhebung*, of desire.

The third term—the intervention of the father, threatening the mother-child dyad—offers not a breaking open but a continuation and consolidation of the family structure. The father comes in a spirit of disruption (disrupting a taboo desire), but acts out a moment of mediation between the two terms,

moving the family form, unchanged, into the future and the next moment (for Hegel, the moment of synthesis or resolution of a dialectic forms the first 'thetic' moment of the next dialectical phase).

Johnson (1980:122) states that the child's desire thus acts as a totalizing moment of incorporation rather than a sign of difference. At the moment at which he learns of the substitution involved in signification, he consolidates a family structure articulated by Lacan—in Johnson's (1980:122) words: 'within the bounds of the type of 'logocentrism' that has been the focus of Derrida's entire deconstructive enterprise'. The question is: what does all this have to do with *The Purloined Letter*? There are two ways of answering this which have particular pertinence here. One of Johnson's arguments is that Derrida reads the first pattern of triangulation which Lacan identifies in the Poe story (its primal scene, involving the King, the Queen and the Minister) as both a straight translation of Freudian Oedipality and as only dialectically connected to the second triad, the resolving repetition (involving the Queen, the Minister and Dupin). The triangle, Johnson (1980:119f) writes:

> becomes the magical, Oedipal figure that explains the functioning of human desire. The child's original imaginary dual unity with the mother is subverted by the law of the father as that which prohibits incest under threat of castration. The child has 'simply' to 'assume castration' as the necessity of substitution in the object of his desire (the object of desire becoming the locus of substitution and the focus of repetition), after which the child's desire becomes 'normalized'. Derrida's criticism of the 'triangles' or 'triads' in Lacan's reading of Poe is based on the assumption that Lacan's use of triangularity stems from this psychoanalytic myth.

For Johnson (1980:125) Derrida fails to see the repetition in Lacan's reading. These triads do not add up to one grand Oedipal narrative, but need to be read as interconnected but different moments. Lacan's final model is here quadrangular—the shape of the triangles placed together, with one a repetition (with a difference) of the other—but, Johnson (1980:125) argues, it is Derrida who is blind to this. Derrida, in short does not see the difference.

Derrida criticizes Lacan for failing to account for the literariness of the Poe story—its narrative devices (and way in which it frames itself), the context of other Poe's stories—in order to read the story as a purely analytic narrative. One of Johnson's concerns is to bring both of these possibilities together—a narrative read for its analytic interest but precisely as fictive or poetic writing. The letter for Lacan, is important not because of its content but because of its movement—its content is absent. Derrida, however, turns the absence into another kind of truth. Derrida believes that Lacan in reading *The Purloined Letter* as an allegory of the signifier, has made the signifier the story's truth. With this moment of consolidation, the text loses its indeterminate textuality, despite Lacan's emphasis on the mobility of elements within the story. But more important than this for Derrida, is Lacan's lack of interest in the multiple literary references which frame, and are contained by, the text, the sense in which it is obsessed with the written word and transgresses the limits of the story itself, as it refers and spills beyond itself. Champagne (1995:13) states that for Derrida, Lacan's text is an inter-text—not entirely his own work. In the midst of several different critiques of psychobiographical 'decoding', comes a strange re-emergence of Marie Bonaparte's strategies; she ironically becomes one of the crucial inter-textual reference points between these texts:

> The very Oedipal reading that Derrida attributes to Lacan is itself, according to Derrida, a purloined letter—purloined by Lacan from Marie Bonaparte's psychobiographical study of the life and works of Edgar Allan Poe (Johnson 1980:134).

Thus, it appears that in the apparently endless chain of inter-textuality, all texts are purloined versions of each other.

Concerning Lacan's reading of *The Purloined Letter*, I previously outlined Flower and Cannell's discussion on the 'two registers': exactitude of measurement, and the register of 'truth', the narrative register which invests Dupin with all manner of ambiguities, aporias and enigmas. This register is indeed, as Derrida complains, that of the 'truth' of the signifier, the truth of the phallus, the one by which Lacan writes 'we measure the supremacy of the signifier in the subject' (Flower & Cannell 1986:20). It is where we are blinded.

Derrida criticizes Lacan for failing to make reference to Poe, the author in his literary analysis of the story. He compares Lacan's analysis to that of Marie Bonaparte's psychobiography. I believe that it is an unfair criticism, as referencing the author himself is not essential to a sound literary analysis.

Derrida (1987:421) agrees with Lacan that the story is that of a letter, of the theft and displacement of a signifier. But what he finds problematic is that Lacan treats only the content of the story. Derrida (1987:421) states:

> But what the Seminar treats is only the content of the story, what is justifiably called its history, what is recounted in the account, the internal and narrated face of the narration. Not the narration itself.

Derrida (1987:428) accuses Lacan of misleading the reader into thinking that he will take into account the narration and the curious place of the narrator. What Lacan does, according to Derrida is to 'allow the narrator to dictate an effect of neutralizing exclusion (the narration as commentary) that transforms the entire Seminar into an analysis fascinated by a content' (Derrida 1987:426). Derrida (1987:428) states that in Lacan's Seminar there is a first moment when it seems that the position of the narrator and the narrating operation are going to intervene in the deciphering of 'Poe's message'. Derrida goes on to inform us that Lacan fails to deliver in this regard and reduces the narration to mere 'commentary'. Furthermore, he accuses Lacan of failing to discuss the specific status of the narrator's discourse and refraining from questioning the narrator's interventions and his psychoanalytic position in the rest of the Seminar. He considers it a weakness in Lacan's Seminar that he excludes the narrator from what he calls 'intersubjective triads', the triads which constitute that which is inside the recounted story. He believes that Lacan deliberately excludes the narrator from the real drama—the two triangular scenes. Derrida states that Lacan by referring to the narrator as the 'general narrator' gives him a neutral, homogenous status. This is facilitated by Lacan who states that the narrator 'adds nothing' (Lacan in *The Purloined Poe*, 1988:48). Derrida (1987:429) responds scathingly to this statement by stating:

> As if one has to add something to a relation in order to intervene in a scene. Especially in a scene of narration. And as if his questions and remarks and exclamations—these are the forms of the so-called general narrator's interventions in what Lacan demarcates as the 'first dialogue'—added nothing. Further, even before this 'first dialogue' gets underway, the 'general narrator' says things to which we have to turn later. Finally, the narrator who is onstage in what he places onstage is in turn placed onstage in a text more ample than the so-called general narration. A supplementary reason not to consider him as a neutral place of passage.

Derrida sees the text as overflowing and he finds it delimiting that Lacan pays no attention to this, but, rather isolates the two narrated triangular scenes, the two 'real dramas', neutralizing the fourth character who is the general narrator.

Derrida (1987:432) believes that Lacan's analysis contains a formal limit. He goes on to state that Lacan completely overlooks the formal structure of the text, 'at the very moment when, and perhaps, in the extent to which, its 'truth', its exemplary message, allegedly is "deciphered"'. He sees this as evidence of power formalism. Formalism is practised when one is not interested in the subject-author which in certain theoretical situations is constituted as progress. But Derrida (1987:432) is emphatic that Lacan's formalism is illogical because on the pretext of excluding the author, he does not take into account the 'scription-fiction' and the 'scriptor-fictor', or simply put the narrating narration of the narrator. Lacan is also accused by Derrida of cutting the narrated figure from a fourth side in order to see only triangles because of his over-evaluation of the Oedipus complex. Derrida (1987:436) sees the exclusion of the fourth as having adverse implications in the precipitation toward the truth.

Derrida (1987:436-437) finds it objectionable that Lacan insists upon showing that there is a single proper itinerary of the letter which returns to a determinable place that is always the same and that is its own; and that its meaning (what is written in the note in circulation) is indifferent or unknown for our purposes, the meaning of the letter and the sense of its itinerary are necessary, unique, and determinable in truth, that is, as truth.

Derrida (1987:444) draws attention to the one element of commonality between Bonaparte and Lacan, in that for both of them the castration of the woman is the final sense, what *The Purloined Letter* means. At the same time Derrida states that Bonaparte does what Lacan does not: she relates *The Purloined Letter* to other texts by Poe. Derrida believes that this operation is an internal necessity. According to Derrida (1987:439) *The Purloined Letter* belongs to a trilogy along with *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Mystery of Marie Roget*. The Seminar does not mention anything about the Dupin trilogy. Derrida (1987:446) notes that it is obvious when reading the Seminar that Lacan has read Bonaparte, but, he fails to name her. Derrida remarks scathingly that Lacan is always so scrupulous about debts and priorities, yet, he fails to acknowledge an explanation which orientates his entire interpretation.

Derrida (1987:446) finds it unacceptable that Lacan, who is a psychoanalyst, should state that the question of whether Dupin seizes the letter above the mantelpiece, as in Baudelaire's translation, or beneath it as in the original text 'may be abandoned without harm to the inferences of cooking'. Derrida finds it incredible that Lacan should consider this to be without harm. Lacan is also accused by Derrida of failing to pick on significant details like the 'brass knob' of the fireplace which symbolizes the clitoris. Derrida (1987:448) states that Bonaparte is never tempted to grant Dupin the position of analyst, not even in order to watch over him with another kind of mastery. By implication he lashes out at Lacan whom he sees as wanting to assume the role of master.

Derrida (1987:453) sees Dupin as occupying a 'median position'. He contends that from the outset Dupin acts with his sights set on the letter, on possessing it in order to return it to its rightful owner (neither the King, nor the Queen, but the Law which binds them). In his Seminar Lacan used the image of ostriches, and Derrida purloins this image to ridicule Lacan by saying that there are only ostriches, no-one can avoid being plucked, and the more one is the master, the more one presents one's rear, which would be the person who identifies with Dupin.

For Lacan, as analysed by Derrida, castration is the sign of the simultaneous presence and absence of the phallus: the object of desire is always a substitute for something that was never present (the mother's phallus). This is expressed in Lacanian terms as a phallus always both

'veiled' and 'unveiled'. Derrida cites from a well-known passage in Lacan's *The Signification of the Phallus* which states that the phallus:

> can play its role only when veiled, that is to say, as itself a sign of the latency with which any signifiable is struck, when it is raised to the function of signifier. The phallus is the signifier of this *Aufhebung* itself, which it inaugurates by its disappearance. That is why the demon of shame arises at the very moment when,in the ancient mysteries, the phallus is unveiled (Lacan in *Ecrits* 1977:480).

Yet, Derrida complains, this veiling and unveiling is set up as the structure of the lack. In this way it restores to the phallus, as well as to castration, a fixed and central place which is freed from all substitution, thus undermining the attack on the metaphysics of presence to which Derrida's deconstructive enterprise is dedicated.

Derrida (1987:463) believes Lacan subordinates the letter writing, and the text. Derrida (1987:469) postulates that when Lacan recalls the passion for unveiling which has one object: the truth and recalls that the analyst 'above all remains the master of the truth' it is always in order to link the truth to the power of speech. He explains that even if communication communicates nothing, the discourse represents the existence of communication; even if it denies the evidence, it affirms that speech constitutes truth; even if it is intended to deceive, the discourse speculates on faith in testimony.

4 Žižek's Defense of Lacan

Lacan postulated at the end of *The Purloined Letter* that the letter always arrives at its destination. Derrida refuted this claim, asserting why could it not—sometimes at least also fail to reach it? Žižek (1992:9f) examines the statements offered by both the theorists and states that if the Lacanian theory insists categorically that a letter does always arrive at its destination, it is not because of an unshakable belief in teleology, in the power of the message to reach its preordained goal: Lacan's exposition of the way a letter arrives at its destination, 'lays bare the very mechanism of teleological illusion'. This

simply means that the very reproach 'a letter can miss its own destination'. Žižek (1992:10) accuses Derrida of misreading the Lacanian thesis, reducing it to the traditional teleological circular movement; that is, to what is precisely called in question and subverted by Lacan. Žižek (1992:10) gives credence to his views by pointing to the case where the letter does have an addressee, for example, a message in a bottle thrown into the sea from an island after a ship wreck. This case displays how a letter reaches its true destination the moment it is delivered (thrown into the water). This may be difficult to fathom but Žižek (1992:10) explains it: 'Its true addressee is namely not the empirical Other which may receive it or not, but the big Other, the Symbolic Order itself, which receives it the moment the letter is put into circulation, that is the moment the sender 'externalizes' his message, delivers it to the Other, the moment the Other takes cognizance of the letter and thus relieves the sender of responsibility for it. Lacan (1981:315-319) notes in this regard that what is crucial here is the difference between the letter's symbolic circuit and its itinerary in what is called 'reality': a letter always arrives at its destination on the symbolic level, whereas in reality, it can of course fail to reach it. Žižek (1992:10) believes that Lacan's thesis that a letter always arrives at its destination could be ordered by means of reference to the triad: Imaginary, Symbolic and Real.

According to Žižek (1992:9), regarding the Imaginary (mis) recognition, the idea that a letter always arrives at its destination points to the logic of recognition/misrecognition, the logic by means of which one (mis) recognizes oneself as the addressee of ideological interpellation. The illusion that constitutes ideological order is paraphrased by Johnson (1988:248): 'a letter always arrives at its destination since its destination is wherever it arrives'. This view does not rule out the element of fate where an illusion is produced by kind of 'short circuit' between a place in the symbolic network and the contingent element which occupies it. Thus, whoever finds himself at a place becomes the addressee since the addressee is not defined by his positive qualities but by the very contingent fact of finding himself at this place. Regarding fate, Žižek (1992:11) states:

> Fate in psychoanalysis always asserts itself through contingent encounters giving rise to the question: 'What if I missed that remark? What if I had taken another route and avoided that scene'?

> Such questioning is, of course, deceitful since 'a letter always arrives at its destination'. It waits for its moment with patience—if not this then another contingent little bit of reality will sooner or later find itself at its place that awaits it and fires off the trauma.

This is in fact what Lacan called the 'arbitrariness of the signifier'. Žižek (1992:12) emphasizes that the reason why a letter always reaches its addressee is because one becomes its addressee when one is reached. Žižek (1992:13) tries to nullify Derrida's thesis that the letter can also miss its addressee by stating that:

> It makes sense only insofar as I presuppose that I can be its addressee before the letter reaches me—in other words it presupposes the traditional teleological trajectory with a preordained goal … the Derridean proposition that a letter can also go astray and miss its destination discloses a typical obsessional apprehension of what would happen if …. So, far from implying any kind of teleological circle 'a letter always arrives at its destination' exposes the very mechanism which brings about the amazement of 'Why me? Why was I chosen'? and thus sets in motion the search for a hidden fate that regulates my path.

On a symbolic level 'a letter always arrives at its destination' condenses an entire chain of propositions, according to Žižek (1992:12), who echoes the Lacanian viewpoint: 'the sender always receives from the receiver his own message in reverse form', 'the repressed always returns', 'we cannot escape the symbolic debt, it always has to be settled', which are all ultimately variations on the same premise that 'there is no metalanguage'. According to Žižek (1992:13) when the subject/sender receives from the addressee his own message in its true form, that is, the letter that the subject put into circulation, 'a letter always arrives at its destination' which was from the very beginning the sender himself: 'a letter always arrives at its destination' when the subject is finally forced to assume the consequences of his activity. Lacan (1992:13) believed that the true meaning of the subject's words or deeds—their reason—is disclosed by their actual consequences so that the subject cannot deny responsibility for his actions. Lacan (1992:13)

defines 'hero' as the subject like Oedipus, who accepts the consequences of his act. The reverse of the subject's message is its repressed, thus, we can see the idea of the impossibility of metalanguage is linked to the return of the repressed. Žižek (1992:14) asks the question: What could the Derridean notion that a letter can also miss its destination mean? He responds:

> That the repressed can also not return and yet by claiming this, we entangle ourselves in a naïve substantialist notion of the unconscious as a positive entity ontologically preceding its 'returns' that is; symptoms *qua* compromise formation, a notion competently called in question by Derrida himself. Here, we cannot but repeat after Lacan: there is no repression previous to the return of the repressed: the repressed content does not precede its return in symptoms, there is no way to conceal it in its purity undistorted by 'compromises' that characterize the formation of the symptoms.

'A letter always arrives at its destination' implies that one can never escape one's fate and Žižek (1992:16) defines this in psychoanalytic terms as 'the symbolic debt has to be paid'. The letter which arrives at its destination is also a letter of request for outstanding debts; what propels the letter on its symbolic circuit is always some outstanding debt. Žižek (1992:16) declares that this dimension of fate is at work in the very formal structure of Poe's *The Purloined Letter*: there is something distinctly 'faithful' in the way the self-experience of the main characters in Poe's story is determined by the simple 'mechanical' shift of their positions within the intersubjective triad of the three glances (the first which sees nothing; the second which sees that the first sees nothing and deludes itself as to the secrecy of what it hides; the third which sees that the first two glances leave what should be hidden exposed to whomever would seize it). In the way, for example, the Minister's fate is sealed not because of his personal miscalculation or oversight but because the simple shift of his position from the third to the second glance in the repetition of the initial triad causes his structural blindness. Žižek (1992:16) sees this as the mechanism of imaginary (mis) recognition: the participants in the play automatically perceive their fate as something that pertains to the letter as such in its immediate materiality (this letter is damned, whoever comes into possession of it is brought to ruin!)—

what they misrecognized is that the curse is not in the letter as such but in the intersubjecive network organized around it.

Žižek (1992:20) examines the concept of the Real and again agrees with Lacan that 'a letter always arrives at its destination'. This in effect means that 'we will all die'. It is the only letter that nobody can evade: the letter which has each of us as its infallible addressee is death. It is important to note that the Real is also associated with life. Lacan (1992:22) points out that the very notion of life is alien to the symbolic order. The name of this life substance that proves a traumatic shock for the symbolic universe is enjoyment. Žižek (1992:22) sees the ultimate variation on the theme of 'a letter always arrives at its destination' as 'you can never get rid of the stain of enjoyment'—the very gesture of renouncing enjoyment, produces a surplus enjoyment that Lacan (1992:22) calls 'object small a'.

In his concluding remarks on *The Purloined Letter*, Žižek (1992:22) states that its story stays within the confines of the 'structuralist' problematic of a senseless, 'mechanical' symbol order regulating the subject's innermost self-experience. Žižek (1992:22) contends that if one looks at the last years of Lacan's teaching, the letter which circulates among the subjects in Poe's story, determining their position in the intersubjective network, is no longer the materialized agency of the signifier but rather an object in the strict sense of materialized enjoyment—the stain, the uncanny exists that the subjects snatch away from each other, forgetful of how its very possession will mark them with a passive 'feminine' stance that bears witness to the confrontation with the object—the cause of desire.

I would suggest that Žižek's attempt at defending Lacan's seminar lacks substance. He fails to defend Lacan against the numerous charges made by Derrida. Žižek's entire defense is centered on one of Derrida's objections against which he piles up his counter-argument.

5 Conclusion

I have attempted in my essay to show the complex readings which have formed around *The Purloined Letter*, with special reference to Lacan, Derrida and Žižek. It is imperative to note Freud's influence on Lacan's reading of *The Purloined Letter*. However, it is also evident that Lacan neglects to mention *The Uncanny,* and Derrida considers it to be one of the

weaknesses in Lacan's Seminar. We have seen that Derrida tears into Lacan's writing by arguing that Lacan commits the ultimate sin against literature: he works from the plot rather than Poe's language. Lacan succeeds, according to Derrida, in finding yet another way to cut off the chain of meaning on which a literary work subsists: he isolates the story from two other stories about Detective Dupin. Furthermore, Lacan isolates the mythic triangle of characters in Poe's story from the narrator. By bursting these frames, Derrida hopes to open up all those Lacian triangles. Lacan, in other words, imposes a frame on the story as triumphantly as a blackmailer frames the innocent victim. He is one more player in the game, trumping the previous one to assert his own mastery—much like each person in turn in *The Purloined Letter*. For Lacan, context is everything. It creates desire, and so each person, as in Poe, the letter bears profound significance: 'a letter always arrives at its destination'. Derrida plays on that memorable line. In language, literature, or psychology, meaning can never be closed off or translated once and for all, not even into other words: a letter never ever reaches its destination. Derrida (1987:495) states:

> Two out of three times, the author of the Seminar will have forced *dessein* [design] into *destin* [destiny], perhaps, thereby, bringing a meaning to its destination: *expressly, no doubt, for in any case nothing permits one to exclude a design* [dessein] somewhere.

Žižek provides a defense of Lacan's analysis of *The Purloined Letter* and accuses Derrida of misreading Lacan. Žižek uses the triad of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real as the bedrock in his defense of Lacan. Regarding the Imaginary (mis)recognition Žižek, sees the letter arriving at its destination because its destination is wherever it arrives. He/she becomes the addressee by the very contingent fact of finding himself/herself at this place. On the Symbolic level the subject/sender receives from the addressee his own message in inverted form; that is, the letter that the subject put into circulation arrives at its destination, which was from the beginning the sender himself. On the level of the Real the letter always arrives at its destination and this in effect means that we will all die—death is the addressee.

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Mandela's Ego:
A 'Cock' and 'Bull' Story

Sikhumbuzo Mngadi

Introduction

Mandela's Ego (2006), Nkosi says, developed from a fantastical idea[1], which is, of course, why it is a novel, in a certain sense of the word anyway. It can be seen against what Lewis Nkosi has said about writing by black South Africans in English, namely, that

> … its [writing by black South Africans in English] formal insufficiencies, its disappointing breadline asceticism and prim disapproval of irony, and its well-known predilection for what Lukacs called 'petty realism, the trivially detailed painting of local colour' … can be seen to be a result, in part, of a claustrophobia related to … internal colonialism from which, it is hoped, a post-apartheid condition will set it free (1998: 77).

[1] 'I had wonderful students at Brandeis University, in Boston, in my writing class …. I wanted to encourage them to write. As an act of solidarity, I told them I would also write something for them which [we] would read together but I had no idea what. Then I thought very quickly; I thought of a young boy who grows up worshipping Mandela. His manhood comes to an abrupt end before it has begun the day Mandela is arrested and sent to Robben Island' ('In Their Words—Book Award Nominees' p. 1. www. entertainment.iafrica. com).

Whereas this line of inquiry into black South African writing in English has become all too familiar, albeit its credentials remain contested, what is a more urgent question today is whether the hope of the freedom to experiment (with irony and fantastical tales, for instance) post-apartheid has been realised in the recent literature by black South African writers, including Nkosi's *Mandela's Ego* as a case in point. Alternatively, one may ask of this line of inquiry whether it is appropriate—indeed, desirable—to see history as marching in linear fashion from presumed claustrophobic necessity to the open air of formalism, so to speak. Further still, whether what can be called claustrophobic necessity is not a legitimate area of fictional interest and philosophical inquiry, beyond the generalities of literary taste or subjective formalism. For, even as this critique of black South African literature acquired renewed energy in the nineteen eighties and early 'nineties, with the publication of Njabulo Ndebele and Albie Sachs's essays, a sobering counter-critique of the ascendance of culturalism could be discerned in the work of, among others, Michael Vaughan, Tony Morphet, Shane Moran and Kelwyn Sole (see Vaughan 1991: 186- 204; Morphet 1992: 129-141; Moran 1995: 177-195; Sole 1997: 116-151). Vaughan, for instance, could not find in Ndebele's stories examples of the kind of literature that his critical essays presupposed and called for but, rather, a tradition of storytelling more at home in a Western realist novel, with its attendant problems. For his part, Morphet saw Ndebele's critical essays as drawing on 'the traditions of Romanticism and Nationalism' (131). In 'The New Hellenism', Moran cautioned against the 'valorisation of popular culture', which 'presupposes a unity that can be, and has been, racialised' (1995: 182-183). He did this by considering some of the historical uses of the idea of culture and the pre-eminence—and sometimes hegemony—of the German sense of culture, that is, '*Bildung*', which 'conveys self-formation, development, and cultivation ...' (183). Sole argued that,

> It is noticeable that the sense of 'newness' it [post-coloniality] both helped form and responded to often demonstrates a superficial understanding at best of what the local versions (in literary criticism) of the 'master narratives' it has sought to supplant were. It has also tended to stereotype the literary expression produced during the struggle period as literature obsessed with politics and oblivious of

> the quotidian experiences of its characters or its readers[2]—a belief which usually relies on the authority of a handful of critics such as Ndebele, Sachs and Nkosi (119).

Culturalist arguments and practices, then, have had to confront the challenges of materialist critique, with their emphasis on the imperatives of power that suffuse cultural representation, and these challenges have become more pronounced with the steady, albeit fitful, emergence of 'post-apartheid' writing. This is even more so because much of what is today called post-apartheid literature is marked by a strong sense of cultural self-representation and historical recuperation, a phenomenon not altogether surprising, given South Africa's history of overdetermination of identity from without, as it were, of *ethnos*. However, as I shall argue in the case of *Mandela's Ego*, the phenomenon of cultural self-representation is one that is potentially conservative.

There are, of course, variations to the theme of cultural and historical self-representation; Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000), for instance, or, for that matter, her *Playing in the Light* (2006), approaches the issue of self-representation in terms that differ from Nkosi's *Mandela's Ego*. For instance, whereas in *David's Story* a formal issue such as the investigation of the self in history is a thematic concern, in Nkosi's novel expressions such as 'Courting Zulu men believe in touch', 'For Zulu girls this was routine stuff' (144), or 'What better way for a young Zulu boy, striving to make a name for himself as a man …' (50), while an argument can be made of their potentially ironic—even comic—import, nevertheless remain largely dehistoricised. And, as I shall contend in my discussion of Nkosi's novel, it makes very little difference, if at all, that the kinds of identities that the two authors (Wicomb and Nkosi) portray are marked by

[2] Indeed, J.M. Coetzee's reading of Alex La Guma's *A Walk In The Night*, in 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex La Guma' (Attwell 1992), shows that, strictly speaking, a closed or monologic text is impossible. That is, that it often depends on the experience that readers bring to a text that appears to disclose nothing of its world beyond the author's banal omnipresence to realise that a text's meaning may, in fact, also reside in the act of reading.

differences in complexity[3]. Nor does it seem terribly convincing to say that *Mandela's Ego* is a hoax, as it were, a cock and bull story, for the mere fact that cocks and bulls in the novel acquire more than just comic significance.

Doubtless, irony abounds in the narrative of *Mandela's Ego*, so that the generalisations about Zulu boys, girls and men may very well be intended to provoke. Yet the world that the novel portrays (Mondi village) seems to me already sealed inside a semiotic chain that undermines the possibility of a non-identitarian argument or, at the very least, an argument that acknowledges, however tacitly, that issues of identity imbricate with those of power. Irony in narrative fiction, it must be said, is a function of a narrative contract between narrator and narrattee and works by means of strategic disclosure of the underlying 'truth' that the use of irony seeks to render absurd. Unless, of course, it is proffered in bad faith, in which case it falls by its own unlearnt lessons. In the novel, besides Dumisa's exaggerated and, thus, ironic egoism, which is fairly easy to lampoon, other characters act out their predictable roles that the narrator assigns with cheerful self-indulgence. MaMkhize, Dumisa's mother, and her daughters sing '*Waklazulwa ngenxa yami*! *He was wounded for our sins*!' (26) *ad nauseam*, and do not seem to have any meaningful lives outside the home; Father Ross holds forth with his Medieval ideology, disguised as poetry, in Africa; the Zulu girls are either difficult (Nobuhle) or loose (Nozizwe), with both sides rolled into a simple sexual binarism, much to the male protagonist's delight; the villagers are a happy, cheerful lot and the Afrikaners are murderous but not very bright. In short, when it comes to these characters, the novel's irony reverts to the older, tedious commonplaces and stereotypes.

What is of interest for me, then, is the value of the culturalist (read fantastical) site that the narrative of *Mandela's Ego* appears to inhabit against the background of, firstly, the evident internal hierarchies of gender and wealth and, secondly, the seductive pull of African nationalism which gives the novel its title, and which, like all nationalisms, appears to be deeply organised in the lore of masculine authority and prestige.

[3] That is, that Wicomb's novel is aimed at an academic audience, while Nkosi's is aimed at a relatively youthful readership.

Ego Sum

Set in the nineteen sixties, *Mandela's Ego* follows the sexual (mis)fortunes of 'Dumisa, the Bull of Mondi, a Zulu *isoka* [Casanova] of great renown, a heroic lover of countless women, known across the length and breadth of the land for his exploits in the name of the Black Pimpernel, the great Mandela' (7). On the horizon of this text of male sexual egoism, or, rather, embedded in it, is the text of (South African) politics, even though the narrative is quite glib about the meaning of this text to the day-to-day lives of the Mondi villagers. Here Nkosi returns to his old theme, namely, the uneasy and tragic commerce between black male sexuality, politics and psychoanalysis, well established by *Mating Birds* (1986) and developed in *The Black Psychiatrist* (1994). However, whereas in these earlier works the tragedy plays itself out in the encounters of black male protagonists, Ndi Sibiya and Dr Kerry respectively, with white women, Veronica and Mary respectively, in *Mandela's Ego* Nkosi changes tack and tackles the tricky issue of the coming-into-being of Zulu male subjectivity and how this is sustained by a projection of self-love/narcissism onto a significant ideal. The ego ideal in the formation of Dumisa's sexual identity is the combination of the formative fantasy of a super masculine Mandela, which he works into his (and, by extension, 'Zulu') masculine sexual repertoire, and the sexualised image of African nationalism, which he appropriates for his Mandela Football Club. Fastened upon this is an idea of Zulu boyhood and sexual socialisation that is sustained by a local version of 'Zooluology', to borrow a coinage by Peter Davis (1996:124)[4].

However, the novel eschews an elaborate Freudian narrative and, instead, installs one that must be seen to have its foundations in Zulu male attitudes towards manhood and sex. For instance, the narrator spends a great deal of time in the early sections of the narrative working out the differences between Zulu and European notions of sexuality and desire via the lessons

[4] Whereas Davis uses this term to mount a critique of racist colonial attitudes towards the Zulus as an unchanging mass of noble savages, in a similar way that Edward Said uses the term 'Orientalism', I argue that it can be appropriated for a description of a practice of cultural representation in which a group is described in static/essentialist terms, even if the intention is not to insult or to undermine.

that Father Ross gives in his Culture Studies classes about

> European courtship patterns in the Middle Ages, about love-making between knights and ladies in those great, unrepeatable times, when love was above all a game of chess—full of passion yet innocent of vice, full of devotion yet unsullied by the corruption of the flesh! (33).

To which he opposes 'The people of Africa [who] have too much sex on their minds to experience the meaning of true love' (33). Even the case of Dumisa's sexual impotence after Mandela is captured by the Apartheid State police, described in some detail in the opening two paragraphs of Chapter Fourteen, and which looks every bit the type of case that Freud discusses in his case studies, turns out to be without an abstract Freudian psychological foundation[5]. Rather, it is cured by its cause, as it were, by the release of Mandela, rather than by the psychosexual promptings of Madame Rosi. In this regard, then, one can suppose that together with the failure of Madame Rosi's method, the resistance of Ross's pupils to the 'obvious hypocrisy' (34) of European knights, who 'take women for a ride' by simply engaging in pointless 'palaver' (34), means that the narrative leans towards social analysis, rather than the idea of the essential 'tragicness of psychical life' (Voloshinov, qtd. in Morris 39) favoured by the Neitzschean strain of Freudianism. Which, of course, is not to say that the narrative is consistent with a social analysis that it appears to endorse. This murkiness in the narrative's conceptualisation of the relation of the subject to the social, it seems to me, is one of the areas of the novel that require analytical attention and mirrors the point I made earlier about the relative absence of sustained political life in Mondi village at the very moment that the village appears to be in the eye of the nineteen-sixties political rumble.

Nevertheless, let me ponder further the merits of my point above, namely, that the narrative tends toward a social, rather than an abstract psychological analysis, even as it seems to invest Dumisa's tragic failure to 'rise to the [coital] occasion' (7) with an abstract psychological diagnosis.

In a critique of Freudianism, in *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*

[5] Freud's discussion of the libidinal investment of the ego, for instance.

(1927), Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov, after pondering the weakness of the basis of the Freudian psychological thesis in 'subjective individualism', posits an alternative one based on the '*social and historical localization* [that makes a human being] *a real human being* and determines the content of his life and cultural creativity' (in Morris 38). This is because,

> [Tthe abstract biological person … does not exist at all.… What is needed, as it were, is a second birth, a *social* birth. A human being is not born as an abstract biological organism but as a landowner or a peasant, as a bourgeois or a proletariat … (ibid. 38).

In the above sense, then, no person can be possessed of a singular consciousness born of a singular ego ideal. About Voloshinov's line of critical inquiry, Pam Morris notes that, 'since any Marxist study must be founded upon an objective methodology, the inherent subjectivism of [the Freudian] introspective trend makes it totally unacceptable for dialectical materialism' (ibid. 38). If, as Voloshinov says, what runs through 'Freud's [subjectivist] doctrine' is 'the *strife*, the *chaos*, the *adversity* of our psychical life', and that this is a radical departure from earlier, more optimistic 'old [pre-Freudian] psychology', its [the doctrine's] weakness nevertheless lies in its conception of the human subject as existing outside history.

Strife and adversity in *Mandela's Ego* centre on Dumisa's psychosexual 'ill[ness]' (162). 'Following Mandela's capture', the narrator informs us,

> Dumisa was seriously ill, unable to eat, unable to sleep. He suffered nightmares, he complained of splitting headaches, his eyes yellowed, began slowly to dim. For hours on end he was mute, unable to utter more than a dozen words at a time. Then his hearing became impaired, he hallucinated. Sometimes he dreamed of Mandela, his hero, tall, bearded, eyes luminous with desire for freedom (162).

This leads to his failure to consummate his conquest of Nobuhle, '[a]fter so many days, weeks and months of trying to bring his quarry [Nobuhle] to heel …' (7). Readers are made to understand that Dumisa has brought this psychosexual strife on himself: out of the choices available to him to become

a (proper Zulu) man, he opts for a fantastical one that he culls from his uncle Simon's anecdotes about Mandela's boyhood, evidently embellished, and from 'photographs of the great man' (19). In this sense, his is the story of a politically naïve village boy in the tense political environment of the South Africa of the early nineteen sixties, whose frame of reference is quite limited, a point that a man at the rally at which Mandela is scheduled to speak brings home to him. After demanding to speak to 'the Big Man' (117), the man, 'Assuming a severely tutorial tone', tells Dumisa that,

> Mandela may be a big man in stature, but he is not the Big Man of the Movement. Luthuli is President-General. We believe in collective leadership. No one is a 'Big Man' in our Movement. We try to discourage any manifestations of the Cult of Personality (117).

Needless to say, 'Dumisa did not know what the man was talking about …. He listened [to Mandela's speech] without enthusiasm' (118).

Textual-sexual Politics in *Mandela's Ego*

Against the backdrop of the above, one can make a few pointed inferences about the type of novel that *Mandela's Ego* is, in particular the imbrication of the story of a Zulu Casanova in a remote village of Zululand with African nationalism, which Dumisa constitutes into a formidable, albeit repertory, sexual metaphor and routine via the agency of Mandela. I want to proceed by making a few observations regarding the textual-sexual overlay in the narrative of *Mandela's Ego* and how this may be said to relate to the idea of social and political consciousness that the novel grafts onto the singular consciousness of its male protagonist.

The fantastical world that Dumisa makes up from stories told to him by his uncle Simon, 'his older cousin Sipho, and indeed a whole army of herdboys in the countryside taking care of younger boys' (23), including Sipho's masturbation; the sexually charged poetry lessons that Father Ross gives in his Culture Studies classes; and the elaborate display of sexuality in the *ukuthomba* (coming-of-age) ceremony, all imbue the narrative with the elements of tragic-comedy that it sets against the realism of political ferment and repression. Dumisa's world is both tragic and comical precisely because

in it he can only admit these stories or, if not these stories, those that would dovetail with his stock of regularly performed masculine routines.

The social world that the narrative portrays, however, is one of socio-cultural transition from vernacular consciousness to something of no 'true origin or proper provenance' (64). Dumisa's shorts, for instance, which he wears under an *ibheshu* (skin apron) at his coming-of-age ceremony, speak of the 'extravagance of his blended repertoire' (64), but also poignantly of a community that is loosely anchored in 'authentic' (64) tradition. The structure of the Mondi village community that the narrative constitutes rests on a set of fairly simple co-ordinates: the missionaries, who have converted a small band of villagers, including Dumisa's mother, regard the villagers as simpletons and the non-converts, among whom Dumisa's father, retain an older (aristocratic) male order. In-between are those, like Dumisa's uncle and Nozizwe, who are of worldly consequence and the non-descript who drink sorghum beer at Dumisa's (place), but who nonetheless give the narrative its authoritative, insider voice.

The political world remains largely marginal to the day-to-day lives of the Mondi villagers, conspicuous mainly by the sight of 'a man … in the vicinity of Mondi Missionary School, in deep conversation with pupils … dressed like a soldier in khaki uniform, and … a dark beret with a pin bearing the letters and colours of the Freedom Movement stuck in it' (74). Aside from the journey that Dumisa and the members of his Mandela Football Club undertake to a political rally in Pietermaritzburg, and the news of political upheaval brought to the village by the local newspaper *iQiniso* (The Truth), there is no sustained political activity in Mondi.

So how are the two texts of sexual, quixotic fantasy and of political realism and social change brought to bear on a text of ordinary social and cultural life of Mondi? To address this question, I return to some of the broad statements that I proposed earlier, in particular my view that the novel sidesteps crucial issues of material culture by grafting its narrative and its world onto a largely synthetic culturalist pattern. While a cautionary tale about Mandelamania is not inherently weak, no such presumption can be made about what flourishes inside the framework of such a tale. It is, thus, to the story of the Mondi village community, which holds the novel's 'Prologue' (Dumisa's sexual impotence) and 'Epilogue' (the restoration of Dumisa's sexual powers) in place that I now turn, the better to probe into the

spurs that Nkosi brings to the post-apartheid novel form, against the 'disappointing breadline asceticism and prim disapproval of irony' (77) of the claustrophobic apartheid novel. For even as the novel turns to the past to situate Dumisa's Mandela-size ego, it treats of the past 'as the prehistory of the present'; it (the historical novel) is, as it were, 'a coded reflection on the present' (2005:6), to borrow Terry Eagleton's efficient formulations.

'Zooluology': Masculinity, Femininity and Narrative Authority in *Mandela's Ego*

'The Zulus', the priest used to say, 'are most like us as we were many centuries ago when the great tribes of Europe were still young and vigorous and full of sap, before too much civilisation had razed their spirit, when pastoral life still bore witness to that ideal of pure love, expressed in absolute freedom and innocence' (9). This is Father Ross at his condescending best, a point that the narrative makes a point to buttress, most notably in its description of the American tourists that Dumisa takes around Mondi as a tourist guide with the Durban Tourist Company, who want to see 'how a real Zulu maiden prepares a meal' (133) and suchlike so-called Zulu cultural quintessence. Of course, Dumisa uses the opportunities that both Father Ross's lessons and the tourists' gullibility present to assert his own views about sex and to see Nobuhle (as the so-called real Zulu maiden), respectively. In any event, this is the trajectory that the narrative takes, relying on point and counterpoint, showing up Father Ross's austere colonial ideology and the American tourists' 'fast food' type as different only in form. But what does the narrative present as the alternative to these stereotypes of 'the Zulus'?

The first issue that I want to consider is the link that the narrative establishes between sexual and political impotence, using Dumisa as the mirror for such a link. Of course, it is not the first time that this kind of link has been made by an African writer; Sembene Ousmane used it in *Xala* (1974) to launch a scathing satire on the political impotence of the neo-colonial male elite in Senegal, by showing how the men of political influence take many wives both to flaunt their wealth and to compensate for their lack of real political (read economic) power. In *Xala*, the story of El Hadj Abdoukader Beye, a wealthy businessman in a newly independent

Senegal who takes a young wife to show off his success, is used as a parable to reveal this phenomenon. On the first night with his young wife, El Hadj fails to consummate his marriage because he is stricken by a *xala*—a curse—which renders him impotent. The notes on the back cover of the video production of the story describe El Hadj's attempts to solve his problem as 'allow[ing] … Sembene Ousmane to draw a vivid, satirical image of life in post-independence Senegal, underlining the gap between rich and poor and the inextricable mix of modernity and tradition'.

Mandela's Ego, like *Xala*, also deals with the issue of male sexual egoism. Again, like Ousmane's novella, Nkosi's novel bases its theme of sexual egoism on the ascendance of a cult of personality. However, unlike *Xala*, *Mandela's Ego* does not undertake a materialist analysis of this phenomenon, even though, potentially, it calls for such analysis. Instead, the narrative adopts a subjectivist approach, with pretensions toward a social and political analysis, by portraying Dumisa's impotence as ultimately the result of his delusions of grandeur. The consequences of this subjectivist approach are that, firstly, the social scene, which forms the backdrop of Dumisa's sexual activities, is portrayed in stereotypical ways and, secondly, the potentially rich narrative of masculinity and nationalism is sacrificed for the simplistic one of the tragic consequences of hero-worshipping or Mandela mania.

Let me tackle the problem of the lack of a viable social analysis in the novel, by considering the way in which the narrative rightly portrays the sexual socialisation of young boys in the village as responsible for Dumisa's attitude towards the village girls, but retreats from an analysis of the social constructions of masculinity and femininity. Indeed, much of the narrative appears quite comfortable with stereotypes of men, boys and girls that derive from social presuppositions and, in fact, holds them up as essentialisms, rather than submit them to social critique. The procession of general statements about Zulu men and women in the narrative, examples of some of which I referred to earlier, have acquired notoriety today as urban legends[6]

[6] Recall Jacob Zuma's defence when asked by the Judge at his rape trial why he did not back away from what he construed as a sexual invitation by his accuser, that in his culture, which would be Zulu culture, a man does not leave a woman in a state of arousal.

but are the stock-in-trade of *Mandela's Ego*'s Zulu cultural 'archive'. The failure to acknowledge the agency of Nobuhle, onto whose tantalisingly within reach and subsequently available body the text projects Dumisa's impotence, results in a restorative, rather than deconstructive, text of masculine pre-eminence: Dumisa regains his potency by going through a ritual of sexual 'release' and Nobuhle, whose role in the narrative is to raise the stakes in an otherwise male tragicomedy, is quietly narrated out. So is the 'brown woman [in a] *doek*' (181), whose only act is to offer Dumisa sex, which cures his impotence. It would be correct to say that she is put there to prop up a story that has no real use for her beyond the sexual service that she provides, which is also a service that the narrative requires to reach its conclusion.

Still on the issue of the novel's failure to provide a viable social analysis of the milieu, there is also clear evidence that, despite the social changes that Mondi village has undergone since the arrival of the missionaries, an aristocratic male order has remained. Mziwakhe Gumede, Dumisa's father, owns a sizable herd of cattle and remains aloof from and contemptuous of his wife MaMkhize's Christian fervour. However, there is no attempt in the narrative to draw links between his position in the village and in the text and the 'new men' of political power and influence who are gradually making inroads into the village. And, this is despite his evident discomfort with the son's political interests and growing disregard for him. Given his son's Mandela-size ego, there is good ground for the narrative to explore the lineaments of power, masculinity and authority in the discourses of tradition and nationalism. After all, Anne McClintock wrote in an issue of the journal *Transition*, which also featured an essay by Nkosi, that,

> 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 representation, as well as the power to vote (114).

This is an issue that was urgent then as it is today. And since *Mandela's Ego* situates its own story in the period that McClintock describes above, it seems quite odd that Nkosi's narrator would revert to a language that is replete with gender and sexual stereotypes.

Conclusion

The type of theme that *Mandela's Ego* tackles is not new in African writing and has been treated with various levels of depth in world literatures dating back to Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. Against this background, and considering Nkosi's credentials as a renowned writer and critic, one would have expected a nuanced understanding of the concepts on which *Mandela's Ego* is founded, including the fantastical form, masculinity, femininity and nationalism. However, the novel missed the opportunity to tell an engaging *and* entertaining story when it seemed easier to do so than to fall into the same trap of 'petty realism' that Nkosi would rather was consigned to the claustrophobic colonial cauldron.

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Shades of Nkosi:
Still Beating the Drum

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Review Article

Still Beating the Drum: Critical Perspectives on Lewis Nkosi
Edited by Lindy Stiebel and Liz Gunner
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Lewis Nkosi's reputation is largely based on his acute and unflattering analysis of South African cultural production rather than on the short stories and plays that he published in the nineteen sixties. Indeed, hardly any critical commentary on the South African literary scene remains untouched by his 1965 seminal essay, 'Fiction by Black South Africans'. In fact, such has been its impact on the South African literary debate that Lewis Nkosi has had to consistently defend and constantly elaborate on it in his subsequent essays.[1] Yet a section of his readership, in South Africa and elsewhere, maybe oblivious to the fact that after gaining his apprenticeship in journalism Nkosi dabbled with writing short stories and plays. That he has even written some poetry is certainly a revelation to some of us.

Still Beating the Drum: Critical Perspectives on Lewis Nkosi (2005) provides its readers with a glimpse of his work via critical essays from commissioned contributors as well as a selection of critical essays by Nkosi himself and, thus, is likely to be welcomed by all researchers interested in

[1] See for example, Nkosi (1985; 1986; and 1987b).

Nkosi' oeuvre. The aim of this first full-length collection of essays on Lewis Nkosi is, according to the editors, to 'provide both a critical perspective on Nkosi and a source-book useful to researchers' ('Preface'). The inclusion of interviews, a timeline on Lewis Nkosi and a detailed bibliography bears testimony to this avowed intention.

The introduction provides useful biographical background on Lewis Nkosi as well as the context and general reception of his writings. It also intimates to the reasons for a somewhat minimal recognition of Nkosi's writing in South Africa during the apartheid era when he was compelled to write from exile. It further alludes to how the publication of his novels, *Mating Birds (1983)* and *Underground People (2002),* has renewed readers' interest in his work as well as further reaffirmed and entrenched his position in the country's literary circles.

The Critic

The first section consists of three essays; the first, 'Lewis Nkosi as Literary Critic' by Annie Gagiano, the second, 'Lewis Nkosi's Early Literary Criticism' by Chris L. Wanjala and the third, 'Lewis Nkosi: A Commentary Piece' by Oyekan Owomoyela. Since Nkosi is primarily known as a literary critic it seems logical to look at this aspect of his career first. Wanjala's essay traces Nkosi's early development as an 'essayist' or literary critic from the time he wrote pieces for *The New African* to the time when his critical essays were collected in *Tasks and Masks Home* (1981) and later in *Exile and Other Selections(1983,)* while Gagiano's essay moves beyond that, even cursorily referring to some of Nkosi's post-apartheid essays.

In his exploration of Nkosi's criticism Wanjala correctly points out how the hallmark of Nkosi' early criticism was 'a kind of detached humour, and an urbane irony verging on nonchalance' and rightly, I think, attributes this to the 'ironic and witty' approach of *Drum* (Stiebel & Gunner 2005:28). Nkosi's aesthetic leanings, according to Wanjala, are to the European critical traditions of critics such as Eliot as well as 'the romantic tradition which celebrated the genius of a writer as an organizing focus of the creation of literature' (36f). Wanjala is deliberately being cautious about putting Nkosi 'in a box' though. This can be discerned from the following statements: 'He is a black literary critic who, in a time of inequity and iniquity, wanted to be

as good as his white contemporaries in the West' although he 'never took race as the benchmark of African literature' (37); and, later, he 'recognized the need for commitment in literature but at the same time foregrounded the supremacy of art in literature. For him, form was as important in the composition of literature as content' (37). Nowhere is Wanjala's attempt to strive for balance in his assessment of Lewis Nkosi's criticism more obvious than in the following statement: '… in general the identity that Nkosi (and those in the 1960s who thought like him) wanted to give our identity was largely mapped by European societies. Perhaps we should take their ideas in the spirit of comparative studies, rather than seeing the Nkosi stance as simply one of servile mimicry' (31). Yet one cannot help but notice that Wanjala's essay is fraught with ambivalence—the tension between his admiration of Nkosi's witticism and tongue in cheek style of writing and candour, on the one hand, and his reservations about Nkosi's leanings toward Western aesthetics, which may not necessarily have been seen as serving the African cause at the time he was writing, on the other hand.

Gagiano's coverage of Nkosi's critical work is much wider than Wanjala's, in that she aims to provide an 'evaluative' (5) assessment of a survey of three decades of Nkosi's critical writing. Gagiano is quick to warn us as readers that she will avoid solidarity criticism in her assessment of Nkosi's critical writings because, 'a merely eulogizing approach to his body of work would be inappropriate and unworthy of him' (4), and, thereby showing a clear indication of her reverence for Nkosi's stature. Echoing Wanjala's sentiments, Gagiano points out that although Nkosi is oftentimes 'excessively harsh' in his criticism he 'cannot … be caught with an ideological or party political thumb on his scale' and that he requires 'both social relevance … and intellectual skill from the authors and their works that he assesses' (6, 7). Indeed, in line with her promise to avoid solidarity criticism, Gagiano explores (and takes issue with) some of the excesses of Nkosi's criticism of Mphahlele and, to a lesser extent, of Bessie Head's writing. Gagiano sees exile as having sharpened Nkosi's focal lens through his interaction with avant-garde luminaries abroad and strengthened his critical distance in his engagement with African/ South African literature. (It would be interesting in this regard to have known what the dominant theoretical critical tradition was at Sussex at the time Nkosi was a student there and, on this basis, to establish to what extent it impacted on Nkosi's

development as a literary critic). Gagiano's essay is most useful in her extensive reading of, and engagement with, Nkosi'essays in *Tasks and Masks*. Here Gagiano boldly assesses the strengths and weaknesses of Nkosi's essays—this, I would surmise, is the result of her own familiarity with African texts that Nkosi examines. Gagiano's incisive assessment of Nkosi's criticism is best epitomized in the conclusion of her essay: 'Nkosi's critical oeuvre presents us with a robust, provocative but rigorous voice that has immensely enriched South African—and more broadly continental and diasporic African culture(s). His writing is always interesting, even when one disagrees with him …' (24).

The Dramatist

This section of the collection brings in its wake two aspects of Nkosi's work that most of his readers would be unfamiliar with: his radio drama and his poetry. Liz Gunner's exploration of Nkosi's two radio plays written for the BBC, 'The Trial' and 'We Can't All Be Martin Luther King' is quite illuminating in the manner in which it brings to the fore Nkosi's artistic activities in the 'sixties in Britain. Nkosi's involvement with the BBC is well contextualized by Gunner, who provides an indication of Nkosi's interaction not only with African writers, such as Soyinka and Achebe, through his series of radio interviews, entitled, 'The African Writer in Search of his Audience', but also of his possible weaving of a network in the diaspora 'as cultural broker and interpreter across contending modernities at such a time' (52, 53)[2]. Gunner persuasively and convincingly argues how Nkosi's immer-

[2] Gunner, as indicated in the footnote 4 (52), has drawn largely on the Transcription Centre Archives from the Humanities Centre at the University of Texas in Austin as a source on Nkosi's activities at the BBC. Incidentally, it has since emerged from Gerald Moore, in a recently published essay in *Research in African Literatures*, that the Transcription Centre, that facilitated the creative activities of African writers and artists such as Nkosi and Soyinka, amongst others, which was supposedly 'the brainchild of Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom', was just (unknown to the artists?) one of the numerous CIA fronts in the cold war 'over the soul of Africa'. See Gerald Moore (2002).

sion 'in the diasporic discourse' at that point in time culminates in his writing of 'We Can't All be Martin Luther King', whose appeal to the producers lay in 'poised wit, the irony and insights …into the complexities of race and class in British society in the 1970s' (62). Gunner's analysis of this play, in particular, taps into the readers' curiosity on the modalities of the interplay (or tension) between politics and aesthetics in Nkosi's fictional world.

Litzi Lombardozzi's essay, appropriately entitled 'An Introduction to the Poetry of Lewis Nkosi', introduces those of us who were not hitherto aware to this aspect of Nkosi's career. The aim of Lombardozzi's essay, she tells us, is not 'to unmask, expose or deconstruct Nkosi's poetic discourse, but rather to allow the poems to speak for themselves' (127). Lombardozzi, I would argue, is at her best when she reads Nkosi's personal or love poems such as 'Spanish Roses (For Teresa)', 'Jealousy' and, especially, 'To Astrid for Her 59th Birthday'. She convincingly points out how these are 'personal poems with a lyrical quality in celebration of women and the body, revealing a poetic voice which is *both* spectator and participant' (136). Lombardozzi is here at pains to defend Nkosi from those critics such as James Booth who 'has accused Nkosi of being exclusively masculinist, particularly in his descriptions of women' (136), arguing that 'there is more depth to Nkosi than being relegated to the ranks of a male chauvinist …'. Instead, she bestows accolades on Nkosi's love poems which, she proffers, 'abound with sensual imagery of all that constitutes woman in the physical and emotional sense.'

Arguably the most useful aspect of Lombardozzi's essay is her reading of 'To Astrid for Her 59th Birthday: *An imitation of an image in Chagall's painting 'Lilies of the Valley 1916''* in which I found both analysis and contextualization illuminating. The interface between the painting of the French surrealist painter, Marc Chagall, apparently used as a backdrop to Nkosi's inspiration, and the poem, is succinctly delineated. In the case of the poem, 'What makes Poetry Not Prose' I would, however, argue that there is more to the poem than Lombardozzi tells us here and that, perhaps more obviously, this poem renders more visible, if you like, Nkosi's bias against the realist tradition of writing. This is what the critic has overlooked despite the repetition in the poem of phrases such as 'one-eyed monster /named Realism'; 'life's thorough beating/ by a fellow named/Realism'; 'Sweaty with struggles/ of Everyday named Realism'.

To 'allow poems to speak for themselves' (whatever that means) in

accordance with Lambardozzi's objective in this essay, I would argue, does not, and should not, preclude one from providing a proper contextualization of a poem as part of its reading, however. A bit of reading on Dhlomo's poetry would have revealed some affinities between Nkosi's poem, 'To Hebert Dhlomo', and Dhlomo's own poem, 'Renunciation', in terms of content, style, syntax and rhetoric as part of a counter-discourse of colonialism. This would have thereby confirmed Nkosi's admiration of, and a sense of loss that he felt for, his mentor in his stint with the *Ilanga Lase Natal* newspaper.

Incidentally, I just had no idea what to make of the statement in relation to this poem that it 'derives its primary material from [Nkosi's] own rural boyhood and manhood in South Africa'. People who grew up in Cato Manor and Chesterville in Durban would never refer to their upbringing as a 'rural' one.

In a different vein, it would have helped Lombardozzi's cause to make a point about the nature of Sechaba as a publication and use that to explain the militant stance in Nkosi's two poems 'Images of a Nation Yet to Be' (hereafter 'Images') and 'Refugee Woman' as being in sync with the then radical politics adopted by the ANC. Leaving that aside though, it is to Lombardozzi's reading of 'Images' that I will now turn my attention.

Despite the fact that there is an indication in the title of the poem that it was written in commemoration of Amandla's visit to Lusaka in December 1981, Lombardozzi glosses over this in her contextualization of the poem. Amandla was part of the cultural wing of the ANC which provided entertainment to the people in exile in the form of music, poetry, drama and, generally, kept their cultural heritage alive. Nkosi here is commemorating one of those visits. Lombardozzi's failure to acknowledge this and to follow it through unfortunately results in a number of problems, one of which is to resort to dry generalizations on the poem, as can be seen in her assertion that the theme of the poem is 'the political situation in South Africa at the time', a theme vague enough to apply to any anthologized poem in South African poetry or even to a whole anthology of poems.[3] Granted,

[3] I have in mind here, for example, Barry Feinberg's *Poets to the People* ([1974] 1980), an anthology avowedly aimed at poems reflecting the politics of the time it was published.

Lombardozzi makes a valid point about 'the rigid and almost militaristic precision of the linear form of the poem' and the tone of anger that characterizes the poem and, finally, in her observation that the poem 'exhibits an exuberance and energy unparalleled in other poems of this nature'. It is precisely the 'exuberance' of the songs and dances of the Amandla performers that Nkosi is celebrating here. However, it is by virtue of missing this point about Amandla, that Lombardozzi's analysis results in a misreading of the poem, something which the readers of the contributions to the critical essays could have easily picked up. For example, despite Nkosi's obvious reference to Spear (read: Umkhonto weSizwe, sometimes referred to as 'The Spear of the Nation'), Lombardozzi insists that Nkosi is invoking 'the powerful images of the African warrior of old' and that he 'draws on his childhood impressions and memories of the fighting warrior …'. The impression created here is that Nkosi mythically evokes the heroism reminiscent of traditional wars of resistance, when he is clearly valorizing a contemporary army that has superseded that elementary stage of warfare Lambardozzi harps on in her reading of the poem.

Sikhumbuzo Mngadi subjects Nkosi's play, *The Rhythm of Violence* to what he calls 'the rigours of the 'new left'' by, first, engaging convincingly with Soyinka's reading of *Rhythm of Violence.* Where Soyinka is of the view that *Rhythm of Violence* advocates a multi-racial society, Mngadi argues, again convincingly, by way of a number of examples, that it envisages inter-racialism rather than multiracialism. Not only does Mngadi's alternative reading of Nkosi's play challenge Soyinka's version but it can also be read as an indictment on the dominant logic of Nkosi's text which, Mngadi proffers, 'is shot through with a 'left wing' optimism that misses the point of operation of apartheid power that it targets, and, as a consequence of it, takes its power for granted' (87). Could it not have been, though, that, at the time Nkosi was writing, that sense of optimism was prevalent to the marginalized sectors of the population, in which case Nkosi's text could be seen as rooted in the socio-historical realities of the time and therefore that the critic here providing a critique of Nkosi's play in post-apartheid South Africa has the benefit of hindsight? Be that as it may, Mngadi's reading of this play is provocative and will undoubtedly generate an interesting debate on this text.

The Novelist

For me at least, the most interesting section of the collection is one on Nkosi as a novelist. I'll focus on two of the articles here which seem to me to be more useful, that is, Lucy Graham's and Andries Oliphant's, both of which I consider to be forthwith the starting points of any one interested in research on Nkosi's novels. Graham's essay entitled, 'Bathing Area—For Whites Only': Reading the prohibitive signs and 'Black Peril' in Lewis Nkosi's *Mating Birds'* provides the most comprehensive analysis of the reception of Nkosi's novel to date. Graham argues that *Mating Birds* seems to have been well received abroad than it was in South Africa where it was regarded as 'an interloper in the historically 'whites only' territories of the avant-gardism and erotic writing' (149). Providing examples that range from Louis Gates Jnr. who admires the novel's 'lyrical intensity' and 'compelling narrative power' to Alan Ryan who refers to the novel as 'very possibly the finest novel by a South African, black or white, about the distortion of love in South Africa …' (150) Graham outlines the accolades accorded to Nkosi's text abroad. She then engages with South African critics whose opinions on this novel range from it being an 'anachronism' (Jacobs, Brink, Scholtz), or reinforcing the myth of rapists ('she wanted it'), as in Dodd and Brink, and sexist or tantamount to 'soft porn' (Jacobs description of the novel as 'nothing so much as the elaborate strip-tease with which the girl seduced the narrator' is illuminating in this regard). Graham specifically takes Brink to task for his double standards on this score:

> So how is it that, when Brink [in his novel, *Cape of Storms*] uses the image of an outsized black penis, he is being postmodern and 'ironic', but when Nkosi's protagonist makes a playful reference to his 'somewhat … oversized penis' the author is, according to Brink, exploiting the image of the black male whose awareness of the body obtrudes on every page (including even the assertion of one of the crudest myths of sexist racism, the size of the black penis) (158).

There are a number of aspects in Graham's essay that are worth noting. Firstly, she points out that although J.M. Coetzee, amongst others, has set some of his novels 'in the past or in unrecognizable eras' and got away with it unscathed, so to say, in the case of Nkosi, this is construed as an

anachronism. Perhaps more importantly, is her observation that most critics have read Nkosi's novel through the lens of traditional realism when it is obviously self-reflexive and parodic. It is, as Graham correctly observes, precisely in its 'self-reflexivity, experimentalism and intertextuality' that the 'innovative and transgressive' (52) power of *Mating Birds* lies. Graham proffers that by 'virtue of its central indeterminacy the novel engages with an avant-garde tradition and avoids reductive positioning'. Without any doubt, Graham's reading of the novel is innovative and will inevitably determine or even become seminal in future readings of Nkosi's novel for that matter.

It is curious though that while a number of essays which touch on *Mating Birds*, *Rhythm of Violence* or 'The Black Psychiatrist' allude to Fanon or highlight the need to employ a Fanonist analysis to these texts, none of the critics is prepared to take this to its logical conclusion.[4] This is even more surprising in the case of *Mating Birds*, in particular, which seems to invite a Fanonist reading in its handling of interracial sexual relations. Foremost in such an analysis would be whether Nkosi is reinforcing the myths that Fanon so extensively brings to the fore in *Black Skins, White Masks* or debunking them. This would, of course, include the modalities of how he does this and whether he succeeds in his attempt to do so. Obviously, such an analysis would have to be attentive to narrative seduction in Lewis Nkosi's text.

Andries Oliphant is attentive to a more or less similar strategy of narrative seduction in *Underground People* which is underpinned by irony. The bulk of Oliphant's essay deals with the multi-dimensionality of Nkosi's narrative, its strategies of eschewing realism, as well as its ironic twists, all of which are meant to elicit a different response from a more perceptive reader. Prior to this, Oliphant draws the attention of the reader to the parallels between Nkosi's critical views and his writing, showing how these two are indissolubly linked in some meta-fictional tapestry or web that needs some deconstruction. In his engagement with Nkosi, Oliphant brings into

[4] The two essays by Stark-Adler and Steffen, whose main thrust is on Nkosi's 'Black Psychiatrist' but refer to *Mating Birds*, albeit fleetingly, allude to psychoanalysis or/and Fanon but their focus is on the role of the psychiatrist in these texts.

sharp focus the pros and cons of Nkosi's aesthetics and points out what no one else has never dared to mention, for example, by referring to Nkosi's labeling of Black writing as 'primitive' in his 1965 essay as 'a slippage which suggests the uncritical acceptance of the cultural hierarchies of colonialism.' (190) Turning his attention to the text, Oliphant offers an interesting and perceptive reading of *Underground People* as 'a novel of ironic laughter' (190), arguing that:

> In its ironic play with appearance and reality and the imaginative energy which drives the narrative, it dramatizes the release of the literary signifier from the shocking grip of history and social reality to suggest a space where meaning is neither given nor transparent, but constructed and perilously made (195).

For this reason, Oliphant finds the novel consistent with Nkosi' avowed aesthetic considerations in which irony is the cornerstone of imaginative ambience.

On the whole, this is a useful collection for anyone interested in reading Nkosi's work. What is missing from this collection though is an essay on Nkosi's journalism which may throw more light on his development as a writer. The editors could have commissioned an academic in the journalism field to do this. Alternatively, another possible project could be to collect Nkosi's journalistic pieces and edit them in the same way that this has been done in the case of his colleagues in *Drum* such as Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Casey Motsitsi, as well as, fairly recently, Alex la Guma, who came from a different tradition of journalism. It would be interesting, for example, to find out more about Nkosi's beat in *Drum*, the news angles he would take, his style of writing and whether this had anything to do with his development as a writer he has become. Incidentally, despite the fact that Nkosi started venturing into fiction by first writing short stories in such publications as *Fighting Talk*, this collection glosses over this aspect of his career, not only in the essays that, albeit glibly, provide his biographical details, but also in interviews which otherwise throw some light on one's understanding of Nkosi's development as a writer. Would it not be useful, for example, to explore if there is any possible progression in Nkosi's short stories from a realist tradition to a more experimentalist modernism as

seen in his novels? Finally, it is a pity that the collection pre-dated the publication of Nkosi's latest novel, *Mandela's Ego* (2006).

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*Alter*nation
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